

Hexagon Housing Association Harassment Policy

1 Position Statement

Hexagon Housing believes that all our tenants have a basic right to peaceful enjoyment of their home, free from harassment. Hexagon is committed to encouraging good relations and equal opportunities for all members of the community, regardless of race, class, ethnic origin, sex, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, age or disability. Hexagon will not tolerate discrimination or harassment in any form and will take all possible steps to bring an end to the harassment.

2 Forms of Harassment

Harassment can take many forms but it is distinct from nuisance and other forms of anti-social behaviour because it is always based on deliberate acts against a person or property with a definite **intention** to cause harm fear or distress. It is important not to confuse harassment with neighbour disputes, other violent incidents, or other nuisance (these issues are covered by separate Policy & Procedures).

For racial harassment, Hexagon Housing has adopted the definition set out in the McPherson Report – *“A racist incident is any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person”*.

This does not mean that an incident initially reported as racist may not be recategorised following investigation. This principal, where the starting point is based on the perception of the victim is extended to all forms of harassment.

3 Principles of the Policy

Hexagon is guided by current best practise and standards including the Respect Standard for Housing Management and the ODPM Tackling Racial Harassment: Code of Practice for Social Landlords (copy attached as appendix 1).

There are three broad principles that run through our policy on harassment:

- A victim-centred approach
- Action against perpetrators
- Multi-Agency working

3.1 A Victim-centred Approach

A victim-centred approach means that staff start from the premise of believing the victim unless there is overriding evidence to the contrary, and take steps to ensure the safety, health and welfare of the victims concerned.

Any action undertaken will be fully discussed and agreed with the victim. The opportunity of being seen by a Housing Officer of the same sex or ethnic origin as the tenant will be offered where possible.

3.2 Action against Perpetrators

With due regard being made to the victim's wishes, every possible effort must be made to identify and take action against the perpetrators. Without such an approach, we are not effectively challenging harassment, may be seen as not taking the issue seriously by victims and giving any perpetrators the confidence to continue their behaviour.

3.3 Multi-Agency Working

It is important to recognise that Hexagon is not working in isolation, and that other organisations have a vital role to play in the provision of expert assistance, advice and support. Some possible courses of action such as Anti-Social Behaviour Orders require close working with other agencies.

Most Local Authorities now co-ordinate multi-agency groups to monitor incidents of harassment, and provide assistance where necessary. Details of these groups are held by Housing Management.

In all cases, referral to or discussion with another agency must be with the victim's consent.

4 Training

Hexagon will ensure that all relevant staff are trained in this policy and accompanying procedure. Training will be provided on adoption of the policy, for new staff, and periodically for all staff. Training will include a background to harassment issues, case management and legal options.

5 Repairs

We aim to complete any repairs that are required as a direct result of an act of harassment within 24 hours. If more time is required due to the nature of the repair, temporary repairs to ensure the safety and security of the victim will be done within 24 hours.

6 Reporting, Recording and Monitoring

As far as possible all racist incidents will be reported and recorded in line with the Home Office Code of Practice for Reporting and Recording Racist Incidents. Other types of harassment will be treated in the same way where applicable.

Where common reporting systems with a Local Authority exist, they will be used.

All reported cases of harassment will be recorded in a central location (but separately for General Needs and Care & Support). Cases will be discussed at each supervision session between Officer and Senior, and reported at each supervision session between Senior and Manager.

Performance Indicators will be produced quarterly for the Operations Director, and annually for the Board.

Appendix 1

ODPM | Tackling Racial Harassment: Code of Practice for Social Landlords (No.148, 2001)Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Housing Research Summary
Tackling Racial Harassment:
Code of Practice for Social Landlords
(No 148, 2001)

SECTION 1

Good Practice Standards for social landlords on tackling racial harassment

1.1 Multi-agency working

1.1.1 Social landlords should adopt the definition of racist incidents recommended in the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry.

1.1.2 Social landlords should join and participate in multi-agency forums on racial harassment in areas where they hold a substantial housing stock.

1.1.3 Front line staff need to be aware of local agencies and services to support victims of racial harassment.

1.2 Prevention and publicity

1.2.1 Social landlords should have a clause in their tenancy agreements

which specifically prohibits racial harassment.

1.2.2 Social landlords should work with other local agencies to map racist incidents to detect local trends and identify 'hot spots'.

1.2.3 Social landlords should use 'target-hardening' measures to protect vulnerable tenants in their home.

1.2.4 Social landlords should display posters and leaflets stating their commitment to tackle racial harassment as well as the action they will take

to deter perpetrators and to give victims information, and confidence, to report racist incidents.

1.2.5 Social landlords should work with the police and other local agencies on outreach work with schools and youth groups.

1.2.6 Lettings and transfers policies should minimise the risk of further racial harassment and should work actively to combat the creation of no-go areas defined by perpetrators.

1.2.7 Effective and inclusive tenant participation structures and practices can contribute to the effective tackling of racial harassment.

1.3 Encouraging reporting and monitoring

1.3.1 Social landlords should implement the Home Office code of practice on the reporting and recording of racist incidents. This includes social landlords in areas where the population of black and minority ethnic residents is low and where they are more likely to be isolated.

1.3.2 Social landlords should help to develop and participate in local networks of third party reporting centres, using common reporting forms and contributing to a central database of racist incidents.

1.3.3 Social landlords should develop and implement a protocol for sharing information about racist incidents and perpetrators with other local agencies bearing in mind the requirements imposed by the Data Protection legislation.

Social landlords should set a target to increase the number of racist incidents reported.

1.3.4 Social landlords should consider using police and community organisations to train housing management staff in taking reports.

1.3.5 Social landlords should collate reports of incidents regularly and report to the relevant committee or board at least every six months.

1.3.6 Social landlords should set performance indicators for dealing with racial harassment effectively.

1.3.7 Social landlords should recognise that people are unlikely to report racist incidents unless they believe that the landlord is competent to tackle racist behaviour effectively and is committed to using its authorities and resources to do so.

1.4 Supporting victims and witnesses

1.4.1 Social landlords should refer victims of racial harassment to effective and sensitive counselling services and should use Without Notice Injunctions to protect victims and witnesses in every situation where threats of violence are made against them by identifiable perpetrators.

1.4.2 Social landlords should arrange safe, good quality temporary housing for victims and witnesses of racial harassment if they fear for their immediate safety. A permanent transfer should be offered if there is no prospect of a safe return.

1.4.3 Social landlords should provide effective support for witnesses and work with other organisations to ensure their safety.

1.4.4 Social landlords should arrange access to telephone and face to face interpreters for local community languages when necessary.

1.4.5 Social landlords should train housing management staff in understanding victims' perceptions and meeting the support needs of victims and witnesses.

1.4.6 Social landlords should ensure that staff are aware of the relevant provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998.

1.4.7 Social landlords should develop quality assurance methods to assess victims' satisfaction.

1.5 Action against perpetrators

1.5.1 Social landlords should be aware of the value of early intervention and consider using the full range of civil legal remedies against perpetrators, including injunctions, anti-social behaviour orders, parenting orders and child curfew orders, as well as possession proceedings, when dealing with racial harassment.

1.5.2 Housing management staff need to be aware of the potential for criminal action in cases involving racially aggravated offences, intentional harassment and incitement to racial hatred.

1.5.3 Social landlords should work closely with the police on the collection of intelligence and evidence, and in pursuing prosecutions for racially aggravated offences.

1.5.4 Housing management staff should be trained in mediating and taking effective civil and criminal action against perpetrators of racial harassment.

1.5.5 Housing management staff should be aware of the role of the courts and the value of case conferences with Counsel early on and facilitating meetings between Counsel and victims and witnesses.