



**PEAKS & PLAINS**  
Housing Trust

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# The Trust

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## VULNERABLE PERSONS POLICY

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

- 1. INTRODUCTION ..... 1
- 2. SCOPE ..... 1
- 3. LEGAL & REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS ..... 1
- 4. DEFINITIONS..... 2
- 5. OUR POLICY..... 3
- 6. EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION ..... 5
- 7. RESPONSIBILITIES ..... 6
- 8. MONITORING AND REPORTING ..... 6
- 9. CONSULTATION ..... 7
- 10. REVIEW ..... 7
- 11. ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS ..... 7
- 12. POLICY INFORMATION..... 7

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. Peaks and Plains Housing Trust (the Trust) recognises that some of our customers will have additional needs which will require the Trust to provide services in a different way in order to sustain successful tenancies.
- 1.2. We recognise that some customers will have a degree of vulnerability that may impact how they are able to manage their home or engage with their community. We also recognise that a customer can become vulnerable over the course of their time with the Trust.
- 1.3. Vulnerability can be a variable state and can occur at different points in a person's life. It can be temporary, periodic or recurring as well as ongoing and developing over time.
- 1.4. We are aware that the word "vulnerable" can have limitations and stigma attached to it. However, upon consulting our customers and recognising there is a real need for all housing professionals, contractors and stakeholders to recognise vulnerable customers may need a bespoke response, we continue to use the word vulnerable as a universally understood term.

## 2. SCOPE

- 2.1. This policy applies to all Peaks and Plains customers including tenants, shared owners, private rent and leaseholders. It also applied to former customers, an applicant for housing or anyone who is affected by our services
  - 2.1.1. This policy provides guidance in relation to the consideration of vulnerability and sets out the general approach that the Trust will adopt in relation to the provision of accommodation and services to customers who may be vulnerable. The Trust has a Reasonable Adjustments Policy that goes into more detail and should be referred to as required.
- 2.2. The aim of this policy is to ensure that all customers have equal access to the Trusts services and that we identify, understand, and respond to our customers' particular needs in providing services and communicating with vulnerable customers, making flexible housing and support services available where we can, and supporting all people to thrive in their homes and communities.
  - 2.2.1. The policy sets out our approach to partnership working with statutory and specialist services in relation to vulnerabilities. We recognise that we are not always best placed or sufficiently specialised to meet customer needs and will often need to work in effective partnerships to respond to customer vulnerabilities.

### 3. LEGAL & REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

- 3.1. Equality Act 2010 - The Trust has a duty under the Equality Act 2010 to “advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it”. As a social landlord we recognise that many other customers can be vulnerable for reasons other than the characteristics protected under the equalities legislation, and this policy sets out how we define vulnerability and how we aim to respond to those customers’ needs.
- 3.2. Section 149 of the Public Sector Equality Duty
  - (1) A public body must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to: a. eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act; b. advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; c. foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
  - (2) A person who is not a public body but who exercises public functions must, in the exercise of those functions, have due regard to the matters mentioned in subsection (1).
- 3.3. The Social Housing Regulator’s Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard (2024) – requires landlords to be open with tenants and treat them with fairness and respect so that tenants can access services, raise complaints when necessary, influence decision making and hold their landlord to account. Under the Neighbourhood and Community Standard landlords have to work with other organisations to help make sure tenants can live in safe and well maintained neighbourhoods.
- 3.4. The Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code 2024 states that landlords must consider their duties under the Equality Act 2010 and anticipate the needs and reasonable adjustments of residents who may need to access the complaints process. It also states that landlords must make reasonable adjustments for residents where appropriate under the Equality Act 2010
- 3.5. Data Protection Act 2018- This sets out a range of obligations on us as a ‘data controller’ in safeguarding rights to privacy and security of personal information. In the context of this Policy the key elements relate to keeping information about the vulnerabilities of our customers and their household members appropriately secure as well as sharing information appropriately.
- 3.6. Care Act 2014 & Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 (as amended by the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012): places a statutory duty on housing providers to act on concerns that children or adults may be at risk of abuse or neglect (see Safeguarding Policy & Procedure). We recognise that vulnerability and the risk of abuse are connected; customers who are vulnerable will therefore often meet the statutory definition of an ‘adult at risk’ and therefore require the application of our Safeguarding policies.
- 3.7. Mental Capacity Act 2005- Customers who lack the mental capacity to make some/all decisions by themselves are deemed to be vulnerable under this Policy.

## 4. DEFINITIONS

- 4.1. For the purpose of this policy 'vulnerable' describes anyone who experiences difficulties with everyday living to the extent that they require additional support to ensure they are not at any disadvantage and/or to sustain the occupancy of their home.
- 4.2. The Trust does not assume that whole groups of people are vulnerable. For example, we do not assume that all people with disabilities are vulnerable even though there may be evidence to suggest that many are. **Appendix 1** suggests some categories of people who may be vulnerable, but this list is not intended to be exhaustive.

## 5. OUR POLICY

- 5.1. We will aim to identify customers and potential customers who are or may at a later date be more likely to become vulnerable. This will be achieved through a mix of capturing data on commencement of service with us, customer data exercises and broader customer insight and through ongoing contact customers have with us. This information will be recorded on the Trust's housing management system and will be available for all staff to review.
  - 5.1.1. We expect all of our colleagues and contractors to be aware of the possibility that a customer may be vulnerable e.g. from information they receive or following their own observations discussed and agreed with the customer during customer contact or working in a customer's home.
- 5.2. We will record on the housing management system any known vulnerability, any particular communication or access needs and whether there is anyone with delegated authority to speak to us on the customers behalf, such as Power or Attorney or support worker. This will ensure that we have advance knowledge of any additional factors to consider when delivering services.
- 5.3. The Trust's approach to supporting vulnerable people will be based on the following principles. We will:
  - ensure our actions are informed by profile information (taking into account data protection legislation) about our customers, using this both to tailor services to the individual needs of customers and also to identify trends across our customer base as a whole;
  - work to ensure that all our services are accessible to all, measuring this through analysis of service users and their vulnerabilities;
  - ensure that 'front line' housing management and maintenance staff are empowered to be flexible in how they provide services, in order to best support vulnerable residents;
  - signpost customers to any useful sign up documents;
  - ensure that employees have the necessary skills, knowledge and guidance to deal effectively with the many facets of vulnerability, including training or refresher training (including mandatory e-learning) for example, mental health awareness, handling difficult situations and safeguarding;

- seek to identify potentially vulnerable people at an early stage to enable preventative action and timely, targeted support;
- work with families/carers of a vulnerable person, in some cases the support will need to include and be informed by them;
- comply with relevant legislation, pre-action court protocols and recognised best practice, including in terms of information sharing and data protection;
- promote an environment in which customers and carers feel able to raise concerns, complaints or grievances without fear of detrimental treatment, and ensure that we respond responsibly and promptly to issues raised;
- work effectively with appropriate partner agencies to ensure support needs are met and to avoid duplication of service provision.

5.4. It is important to state that the Trust will ensure that all tenants fulfil the conditions of their tenancy agreement (to pay the rent, keep their property in good condition, be respectful neighbours etc.) and we will take action if they do not do so. Being vulnerable does not reduce a tenant's responsibilities in these areas. However, we recognise that some tenants will require additional support in meeting their obligations.

5.5. The nature of the support provided will depend on the level of vulnerability and the individual's, or the household's circumstances. Some assistance may be provided directly by the Trust, whereas on other occasions via partner organisations (e.g. Cheshire East Social Services, Disability Information Bureau, Cre8, Citizens Advice).

#### 5.6. **Assistance provided by the Trust**

##### 5.6.1. Providing information and help with accessing services, including:

- Providing advice and signposting people to other organisations;
- Making referrals within the Trust;
- Making referrals to external organisations

##### 5.6.2. Making reasonable adjustments to service delivery arrangements

We will use data profile and other vulnerability information proactively to inform the way we deliver our services. This may include (but is not limited to):

- Agreeing a nominated contact person (e.g. a carer);
- Providing information in alternative media formats, where agreed with the customer;
- Prioritising repairs for people with particular health and/or vulnerability issues;
- Requesting housing benefit/Universal Credit payments for some customers to be paid direct to the Trust;
- Providing appropriate support or referrals to maintain the homes and gardens of vulnerable residents who have no other help available to them;
- Discussing access to adaptations.

5.6.3. Work to promote financial inclusion

Wherever possible, our Income and Tenancy Sustainment teams will help customers to prevent or reduce debt, manage their money and maximise their incomes. Our Income Team is responsible for examining the impact of Welfare Reform and developing the Trust's response to its challenges, including providing employees with the skills to enable them to advise and direct customers appropriately.

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5.6.5. Assistance to customers who have hoarding behaviour or self-neglect

Working through Safeguarding concerns, the Trust will provide support on specific issues e.g. assistance to people who hoard or otherwise need help to maintain the condition of their property in line with our Hoarding Policy. The Trust will work with partners as required to ensure that customers are able to meet the terms of their tenancy agreement.

5.7. **External support for vulnerable people**

5.7.1. There will be cases where the Trust will not be the most appropriate organisation to provide the necessary support. We will develop strategic links with specialist support services in order to meet the needs of our vulnerable customers. Our Tenancy Sustainment team will be proactive in developing operational links with advice, support and mediation services, which we are able to access for our customers.

5.7.2. To ensure the best outcome for our customers, the Trust will:

- ensure that we seek the customer's agreement, wherever possible, prior to making any referral;
- work to ensure we have effective communication and information sharing arrangements in place with partner agencies;

6. **EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION**

6.1. Actions taken in relation to vulnerabilities, should always be appropriate to the individual. They should not discriminate because of disability, age, gender affirmation, gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, culture or lifestyle, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity.

6.2. The Trust will ensure that we address barriers to support / adjustments for those with protected characteristics who may also identify as vulnerable. This will include ensuring that information is available to customers in a range of formats and languages, providing bespoke support dependent on the person's needs, for example, this could be an advocate or an interpreter.

- 6.3. While we do not necessarily define all people with any of the above protected characteristics as ‘vulnerable’, for the purposes of this policy, we will give due consideration to any protected characteristics in deciding any enforcement action under the terms of a tenancy or lease to avoid any inadvertent discrimination.
- 6.4. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed. This has been reviewed by the EDI Forum and the Executive Management Team.

## 7. RESPONSIBILITIES

- 7.1. For future reviews of this policy, the Executive Management Team will have responsibility for approving this policy.
- 7.2. Head of Neighbourhoods will be responsible for
- Managing the implementation of the policy.
  - Implementing related procedures on a day-to-day basis
  - Ensuring relevant employees have the necessary skills and knowledge to recognise when support or assistance is required and to know how best that may be provided.
- 7.3. All Staff will be responsible for
- Ensuring they have read and understood the Policy
  - That they implement its principles in the course of their interaction with tenants and their households, and in particular that they have the knowledge and skills to recognise when support or assistance is required and how this may best be provided.
  - Engage in relevant training relating to vulnerable customers
- 7.3.1. All staff should review and update details within the Tenancy Management System with vulnerability information and preferences when they are made aware of these.

## 8. MONITORING AND REPORTING

- 8.1. We can measure the impact of this policy by:
- Reviewing and reporting on the number of vulnerable customers supported by the Trust’s Tenancy Sustainment Team.
  - Reporting within the Safeguarding reports produced for Executive Management Team and Board.
  - Recording the number of evictions, abandonments or otherwise failed or failing tenancies and analysing this information.
  - Recording the number of cases of anti-social behaviour or harassment (either as victim or perpetrator) and analysing this information.
  - Reporting on the number of complaints based on a failure to support vulnerable tenants and understanding and reporting on any lessons learned.
  - Measurement of income and benefits recovered through the Tenancy Sustainment Team.
  - Customer feedback.



**9. CONSULTATION**

9.1. This policy and the equality impact assessment has been through a thorough consultation process, which has included our Challenge Group; Managers and Senior Managers and the Executive Management Team.

**10. REVIEW**

10.1. This Policy will be reviewed every three years, or sooner if there is any significant change to legislation

**ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS**

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Equality and Diversity policy</li><li>• Safeguarding policy</li><li>• Customer Voice Strategy</li><li>• Complaints policy</li><li>• Anti-social behaviour policy</li><li>• Aids and Adaptions policy</li><li>• Hoarding Policy</li><li>• Rent Collection and arrears management policy</li><li>• Reasonable Adjustments Policy</li><li>• Repairs policy</li><li>• Rechargeable Repairs policy</li><li>• Tenancy policy</li></ul>
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**POLICY INFORMATION**

Policy Name:	Vulnerable Persons Policy
Status:	Final/Approved
Approved by:	PPHT Board
Drafted By:	Steff Goalen – Head of Neighbourhoods
Date approved:	26 <sup>th</sup> March 2024
Next Review Date:	March 2027

## APPENDIX 1 – INDICATIONS OF VULNERABILITY

It is highly likely that a vulnerable tenant will be receiving or have received support from their GP, Social Care, a care worker or some other 3rd party involvement.

Examples of people who may be vulnerable include, but are not limited to those who:

- have a physical or sensory disability;
- have a learning disability;
- have mental health issues;
- are seriously ill;
- are experiencing domestic abuse;
- are single parent families;
- are pregnant women;
- are unemployed;
- are leaving care;
- are ex-offenders;
- have substance abuse problems;
- have difficulties understanding, speaking or reading English;
- have experienced homelessness / repeat homelessness;
- have experienced hospitalisation;
- are in periods following discharge from hospital or other institutional care;
- experience periods of sustained illness at home;
- experience bereavement;
- are in a period of change from supported accommodation to independent living;
- have evidence of neighbour harassment or abuse toward the individual or household;
- provide evidence of anti-social behaviour by the individual or household;
- experience divorce or other relationship breakdown;
- have arrears of rent or other debt problems.