



At a glance 66: Adult safeguarding for housing staff

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Key messages

Regular and sustained joint working between housing and adult social care is essential to protect people who may be at risk of abuse.

Housing and social care should:

- work together to resolve issues where the individual at risk may not be eligible for social care support, refuses support or self-neglects
- work with all their partners to agree on the point at which social care safeguarding procedures need to be used and ensure that all staff are briefed accordingly
- ensure links between 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
- help partner agencies to understand the role of housing staff in safeguarding
- develop a common understanding of language and definitions regarding people with care and support needs and safeguarding
- provide clarity for staff on the law relating to sharing information, confidentiality and data protection
- ensure inclusion of housing staff in strategy meetings and investigations
- agree processes for keeping referrers informed of progress on safeguarding referrals.

Training and raising awareness

Housing agencies should:

- raise awareness on abuse for all staff and contractors
 - arrange 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 better enable them to protect themselves
 - support perpetrators of anti-social behaviour to reduce such behaviour
 - work with social care to ensure adequate support for carers.
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Introduction

Older people or people with disabilities are more likely to be abused or neglected. They may be seen as an easy target and may be less likely to identify abuse themselves or to report it. 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 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.

Some serious case reviews have indicated that housing providers could or should have played a more effective role in adult safeguarding. They point to the need for better joint working, in particular between housing and adult social care, to safeguard people with care and support needs who may be at risk of abuse or neglect. Social care partners need to recognise the important role that housing staff play in safeguarding.

As with most things, prevention is better than cure, so having 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, the likelihood is that people living in the community will be safer.

SCIE's 'Adult safeguarding for housing staff' guide:

- raises awareness of the need to improve safeguarding practice in housing
- helps frontline housing staff and contractors to identify people who may be at risk of abuse and to know how to respond
- helps housing managers to improve safeguarding practice in their organisation
- promotes joint working between safeguarding partners, particularly housing and local authority social care staff.

Who might be at risk?

A person with care and support needs may be a person who:

- is elderly, with poor health, a physical disability or cognitive impairment
- has learning difficulties
- has a physical disability and/or a sensory impairment
- has mental health needs including dementia or a personality disorder
- has a long-term illness/condition
- misuses substances or alcohol to an extent that it has a serious impact on their ability to cope with day-to-day living
- is a carer, providing unpaid care to a family member or friend.

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.

Why might people be at greater risk?

People with care and support needs may:

- be socially isolated which may provide an opportunity for exploitation
- be unsure of who to trust
- depend on others to manage their finances or to withdraw or collect money for them
- have difficulty escaping abuse or knowingly tolerate it due to their reliance on the abuser, adapted accommodation or the lack of suitable alternative accommodation and care provision

What are the issues for housing?

- Difficulties are caused by complex networks – housing providers may have to work with numerous local authorities in their area and vice versa.
- There is no national agreement on the threshold for housing referrals to local authority safeguarding procedures.
- 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' for effective safeguarding.
- Some housing staff report negative attitudes towards them from social care professionals.
- Some housing staff have false perceptions about needing the person's consent to make a safeguarding referral or to share information.

What are the signs you should look for?

Please refer to *At a glance 69: Adult safeguarding: Signs and indicators of abuse*

www.scie.org.uk/publications/ataglance/66-adult-safeguarding-for-housing-staff.asp

Why are housing staff important in keeping people safe?

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 domestic abuse when visiting tenants.

Reporting your concerns

- The Data Protection Act 1998 does not prevent the sharing of information if you suspect a crime may have been, or is about to be, committed.
- If you suspect that a person with care and support needs may be at risk of abuse or may already be a victim you should report it in line with your organisation's internal procedures.
- You should consider your actions carefully – it is important not to put people at greater risk, for example if there is a threat of physical violence.

- You should try to gain the consent of the person involved to share information.
- With the person's consent you should inform the local authority and, if a crime has been committed, the police.

If you suspect the person is being coerced or their mental capacity is in question, reporting your concerns without consent may be justified – but you should still inform the person of your intentions. You must consider any risk to the person in doing so. If you are unsure you could seek advice from the local authority or police in the first instance without disclosing any personal details.

Social Care Institute for Excellence

206 Marylebone Rd
London
NW1 6AQ
tel: 020 7535 0900
fax: 020 7535 0901
www.scie.org.uk

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