

HARASSMENT POLICY

This policy is an update on our current Harassment Procedure which was approved by the Board in January 1994 and has been produced on the recommendation of the Housing Corporation following their review of our performance in April 2003.

The policy sets out the association's response to all forms of harassment, including:

- Racial harassment
- Sexual harassment
- Harassment of gay men and women
- Harassment of people who are HIV+ or have AIDS
- Harassment of people with disabilities
- Harassment of people with physical or mental health problems
- Harassment of elderly people
- Harassment where there is no apparent motivating factor

The association recognises that its staff may also be the victims of harassment and we will deal with any incidents in accordance with this policy.

Spitalfields HA defines harassment as : *any deliberate act designed to interfere with the peace, safety or comfort of an individual or group whether because of their colour, race, nationality, sexual preferences, cultural background, HIV/AIDS status, age, mental or physical health or abilities, or otherwise.*

Harassment may include activities such as verbal abuse; physical assault; graffiti; damage to property; threatening or abusive behaviour/language.

Harassment is usually motivated by prejudice and suffered by groups or individuals who are discriminated against. It is intentional and often premeditated. It is likely to re-occur over time and can escalate if prompt action is not taken.

Spitalfields HA is committed to ensuring equality of opportunity, as outlined in our General Equalities and Cultural Diversity Policy. As part of this commitment the association condemns all forms of harassment and will take steps to stop harassment. The policy applies equally to staff, agents, third parties and tenants. The policy aims to :

1. Prevent harassment
2. Take action against the perpetrators of harassment
3. Support tenants who are harassed
4. To develop working partnerships with statutory, voluntary and other agencies and local government departments to help us deal with harassment complaints.
5. To record, monitor and review incidents of harassment.

1. PREVENTING HARASSMENT

Preventing harassment means showing an intolerance to harassment at the same time demonstrating a firm commitment to dealing with any incidents and encouraging those who are harassed to report it. This will be achieved by:

- 1.1 Promoting the Harassment Policy to all tenants at the start of their tenancy, through the tenants' newsletter and via information leaflets and IT media as appropriate. The policy will be made available in Bengali and in English.
- 1.2 Including harassment as breach of tenancy and hence ground for eviction.
- 1.3 Publicising, through the media and through the tenants' newsletter, successful action against perpetrators of harassment.
- 1.4 Publicising the association's approach to harassment in the areas we operate in by providing our policy to the local authority and other agencies/partners with which we work.
- 1.5 Working in alliance with the local authority and other statutory and voluntary agencies to pool harassment strategies and resources to ensure consistent and effective working practices.

2. TAKING ACTION AGAINST PERPETRATORS

Harassment in any form is viewed as a serious breach of the Tenancy Agreement and action will be taken against perpetrators. This will involve:

- 2.1 Sending warning letters and visiting perpetrators to make clear the action that will be taken against them.
- 2.2 Taking out injunctions to prevent further incidents
- 2.3 Instigating possession proceedings to evict perpetrators of serious and persistent harassment.
- 2.4 Involving the Police where criminal offences are concerned [if the victim gives permission]
- 2.5 Helping to identify perpetrators by using professional witnesses if necessary.

3. SUPPORTING TENANTS WHO ARE HARASSED

This policy aims to commit the Association to give support and assistance to those who are the victim of harassment, whether or not the perpetrator is known. The action will include:-

- 3.1 Interviewing the tenant who has reported harassment within 2 working days or at a time requested by the tenant.

- 3.2 Investigating all incidents and establishing a course of action with the tenant. If after investigation the evidence does not support the claim of harassment, we will inform the tenant and where possible take appropriate action under procedures for nuisance or neighbour disputes.
- 3.3 Repairing any damage and removing graffiti within 48 hours of reporting, after taking photographs as evidence.
- 3.4 When appropriate, and at the association's discretion, providing extra security measures to help the tenant feel safer in their home.
- 3.5 Maintaining close contact with the person experiencing the harassment, assigning one officer to the case who will follow the case through to closure.
- 3.6 Recognising that a transfer of a victim is often a victory for the perpetrator. However, rehousing must be an option if this is the victim's preferred option. Priority will be determined by the Common Housing Register's lettings policy. The option and implications of being rehoused through the L A's Homeless Persons section must be explained to the victim.
- 3.7 All new front line staff will be familiarised with the Policy and associated procedures within 2 months of commencing employment. More detailed training on how to deal with harassment cases will be offered during the course of employment where required.

4. LIAISON WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND AGENCIES

- 4.1 The association will endeavour to encourage a united and coordinated approach to combating harassment in the areas in which we work. We will liaise with the Police, the LA, voluntary agencies, community groups, TAs and other RSLs. We will work to improve channels of communication and promote any initiatives to protect and support victims of harassment.

5. RECORDING, MONITORING AND REVIEW OF INCIDENTS OF HARASSMENT

- 5.1 All reported incidents of harassment will be recorded on standard harassment interview/procedure forms and a register kept locally. The association will update its standard forms to reflect the current Harassment Policy. The association will also maintain a computerised database for recording and monitoring incidences of harassment. Details will not be kept in tenancy files. The association will always adopt a victim-centred approach and the victim's perception of harassment will form the basis of the investigation. The incident will be fully investigated and plan of action drawn up. The incident will be reported to the Police if the victim consents.
- 5.2 Interpreting and translation services will be offered to the victim where appropriate.

- 5.3 Actual cases will be monitored closely with reviews after 2 weeks, 2 months, and 6 months and/or when further incidents occur. Cases will not be closed before 3 months have passed since the first time a victim reports harassment.
- 5.4 The association will record the number of incidents reported, type of harassment, and action taken and report these to the Board of Management in the Housing Management Reports. The effectiveness of this policy should be monitored regularly.
- 5.5 The association will monitor tenant satisfaction with the policy through the Tenants' Survey.