



**VENTURE HOUSING
ASSOCIATION LIMITED**

HARASSMENT POLICY

Document History

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1. INTRODUCTION

Venture Housing Association will treat any form of harassment as a serious matter. We will adopt a victim-centred approach when investigating allegations of harassment, i.e., we will accept the victim's view of what is happening to them and all investigations will be conducted carefully and sensitively. Victims will be given support and practical help to ensure they continue to live peacefully in their homes. Priority will be given to rehousing victims of harassment. Positive action will be taken against perpetrators of harassment wherever possible.

2. DEFINITION

2.1 Harassment can be defined as any form of behaviour which results in people feeling uncomfortable or unsafe in their homes. It is any act of abuse, threatening behaviour or assault that is committed deliberately against an individual or a group of people who are perceived as 'different', or who are in a minority group. Examples of minority groups, include those based on race, gender, lesbian and gay identity and disability. Harassment may also be directed against people because of their age, religious beliefs, physical appearance, HIV/AIDS status or marital status. The harassment can be verbal or physical and can include attacks on the person as well as the property. Venture will deal with all reported complaints speedily and in the first instance staff should accept the victim's view of what is happening to them and this principle should guide the investigations of the complaint. Harassment often takes place without witnesses being present. The absence of witnesses will not determine whether or not the matter is investigated or taken seriously.

2.2 For reporting and investigation purposes we will look at harassment in three areas – racial harassment, domestic violence and other types of harassment. For other types of harassment the definition outlined above will be used. For domestic violence the definition will be that agreed by the Liverpool Domestic Violence Forum and for racial harassment the one adopted by the Merseyside Multi Agency Steering Group on Racial Attacks and Harassment.

These definitions are:-

Domestic Violence is the mental, physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and/or economic abuse of one person by another who is in or has been in a relationship with them. The relationship may be between partners and ex-partners and other family members. Children involved may also suffer direct or indirect abuse.

Domestic violence is mainly perpetrated by men towards women. This is not to deny the existence of violence towards men or that women abuse. We acknowledge that domestic violence occurs between same sex partners. Domestic violence occurs in all communities. Certain groups face additional

barriers and discrimination when trying to access services as a result of such violence.

Racial Attack and Harassment are acts which may be verbal, physical or both and which includes attacks on the person as well as the property, suffered by individuals or groups because of their colour, race, nationality, ethnic or national origins, where the victim believes that the perpetrator was acting on racial grounds and/or there is evidence of racism. This may also include any incident in which it appears to any person that the complaint involves an element of racial motivation, and any incident which includes an allegation of racial motivation made by any person.

3. GENERAL

- 3.1** The Housing Manager will be responsible for advising staff on changes to Venture's harassment policy and procedure in dealing with victims of harassment.

- 3.2** Housing Officers should make all new tenants aware of Venture's stance on harassment, stressing that racial harassment is a ground for eviction under the tenancy Agreement and Housing Act, 1985 and 1998 and that it is also a criminal offence under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. The Housing Manager will be prepared to issue a Notice of Seeking Possession where the perpetrator is a Venture tenant.

- 3.3** Housing Officers will be responsible for giving advice and assistance to victims of harassment and taking steps to resolve the problem quickly. Actions needs to be swift to reassure the victim and make clear Venture's opposition to such incidents. Such immediate action would include repairs or removal of graffiti or contact with such Agencies as Merseyside Racial Harassment Prevention Unit (MRHPU), Liverpool Anti-Social Behaviour Unit, Liverpool Domestic Violence Forum, Merseyside Lesbian and Gay Community Forum, Victim Support, Doctors, Health, Police etc. contact should normally only be made with the victim's consent.

4. PROCEDURE

4.1 Applicants Requesting Rehousing

All Applicants for rehousing claiming any form of harassment should be visited as soon as possible and within 3 working days of receipt of application.

If it is not possible for Venture to assist quickly, or at all, other RSL's should be recommended or the appropriate local council Housing Department. Appropriate advice should be offered as for existing tenants.

4.2 Complaints of Harassment / Transfer Requests

All complaints should be acknowledged / visited within 3 days of receipt. In cases of violence or threat of violence every effort should be made to start the investigation within 24 hours of a complaint being received.

The investigation will involve:-

- * providing positive support, help and assistance to the victim
- * dealing promptly with any physical damage which has been caused
- * collecting evidence which will support or refute the allegation
- * ensuring speedy action against the perpetrator/s where they are known
- * inform the victim of services they can access that are offered by external agencies

4.3 If the tenant is requesting a transfer on harassment grounds this will be given a high priority.

4.4 The Housing Manager should be informed as soon as a transfer request on harassment grounds is received and possible likely courses of action should be discussed.

4.5 The Housing Officer must ensure that all cases of harassment are logged in the Harassment Book kept by the Central Administration Team.

4.6 For racial harassment there is an additional form which should be completed for ALL reported cases and a Monitoring Form to be completed for the MRHPU.

4.7 Tenants will be given a 'monitoring sheet' to keep a record of all incidents and action taken.

- 4.8 Progress on harassment cases should be monitored regularly and cases of racial harassment will be reported to the Housing Management Sub-Committee.

5. FURTHER ACTION

- 5.1 Venture will discuss with other housing organisations and statutory and voluntary agencies, co-ordination of joint action against perpetrators of racial harassment.
- 5.2 Where victims are transferred in accordance with agreed procedure, Venture may assist with financial responsibility for the cost of the transfer.
- 5.3 Where unknown children are the perpetrators of harassment, a model letter could be circulated to all schools within the area, pointing out that children in the area are harassing people.
- 5.4 Where evidence will be required for further action, a camera should be loaned to the victim or sympathetic neighbour. MRHPU also provide surveillance equipment.
- 5.5 If graffiti is daubed on the walls of the victim's home, this is to be treated as an emergency repair and action taken accordingly. Again, a pictorial and written report should be made before the removal of the graffiti.
- 5.6 Details of any reported incident will be forwarded to the Police. Where the victim does not want their name and address revealed, this should be respected. However, for monitoring purposes, the Police should be informed of the incident.
- 5.7 Venture should where possible work in partnership with other Registered Social Landlords, Local Authorities and appropriate agencies to ensure that they keep up-to-date with current trends.

Suitable partnerships and agencies would include:-

- * The Police
- * Social Services
- * The Liverpool Anti-Social Behaviour Unit
- * Mersey Racial Harassment Prevention Unit
- * The Merseyside Multi-Agency Steering Group on Racial Attacks and Harassment
- * Wirral Multi-Agency Group

- * Liverpool and Wirral Domestic Violence Forum
- * Merseyside Lesbian and Gay Community Forum
- * M. R. H. P. U.
- * Wirral Multi-Cultural Centre