



SUPPORTING VULNERABLE RESIDENTS POLICY

Supporting Vulnerable Residents

1. Purpose

This policy aims to ensure that Manningham Housing Association (MHA) proactively identifies and supports vulnerable residents, safeguarding equitable access to our services and addressing their needs with compassion and effectiveness.

This policy aims to:

- **Promote Equality and Accessibility:** Ensure that all residents, irrespective of their vulnerabilities, have equal access to housing services and opportunities. This includes adapting services to meet diverse needs and eliminating barriers to access.
- **Enhance Responsiveness:** Implement proactive measures to quickly identify and address the needs of vulnerable residents. By doing so, MHA aims to prevent issues from escalating into more severe problems, thereby safeguarding residents' health and well-being.
- **Foster a Supportive Environment:** Create a nurturing and supportive housing environment that acknowledges and responds to the challenges faced by vulnerable residents. This involves training staff to recognise and appropriately react to signs of vulnerability and ensuring that all interactions are conducted with empathy and respect.
- **Ensure Continual Improvement:** Establish mechanisms for regular review and feedback on the effectiveness of the policy and its implementation. Engage with residents to understand their experiences and perspectives and use this information to drive continual improvements in service and care.

Through these efforts, MHA aspires to meet the immediate needs of its vulnerable residents. This policy is a commitment to ensuring that all residents receive the respect, care, and support they deserve.

2. Scope

This policy applies to everyone who is a part of or interacts with Manningham Housing Association (MHA) in the delivery of housing services. The comprehensive scope of this policy is designed to ensure that every customer facing person at MHA is aware of, and participates in, the support of vulnerable residents. Specific groups covered by this policy include:

- **Employees:** All full-time, part-time, and temporary employees of MHA, regardless of their role or level within the organisation. This includes administrative staff, management, and executive members who are expected to lead by example in the implementation and upholding of this policy.

- **Contractors and other Service Providers:** Any external contractors or service providers engaged by MHA. These parties must adhere to the principles and practices outlined in this policy while they are performing work for MHA.
- **Volunteers:** Volunteers engaged in any MHA activities, events, or programs must comply with this policy. Training and guidance will be provided to ensure volunteers understand how to interact with and support vulnerable residents appropriately.
- **Residents:** While the policy primarily guides staff in their duties, residents are also included under its scope to the extent that they interact with services and support mechanisms provided by MHA. Residents are encouraged to participate in shaping the implementation of the policy through feedback and engagement in community meetings.

Areas of Application:

- **Service Delivery:** All aspects of services provided by MHA, including but not limited to housing allocation, repairs & maintenance, rent collection, resident engagement, and emergency repairs service.
- **Communication:** All forms of communication between MHA and its residents or between staff and external parties. This includes, but is not limited to, face-to-face interactions, telephone communications, written correspondence, and digital communications.
- **Training and Development:** Includes all training programs and development initiatives provided by MHA to ensure staff, volunteers, and contractors are equipped to support vulnerable residents effectively.
- **Complaints and Feedback Handling:** The processes through which complaints are received, managed, and resolved by MHA, ensuring that vulnerable residents' concerns are addressed promptly and sensitively.

3. Definition of Vulnerability

According to the Housing Ombudsman, a vulnerable resident is defined as someone who, due to specific circumstances, may require additional support to engage with services effectively.

Vulnerability within the context of MHA's operations is comprehensively defined to encompass a range of factors that may impair a resident's ability to independently access, utilise, and benefit from the housing services provided. Vulnerability is recognised as both a condition and a situation, varying widely in nature and impact, and often intersecting with multiple aspects of a resident's personal and social life. This policy categorises vulnerability into several key types to guide staff in providing appropriate and customised support:

- **Physical Vulnerability:** Includes residents with mobility issues, chronic health conditions, or disabilities that affect their physical capabilities. Such vulnerabilities might require physical adaptations to the home, personalised evacuation plans in case of emergencies, or specific property maintenance priorities.

- **Mental and Emotional Vulnerability:** Pertains to residents who suffer from mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, or more severe psychiatric disorders. These conditions may affect their ability to communicate effectively, manage daily tasks, or respond to stressful situations. MHA will ensure sensitive handling and confidentiality, providing support through referrals to mental health services and other support services.
- **Cognitive Vulnerability:** Includes individuals with learning disabilities, dementia, or developmental disorders that impact their cognitive functions and decision-making abilities. Support for these residents may involve clear and simplified communication, as well as engagement with family, friends, guardians or care providers.
- **Economic Vulnerability:** Addresses the needs of residents who face financial instability, impacting their ability to meet housing costs and other living expenses. MHA will provide access to financial advice, support applications for housing benefits, and offer flexible payment plans where necessary.
- **Social Vulnerability:** Recognises the isolation that can affect residents due to age, bereavement, or lack of social networks. This can exacerbate other vulnerabilities and affect the resident's overall well-being. MHA will facilitate community integration efforts and regular social interactions where requested.
- **Cultural and Linguistic Vulnerability:** Applies to residents who may face barriers due to language differences, cultural norms, or immigration status. MHA commits to providing culturally appropriate communication and service delivery.
- **Situational Vulnerability:** Occurs due to specific life events such as domestic violence, homelessness, or significant life transitions. MHA will work with other support services where needed to help residents.

4. Identifying Vulnerable Residents

Identifying vulnerable residents is a critical step in ensuring they receive the appropriate support and services from Manningham Housing Association (MHA). This process is dynamic and requires constant vigilance, sensitivity, and a proactive approach by all MHA staff. To effectively identify vulnerability among residents, MHA will implement the following strategies:

- **Staff Training:** Provide comprehensive and ongoing training for all staff, including those in direct contact with residents as well as those in supportive or administrative roles. Training will focus on recognising signs of vulnerability, understanding the diverse manifestations of vulnerability, and the appropriate steps to take when a potential vulnerability is identified.
- **Resident Self-Identification:** Encourage residents to self-identify as vulnerable through safe, confidential, and non-stigmatising methods. This can be facilitated through direct communication, resident surveys, and through new tenancy packs that include information on how and why to identify oneself as vulnerable.
- **Community Engagement:** Engage regularly with the community through meetings, social events, and forums to build trust and open lines of communication. Such engagement helps staff observe potential signs of vulnerability that may not be evident in more formal settings.

- **Collaboration with External Agencies:** Work closely with local health care providers, social workers, and other relevant agencies. These organisations can provide referrals and share non-confidential information that may help MHA identify residents who are at risk or currently experiencing vulnerability.
- **Documentation and Follow-up:** Ensure that any signs of vulnerability identified are documented in a centralised system that respects privacy. Follow-up actions should be clearly outlined and monitored for effectiveness, with adjustments made as needed.

5. Supporting Vulnerable Customers

Manningham Housing Association is committed to enhancing support for vulnerable residents through targeted actions designed to address individual needs and improve their overall quality of life. MHA will:

- Ensure that all communication, whether written, verbal, or digital, is easy to understand and accessible to people with various disabilities and language preferences. This includes providing interpreter services for residents whose first language is not English and adapting written materials into formats suitable for those with visual impairments or learning disabilities where requested.
- Offer extended appointment times- Recognising that some residents may require more time to understand information due to cognitive or psychological vulnerabilities, MHA will offer extended appointment times. Staff will be trained to recognise when such accommodations are needed and how to respectfully offer them.
- Offer home visits- For residents who face difficulties attending appointments at MHA offices due to physical disabilities or severe social anxieties, MHA will offer home visits. These visits will be conducted by trained staff who are equipped to provide the necessary support in the comfort of the residents own home.
- Develop and maintain strong partnerships with local health services, social care agencies, and community organisations that can provide additional support to residents. MHA will act as a facilitator, helping residents navigate these services and ensuring they receive the support they need.
- Will train staff to make tailored referrals that match the specific needs of each resident. This includes understanding the services available and how they can best address the unique challenges faced by the resident.
- Provide initial and ongoing training- All staff will receive comprehensive training on vulnerability awareness upon hiring and regularly thereafter. This training will include understanding the different types of vulnerabilities and effective communication strategies

6. Handling Service Requests

MHA recognises the importance of efficient and empathetic handling of service requests from vulnerable residents. MHA will:

- Create and maintain a secure system for recording vulnerability status that respects privacy and complies with data protection laws. Staff will be trained to

handle this information sensitively, ensuring that it is only used to enhance service provision and not for any discriminatory practices.

- Recognise that vulnerability status can change; therefore, the system will allow for regular updates based on new information provided by the resident or identified by staff during interactions.
- Develop a clear framework for assessing the urgency of requests, which includes criteria for what constitutes an immediate safety or well-being concern. This framework helps staff to quickly determine the priority level of each request.
- Establish a protocol for regular communication with the resident about the status of their request. This includes providing clear timelines, explaining any delays, and being available to answer questions or concerns.
- Based on the service delivery requirements, assign a dedicated staff member as the contact point for each request, if deemed necessary. This approach ensures continuity and a personal approach in communications. This helps build trust and reassure the resident that their case is being handled attentively.
- After a service request is completed, follow up with the resident to solicit feedback on the resolution and the handling of the process. Use this feedback to make any necessary adjustments or improvements in the service delivery.

7. Complaint Handling

Manningham Housing Association commits to a robust and empathetic approach to handling complaints, ensuring that the process is transparent, accessible, and responsive, particularly to the needs of vulnerable residents. The association adopts the following detailed practices:

- **Ease of Access:** Ensure that the complaint filing process is straightforward and accessible to all residents, regardless of their physical ability or technological proficiency. This includes providing multiple channels for complaints, such as online forms, phone lines, mail, and in-person options.
- **Guidance and Support:** Offer clear, step-by-step guidance on how to make a complaint, what information is needed, and what to expect during the complaint process. Staff will be available to assist residents in filing complaints, particularly those who may need additional help due to disability, language barriers, or other vulnerabilities.
- **Visibility:** Regularly publicise the complaints process through various communication channels to ensure all residents are aware of how to raise concerns and what support is available to assist them.
- **Prioritisation:** Prioritise complaints from residents identified as vulnerable to ensure they are addressed more quickly, particularly when they involve immediate risks to safety or well-being.
- **Sensitive Handling:** Train staff to handle complaints from vulnerable residents with heightened sensitivity and understanding, recognising the complexities that may accompany these complaints.
- **Personal Approach:** Assign a case manager to handle complaints from vulnerable residents to provide a consistent and personal point of contact throughout the process.

- Clearly outline the process by which residents can designate representatives to act on their behalf, ensuring this policy is flexible to accommodate family members, legal guardians, advocates, or social workers.
- Implement procedures to verify the identity and authorisation of representatives to protect the privacy and security of the resident’s information while facilitating effective advocacy.
- Conduct regular audits of the complaint handling process to identify trends, bottlenecks, or areas for improvement. Use this data to inform ongoing training programs for staff and modifications to the process.
- Engage with residents and other stakeholders in periodic reviews of the complaints process to ensure it remains relevant, effective, and responsive to the needs of all residents, especially the vulnerable.

8. Confidentiality

MHA is committed to protecting the rights of individuals’ privacy with regards to the processing of personal data and any information we hold about them. We demonstrate this through operating within the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK General Data Protection Regulations (UK GDPR) (“Data Protection Law”) with regards to collecting, storing, processing, divulging, sharing and disposing of personal information that relates to a living individual who can be identified.

A breach of confidentiality may give rise to disciplinary action under our disciplinary procedure.

Policy Name	Supporting Vulnerable Residents
Equality Impact Assessment Completed	Yes
Date to be approved by the Committee	July 2024
Next Review date	July 2027
Lead Officer	Director of Operations / Deputy Chief Executive Officer