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At a glance 66: Safeguarding adults for housing staff

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Housing staff are well placed to identify people with care and support needs at risk of abuse, share information and work with social care, health and the police. This At a glance briefing for all safeguarding partners describes housing staff's key role in keeping people safe.

Key messages

- Housing staff are a vital component of local multi-agency safeguarding partnerships.
- Social care staff should promote partnership working with housing staff.
- There is a need for clear understanding of the parameters of adult safeguarding for effective working between sectors.
- Information sharing is essential – staff need clarity about when and how they can share safeguarding information.
- Local partnerships should have strategies for promoting the wellbeing of people where safeguarding does not apply, including those without care and support needs, people who refuse support and those who self-neglect.
- Housing staff should be kept informed and involved, as appropriate, with any safeguarding activity concerning tenants.

Introduction

People who live in sheltered, supported or extra care housing may be particularly vulnerable to abuse but a high, and increasing, proportion of people with care and support needs live in general needs housing. Housing providers should therefore have safeguarding systems in place and workers at all levels should be able to prevent abuse where possible and respond appropriately and proportionately when it occurs or is suspected.

Housing staff have a key safeguarding role to play, alongside their colleagues

in social care, health and the police, in keeping people safe. They are well placed to identify people with care and support needs at risk of abuse, share information and work in partnership to coordinate responses. Partners should recognise the value, experience and skill in the housing sector that can contribute to good practice in safeguarding.

Prevention is better than cure, so a joint, proactive approach to preventing abuse and reducing risk makes good sense both in terms of the human and operational costs. If housing staff and contractors are aware of the issues relating to abuse and included as

safeguarding partners, it is likely that tenants with care and support needs will be safer.

What are the issues for housing?

- Complex networks cause difficulties – housing providers may have to work with several local authorities in their area and vice versa.
- The local authority may be reluctant to get involved where there are concerns about an individual who is not eligible for social care support.
- Some housing providers have IT systems that are inadequate to store sensitive data and to facilitate 'customer profiling', that can tell them who may be more vulnerable, for effective safeguarding.
- Some housing staff report negative attitudes towards them from social care professionals.
- Some housing staff have a limited understanding of issues relating to consent and capacity and when information should be shared.

Why are housing staff important partners?

Housing staff and contractors may:

- have local knowledge of anti-social behaviour or crime patterns such as distraction burglary
- be the first to become aware of an individual developing care and support needs as a result of age, disability or illness
- be aware of people with care and support needs who are not known to social services
- be in a position to pick up signs of abuse and neglect when visiting tenants.

Housing should have representation at strategic level across public protection forums such as Safeguarding Boards (adults and children), multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs), multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPAs), health and

wellbeing boards, and community safety partnerships.

The Care Act 2014

Safeguarding duties apply under the Care Act 2014. Housing providers should ensure that they are represented on or linked to Safeguarding Adults Boards which the Care Act requires to be established in each local authority area.

The Care and support statutory guidance states that 'all workers need to be vigilant about adult safeguarding concerns' and that safeguarding practice should be underpinned by the six safeguarding principles:

Empowerment – people being supported and encouraged to make their own decisions and informed consent.

Prevention – it is better to take action before harm occurs.

Proportionality – the least intrusive response appropriate to the risk presented.

Protection – support and representation for those in greatest need.

Partnership – local solutions through services working with their communities. Communities have a part to play in preventing, detecting and reporting neglect and abuse.

Accountability – accountability and transparency in safeguarding practice. (Department of Health, 2015)

Section 42 of the Act requires local authorities to make enquiries, or ask others to make them, when an adult in their area:

- has needs for care and support
- is experiencing, or at risk of, abuse or neglect; and
- as a result of those care and support needs is unable to protect themselves.

This applies regardless of eligibility and whether or not the authority is actually providing any care and support services to that person. The local authority also has a duty to safeguard unpaid carers of adults with care and support needs.

Who may have care and support needs?

People with care and support needs are not all vulnerable to abuse but may become so at any point due to physical or mental ill health, acquired disability, old age or environmental factors, such as poverty and anti-social behaviour. A person with care and support needs may:

- be elderly, with poor health, a physical disability or cognitive impairment
- have learning disabilities
- have a physical disability and/or a sensory impairment
- have mental health needs including dementia or a personality disorder
- have a long-term illness/condition
- be dependent on substances or alcohol to an extent that it has a serious impact on their ability to cope with day-to-day living.

People may be at greater risk because they are:

- socially isolated which may provide an opportunity for exploitation
- unsure of who to trust
- dependent on others to manage their finances or to withdraw or collect money for them
- unable to escape abuse or they tolerate it due to their reliance on the abuser, adapted accommodation or the lack of suitable alternative accommodation and care provision.

Preventing abuse and neglect

It is important for housing staff to respond promptly and appropriately to safeguarding concerns, but it is always better to try to prevent people from being abused in the first place. People who are informed, in control of their lives and empowered to assert their views are less likely to be victims of abuse and neglect, and will be in a better position to speak out should it happen.

The Care Act requires the local authority to promote individual wellbeing and to prevent, reduce and delay future need. This means that it is important to intervene early to prevent escalation of problems that may result in crisis and a higher level of need. There are several ways in which housing can contribute to a preventative approach on safeguarding:

Checklist

- Raise general public awareness of what constitutes abuse and how to report it
- Educate tenants on how to recognise abuse and protect themselves from it
- Ensure individuals have access to support from social services, voluntary support agencies and health
- Work with perpetrators of anti-social behaviour to try to reduce their behaviour and minimise risk
- Work with social care to ensure adequate support for carers.
- Ensure staff training includes prevention and Making Safeguarding Personal
- Have systems in place to facilitate the identification of people with care and support needs and possible risks

- Have mechanisms in place to identify people who may pose a risk
- Make strategic links with the Safeguarding Adults Board and other multi-agency public protection forums
- Ensure that your staff understand and follow multi-agency policies and procedures
- Seek to address social exclusion and isolation through local joint strategies
- Promote inter-agency collaboration
- Ensure that allocations policies consider risk to tenants who may be vulnerable to abuse

What are the signs you should look for?

Signs of abuse can often be difficult to detect. People with communication difficulties can be particularly at risk because they may not be able to alert others. Sometimes people may not even be aware that they are being abused, and this is especially likely if they have a cognitive impairment. Abusers may try to prevent access to the person they abuse. It is vital that people who come into contact with people with care and support needs are able to identify abuse and recognise possible indicators.

Read about [types of abuse and how to spot it](#).

Making Safeguarding Personal

Making Safeguarding Personal refers to the culture shift taking place in safeguarding practice to ensure that people who are being abused or neglected, or who may be at risk, are supported to make choices and, wherever possible, remain in control of decision-making. The emphasis is on empowering people and finding the right balance between individual choice and control and safety.

Empowering people means respecting their rights. An individual may want to move to get away from an abuser or an abusive situation. If possible this should be facilitated. However, the person may not want to move and they should never be forced to do so to avoid abuse. The person may fear less security of tenure and moving from adapted or suitable accommodation may reduce their independence. In addition, the person would face the disruption of moving and may lose essential support and ties within the community. Disabled people should never be placed in residential institutions as a solution to domestic abuse unless they expressly want this.

Training and raising awareness

Multi-agency policies and procedures should be in place to ensure that staff are clear about roles and responsibilities, when a safeguarding concern should be raised and when and how information should be shared. It is helpful for the organisation to have a safeguarding lead – this role could be allocated to a senior manager.

Housing agencies should:

- raise awareness of abuse for everyone (staff, contractors, tenants)
- ensure appropriate safeguarding training is provided to all workers at all levels
- tap into joint training with other safeguarding partners
- ensure housing staff have an adequate understanding of the Mental Capacity Act 2005
- work with social care to provide training for people with care and support needs to enable them to better protect themselves.

Reporting concerns

- The organisation will have a safeguarding policy and procedure and should provide staff with training – this should enable them to respond appropriately to a disclosure and to know what to do if they observe abuse.
- In line with the organisation's internal procedures, staff should report any concerns to their line manager.
- If it is safe to do so, staff, or the line manager, should ask the person what they want done about the abuse and seek their consent to share their information.
- Unless it is an emergency, managers will usually make decisions about sharing safeguarding information with partner agencies.

Sharing information without consent may be justified, if, for example:

- The person lacks the mental capacity to make that decision, and sharing the information is judged to be in their best interests – this must be properly explored and recorded in line with the Mental Capacity Act.
- Other people are, or may be, at risk, including children.
- Sharing the information could prevent a crime.
- A serious crime has been committed.
- The person has the mental capacity to make that decision but they may be under duress or being coerced.
- The risk is unreasonably high and meets the criteria for a multi-agency risk assessment conference referral.
- A court order or other legal authority has requested the information.

If the decision is made to share information with external partners without consent, the person should still be informed. Any risk to the person in doing so should be considered. Advice can be sought from the local authority or police in the first instance without disclosing any personal details.

Find out more at [Adult safeguarding: sharing information](#).

Further reading

[SCIE at a glance 69 types and indicators of abuse](#)

[Safeguarding adults: information sharing](#)

[Highlights: Safeguarding adults Preventing abuse and neglect of adults with care and support needs](#)

We hope this at a glance about Safeguarding adults for housing staff has been helpful. Some aspects of the safeguarding are complex, and it is important that they are fully understood. SCIE offers [e-learning](#), [bespoke training](#), and [consultancy support](#), to make sure that you and your organisation are aware of good practice and legal duties in this area. Or if you would like to talk to our team about how we can help, please complete our [enquiry form](#).

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