



# RCH Group Policy:

## Tenancy Sustainment & Vulnerable Customers

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Approval Body	Social Landlord Operations Committee
Approval Date	[Date approved]

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This policy is available, on request, in different languages and in other formats such as large print, audio format and braille as required.

## 1. Scope

This is a Group policy and therefore applies to Staff, Board and Committee members of The RCH Group of companies. As at January 2024.

## 2. Introduction

This policy outlines how River Clyde Homes (RCH) will support vulnerable customers and prevent tenancies from failing wherever possible. This policy sets our continued commitment to deliver sustainable and successful tenancies that make a positive difference to peoples' lives and their communities.

RCH understands the cost of tenancy breakdown not only in terms of finance but also the personal, health and social cost and have a responsibility to provide advice and assistance to those at risk of tenancy failure.

RCH recognise that we have a responsibility to do what we can to ensure that vulnerable customers are able to enjoy a good quality of life and live as independently as possible. In order to do this RCH will identify and address the needs of vulnerable customers where possible. RCH will also ensure that customers can access all services required and that vulnerability does not act as a barrier to accessing RCH services.

## 3. Definitions

Vulnerable Customers – There is no legal definition of a person who may be deemed vulnerable. RCH will not identify whole groups of people as being vulnerable, for example we will not identify all older customers as vulnerable even though many may be. We will define vulnerable customers as those who experience difficulties with day to day life and require support in order to ensure that they are not at a disadvantage to sustain their tenancy.

## 4. Policy Statement and Responsibilities

In order to promote tenancy sustainment and support vulnerable customers RCH will adhere to the following responsibilities.

### **Working with other organisations**

RCH will work in partnership with other agencies where required to support vulnerable customers. We will ensure we follow General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) when doing so including when we feel a customer's life is at risk and when we should share information without consent. This will include local support services, social care or health services, GPs, Police Scotland and other specialist support organisations.

### **Pre-Tenancy Support - Identifying Vulnerability (risk) Factors**

Our relationship with tenants begins before the tenancy agreement is signed and the tenant moves in. Pre-tenancy contact and support are vital to our approach to successful tenancy sustainment. We will work with partners to ensure effective joined up services for our more vulnerable customers, especially in specific groups such as care leavers, elderly, disabled customers and those at risk of social isolation.

RCH recognise the increasing need for pre-tenancy support in light of continued financial impacts on customers, such as the cost of living crisis. This helps ensure customers are offered homes which are suitable for their needs and financial situation.

### **Standard of Home**

RCH operates a choice based letting system, aimed at giving tenants an active say and more choice in their home. We aim to ensure that every applicant has adequate information, support and guidance to help make informed choices and improve the likelihood of a successful tenancy.

We will continue to monitor customer's satisfaction with the condition of their homes including the standard of repair and will revise and improve accordingly.

### **New Tenancy Support**

RCH support new tenants in the early weeks of moving into their new home, through a settling in visit within the first four weeks of the tenancy. If the tenant is identified as vulnerable there will be an increased number of visits based on the level of vulnerability. These visits are vital in terms of establishing the relationship with the tenant to identify any support or vulnerability issues at the earliest opportunity.

Housing Officers provide assistance with setting up home, assisting with repairs, rents and liaison with other agencies. Issues concerning the condition of the property, garden or other tenancy matters will be raised if necessary, with early intervention to prevent breaches of the tenancy agreement, or by encouraging the tenant to resolve a breach before it becomes serious without having to take legal action.

### **Regular Tenancy Visits**

Regular tenancy visits will take place and will be scheduled according to level of vulnerability and risk. The purpose of these visits is to enable us to record, update and collate information about our tenants and their homes. This information will be used to develop tenant data, which in turn will lead to a more informed approach to identifying need, providing support and sustaining tenancies.

RCH will also use data available from our systems to ensure that customers who have not contacted us, or been contacted by us, for a significant period of time will receive a visit from a Housing Officer. This will ensure that any concerns are identified and that we ensure the customer does not require any other support from RCH.

## **Identifying Vulnerabilities**

RCH are committed to identifying vulnerabilities as early as possible. We will do this by keeping regular contact with our customers and keeping the information we hold about customers as up to date as possible. Only by engaging with our customers will we be in a position to spot vulnerabilities at an early opportunity. This is the responsibility of all RCH Group staff and any concerns about vulnerability should always be shared.

High level intensive support is provided for vulnerable customers by the area teams. This includes risk assessing needs & action planning pre agreed goals. This support ensures our most vulnerable customers receive the intensive one to one support required to increase their standard of living within their home.

## **Adult/Child Support and Protection**

RCH have a responsibility to identify any concerns with adults of children where there is a significant risk to an adult or child's safety. RCH have protocols with Inverclyde Council in relation to Adult Support and Protection and Child Protection which will be followed at all times. [RCH sit on the Adult Protection Committee which strengthens our commitment to identifying adults in need.](#) All front-line customer services staff will attend training in both [Adult and Child Protection](#) on a regular basis and will be required to submit any concerns using the agreed protocol. RCH are represented on the Adult Protection Committee and will feedback to staff any important updates in this area.

## **Support to Access Services**

RCH will ensure that customers are not prevented from accessing services as a result of vulnerability. A range of measures can be implemented to ensure continuity of service for all including:

- Agreeing more regular contact with Housing Officer
- Agreeing a nominated contact person
- Providing information in the most appropriate format for the customer
- Allowing the customer more time to answer telephone or door
- Requesting support with housing costs to come directly to RCH
- Providing assistance to maintain their home

## **Assistance to specific groups of customers**

RCH understands that some of our customers will require a higher and perhaps different level of support. For example, customers that are hoarding will require a unique service compared to a customer where the concern is just tenancy management. We will tailor the type and level of assistance required and liaise with local services including Inverclyde Council & HSCP in order to ensure the correct support is provided.

## **Involvement of vulnerable customers**

RCH will ensure that all customers have the ability to be involved in helping to shape our services including those that are vulnerable. RCH will actively promote obtaining the views of vulnerable customers during any consultation or feedback session. We will also review accessibility and barriers to involvement.

### **In-house Advice Service**

RCH understand that finances can be a significant barrier to tenancy sustainment, particularly in the current economic climate. In order to support in this area, RCH provide a welfare benefits advice service via our Financial Wellbeing Team. This provides access to welfare rights advice including income maximisation checks, access to grants and payments, support with appealing benefit decisions, advocacy with benefit providers and onward referral for specialist support such as formal debt options. Customers can be referred or can self-refer for support to the service.

## **5. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**

The RCH Group will apply this policy fairly and consistently. In implementing this policy, we will not directly or indirectly discriminate against any person or group of people because of their race, religion or belief, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, or any other grounds. Our commitment to equality and fairness will apply irrespective of factors such as age, disability, gender reassignment, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, or other personal attributes.

## **6. Review**

This policy will be reviewed in its entirety every 3 years, unless an earlier review is required due to changes in legal, regulatory or best practice requirements, or because monitoring and reporting reveals that a change in policy is required sooner.