

Vulnerable Persons and Reasonable Adjustments Policy

Originator:	Policy and Strategy Team
OVH Approval Date:	May 2024
Review date:	May 2027

1	Introduction
1.1	One Vision Housing (OVH) aims to deliver excellent levels of customer care and prides itself on achieving high levels of satisfaction from its customers for the services it provides.
1.2	A key factor in consistently achieving these aims is the support OVH provides to customers and the flexibility in service provision to ensure they are accessible and fair for all, regardless of individual characteristics or circumstances.
1.3	This Policy sets out the provisions OVH puts in place to identify which of its customers may be classed as vulnerable in any way and therefore require additional support or for the services to be delivered in a different way to ensure they are not at a disadvantage.
1.4	The Policy also details the type of change or reasonable adjustment it will make to address any differential access to services and also when this may not be possible or appropriate.
1.5	<p>The application of this Policy ensures compliance with the outcomes of the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England, responsibility of the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) as outlined below:</p> <p style="margin-left: 40px;">Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In relation to the housing and landlord services they provide, registered providers must take action to deliver fair and equitable outcomes for tenants and, where relevant, prospective tenants
1.6	Access and Communication
1.6.1	OVH is committed to ensuring that our services are accessible to everyone. OVH will seek alternative methods of access and service delivery where barriers, perceived or real may exist, that may make it difficult for people to work for OVH or use its services.
1.7	Equality, Diversity and Human Rights
1.7.1	OVH is committed to ensuring that no person or group of persons will be treated less favourably than another person or group of persons and will carry out our duty with positive regard for the following core strands of equality; Age, Disability, Gender, Race, Gender

<p>1.7.2</p> <p>1.7.3</p> <p>1.8</p>	<p>Identity / Gender Expression, Sexual Orientation, Religion and / or Belief, Civil Partnership and Marriage, Pregnancy and Maternity.</p> <p>OVH also recognises that some people experience disadvantage due to their socio-economic circumstances, employment status, class, appearance, responsibility for dependants, unrelated criminal activities, being HIV positive or with AIDS, or any other matter which causes a person to be treated with injustice.</p> <p>OVH will also ensure that all services and actions are delivered within the context of current Human Rights legislation. OVH will ensure as far as is possible that staff and others with whom OVH works, will adhere to the central principles of the Human Rights Act (1998).</p> <p>The Policy has close links to and should be read in conjunction with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The OVH Complaints, Appeals and Feedback Policy • The OVH Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy • The OVH Aids and Adaptations Policy • The OVH Safeguarding Adults Policy • The OVH Safeguarding Children Policy
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2	Statement of Intent
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<p>2.1</p> <p>2.2</p> <p>2.3</p> <p>2.4</p> <p>2.5</p>	<p>In operating this Policy, OVH will meet the relevant duties of the Equalities Act 2010, requiring reasonable adjustments to be made for customers that have a disability, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where there is a provision, criterion or practice which puts a disabled person at a substantial disadvantage in relation to a relevant matter in comparison with persons who are not disabled • Where a physical feature puts a disabled person at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with persons who are not disabled • Where a disabled person would, but for the provision of an auxiliary aid, be put at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with persons who are not disabled <p>Where possible OVH will look to adopt changes to the way it delivers its services to benefit all groups of people i.e. not just those who are classed as vulnerable in any way or that have a particular set of circumstances.</p> <p>In operating this Policy OVH aims recognise customers who may be vulnerable for any reason, record the reason for the vulnerability (even if this is only applicable for time limited period) and respond appropriately by adapting service delivery or providing support.</p> <p>OVH will adopt broad principles of ‘fairness’, ‘empathy’ and ‘respect’ with a willingness to constantly learn and improve. As a result, changes that are made either temporarily or more permanently to meet individual customers’ needs will evolve constantly and will not require a corresponding refresh to this or other Policies.</p> <p>Where OVH has good reason to believe a customer may be at risk from harm, exploitation and neglect (including self-neglect) it will make appropriate referrals via its Safeguarding Policies, as required. This may include informing emergency services(or other relevant body)</p>
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2.6	<p>where customers are thought to be in immediate danger and / or referrals without the need to obtain prior permission.</p> <p>OVH recognises that it might not always get right the provisions it puts in place to meet the needs of vulnerable customers or make reasonable adjustments and so offers accessible means of redress or appeal via the provisions set out in the OVH Complaints, Appeals and Feedback Policy</p>
3	Policy
3.1	<u>Recognising vulnerable customers</u>
3.1.1	OVH does not have a definitive or closed definition of what would make a person be classed as ‘vulnerable’ for the purposes of service provision and does not seek to attach unnecessary ‘labels’ on groups or individuals.
3.1.2	Instead, OVH will look to put the provisions that are outlined in this Policy into effect when there is an identified need to do something ‘different or additional’ (a reasonable adjustment) to ensure fair access to the services it provides, or to meet customer’s needs.
3.1.3	This can be for a multitude of reasons and may be for enduring or lasting conditions i.e. those affecting physical or mental health or an attribute that is unlikely to change in the longer term e.g. where English is not spoken as a first language.
3.1.4	It may also be required for short term or circumstantial events that impact on a customer’s ability to access services in the way that they normally would. Examples here may include where a person is undergoing medical treatment or has an injury which impacts mobility (reasonable adjustments in these cases may include extending periods by which customers can escalate complaints or allowing more time for customers to answer calls on home visits).
3.1.5	There is no anticipatory duty on OVH to identify who might be classed as ‘vulnerable customers’ i.e. it will require some form of notification and consent from the customer.
3.1.6	<p>There are three primary routes by which vulnerability (either enduring or temporary) may be identified by OVH, as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being informed Where the customer themselves, provides information about a condition or attribute that requires a differential response in order to ensure fair access to services. This can be via a variety of routes e.g. information supplied at the assessment stage or sign-up for a property, or through the course of regular contacts with OVH. OVH will encourage customers to advise of any reasonable adjustment or alteration to service provision that may be required at the point of access e.g. through reporting of repairs via the OVH Customer Access Centre • By Referral Where customers have additional support or advocates working on their behalf to help them sustain a tenancy or meet identified needs and they make referrals direct to OVH. This may be via third-party organisations / individuals or internally to OVH e.g. customers in receipt of the Independent Living Service or working with Welfare Benefit Advisors

- **Through Observation**

Through interactions OVH has with customers, its staff identify that a customer is struggling to access services that are provided as standard and may benefit from them being delivered in a different way. This includes observations through any visits to the property by OVH staff or those acting on OVH's behalf

3.1.7 In addition to the above, OVH will also carry out a pre-tenancy risk assessment of needs for all new customers. The intention is identifying any additional support needs the customer may have and to make appropriate internal and external referrals or to make any reasonable adjustments to service.

3.2 **Agreements and consent**

3.2.1 For all the above routes by which potential customer vulnerabilities may be identified and any others not listed, OVH will always endeavour to ascertain from the customer direct, what reasonable adjustments or differential to service provision is required i.e. what can be reasonably put in place to ensure the customer is not disadvantaged in any way.

3.2.2 During these conversations or contacts, OVH will also try to reach agreement with the customer for the differential service provision to be put in place. As outlined below in Section 3.3, it will not always be reasonable or possible to fully meet all requests for adjustments to service and in some cases this will be the most feasible or realistic solution that is available and may require a degree of compromise.

3.2.3 OVH will also try to ascertain the length of time any adjustment of service provision is required i.e. if it is to meet an enduring need or one that is temporary due to circumstances.

3.2.4 Where third parties (external to OVH) are providing support for customers, OVH will endeavour to obtain the necessary consents direct from the customer (where they have the capacity to provide it) for them to act on their behalf.

3.3 **Making reasonable adjustments or providing differential services**

3.3.1 Where possible, OVH will put in place any reasonable adjustment to the way in which it delivers its services to ensure access is fair for all groups and individuals regardless of their characteristics or circumstances.

3.3.2 Whilst OVH will always endeavour to meet customers' needs wherever practicable it may not be possible or reasonable to achieve this in every circumstance e.g. if costs are prohibitive or it cannot physically be achieved.

3.3.3 What is classed as 'reasonable' lacks precise legal definition but is guided by the following factors

- The effectiveness of the measure or change of service provision to be put in place i.e. the impact it will have on addressing customers' needs
- The practicality of delivering the measure or change e.g. if a large number of customers indicated that their preferred method of communication was for 'in person' contact – it would not be practical or reasonable to facilitate this request in all incidences

- The availability of resources e.g. if the cost of implementing a change or measure is greater than the available budgets or resources, this may prove prohibitive. Where it is possible to make a change or alter the way in which services are delivered that benefits all customers, OVH will endeavour to implement these measures without the need for request (in these circumstances OVH will consult with customers before implementing any changes)

3.3.4 Therefore, when an adjustment to the means by which services can be provided or a change to a service itself is 'effective, practical and achievable within budgetary constraints' OVH will look to implement the changes without delay.

3.3.5 Similar to OVH not wanting to limit the definition of 'vulnerability' there is also no definitive list of 'reasonable adjustments' that it will look to implement. To give some guidance on what might be expected the list below gives some non-exhaustive examples:

- Using advocates and working with support agencies when investigating complaints, carrying out works to properties or when consulting on proposed changes to service
- Making referrals to support agencies when additional support needs are identified that are not currently being met
- Making referrals to OVH's aids and adaptations services and Policy provisions
- Ensuring preferred communication requirements are catered for e.g. via email, in large print, verbal communications only or in alternative languages
- Altering repairs appointments or other visits to properties to fit around customers needs e.g. avoiding early morning appointments where customers have to take medication or take children to school
- Ensuring any meeting venues that are used and facilitated by OVH in the course of consultations / meetings with customers e.g. at Stage Two complaint meetings or appeal hearings are accessible and meet identified needs
- Allowing additional time for implementation of any reasonable adjustments in the complaint's investigation process and response targets or for customers to respond and escalate between Stages (where specific needs are identified)

3.4 **Impact of reasonable adjustments on Key Performance Indicators and service delivery standards**

3.4.1 Where the measures that OVH puts in place to address customers' requests for reasonable adjustments impacts on timescales or targets for service delivery e.g. extending the period of time that customers have for escalating complaints, OVH will discuss these impacts with customers and agree revised expected timescales on a case-by case basis.

3.4.2 OVH will also produce exemption internal monitoring reports where these measures impact on expected performance and will inform, where required, relevant external agencies e.g. the Housing Ombudsman of any agreements made.

3.5 **Record keeping and erasure of information**

3.5.1 Where customers records are altered to store information for reasonable adjustments, OVH will meet all security requirements of the UK Data Protection Act and UK General Data Protection Regulations 2018.

3.5.2	This will include the right for customers to request that changes to records are erased or altered, as long as this does not include basic details that OVH needs to provide its standard services.
3.6	<u>Application and coverage</u>
3.6.1	The principles that are outlined in this Policy will apply across all areas of service delivery and all relevant Policies.
3.6.2	Any future revisions of this Policy will not necessitate a corresponding review of all other related Policies and likewise changes made to other Policies will not require an update of this Policy.
3.7	<u>Complaints and appeals</u>
3.7.1	If customers are not satisfied with OVH's response in providing reasonable adjustments or they believe they have unreasonably been refused adjustments, they may seek redress via OVH's Complaints Appeals and Feedback Policy which is available via the OVH website at: https://ovh.org.uk/ or by contacting OVH by telephone on 0300 365 1111 .
4	Implementation
4.1	All OVH staff have a responsibility to be aware of the provisions of this Policy to direct any customer enquires that arise.
5	Performance
5.1	OVH will monitor the number and the nature of any reasonable adjustments that are put in place to identify any trends or similarities in service provision that could lead to universal changes being adopted that would benefit all or a large cohort of customers.
5.2	OVHJ will also monitor and provide internal exemption reports to be reviewed by the Executive Management Team for the impact of reasonable adjustments on agreed targets and key performance indicators.
6	Consultation
6.1	All OVH staff and the OVH Tenant Policy Review Group have been consulted in the development of this Policy.
7	Review
7.1	This Policy will be reviewed every three years (from the date it is approved) by the Executive Management Team (EMT) to ensure its continuing suitability, adequacy and effectiveness or as required by the introduction of new legislation or regulation that impacts on the obligations of OVH or changes to OVH business practices.

8		Equality Impact Assessment	
8.1	Was a full Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) required?	Yes	
8.2	When was EIA conducted and by who?	An EIA was undertaken by the Policy and Strategy Manager and the Head of Independent Living in February 2024.	
8.3	Results of EIA	The EIA identified potential for differential service for groups of people based on their characteristics or circumstances. It is recommended that operation of the Policy be kept under close review to identify any trends (and the need for mitigation measures) for any particular group and for the identification of service adjustments that can be implemented that would benefit all customers or a significant number that have similar needs.	
9		Scheme of Delegation	
9.1	Responsible committee for approving and monitoring implementation of the policy and any amendments to it	Executive Management Team	
9.2	Responsible officer for formulating policy and reporting to committee on its effective implementation	Director of Housing and Customer Services	
9.3	Responsible officer for formulating, reviewing and monitoring implementation of procedures	Director of Housing and Customer Services	
10		Amendment Log	
Date of revision:	Reason for revision:	Consultation record:	Record of amendments:
Not Applicable – First Version of this Policy	Not Applicable – First Version of this Policy	See Section 6	Not Applicable – First Version of this Policy