

## Visit in Pairs (VIP) Policy

### 1. Summary

- 1.1 This policy is intended to ensure that SHAL properly exercises its Duty of Care towards employees and contractors and that we enable people to understand and manage the risks associated with lone working.
- 1.2 This policy is written in compliance with the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and comes under SHAL's Health and Safety policy. It ensures that SHAL meets its duty of care to its employees and takes full account of the Health and Safety Executive's advice and guidance.

### 2. Objectives

- 2.1 SHAL Housing has a duty to make best efforts to protect staff at work, whether that be in the offices or when working in tenants' homes. Lone Working systems help in the discharge of that duty. Another key element is the use of Visit in Pairs Markers (VIP Markers) as a means of recording which people pose, or are likely to pose, a risk to staff who come into contact with them.

### 3. Details

#### 3.1 Omni System

- 3.1.1 In practice, a VIP Marker is placed against a tenant by using a tick-box on the Omni system which creates a red VIP symbol in the bottom left hand corner of the screen. Pop-up messages can also be created that can explain why a VIP marker is in place.
- 3.1.2 The existence of a VIP Marker on someone's record is never a reason to not provide services to them. It is, instead, a mechanism for ensuring staff have the necessary information available to them, and can take reasonable precautions when carrying out home visits.

#### 3.2 Housing Management Visits

- 3.2.1 Regardless of whether there is a VIP Marker in place, staff should be carrying out informal risk assessments before every visit to assess whether there any risks that need to be considered and addressed before the visit takes place.
- 3.2.2 If a risk is identified, and certainly where there is a VIP Marker in place, the staff member considering carrying out the home visit should consider whether, instead, the tenant could be asked to come into the office. If that is not practical (where, for example, the reason for the meeting is to see the property) consideration should be given to carrying out the home visit in pairs.
- 3.2.3 If, during a home visit drug dealing is suspected and/ or evidenced, a VIP Marker will automatically be added to the tenants file by the Housing Manager.

### 3.3 Maintenance Visits

- 3.3.1 When a repair order is raised, the person raising the order should carry out an informal risk assessment to assess whether there any risks that need to be considered and addressed before the visit takes place.
- 3.3.2 If a risk is identified, and certainly where there is a VIP Marker in place, they should arrange for two people to carry out the inspection or repair (regardless of whether the job is carried out by an employee or a contractor).
- 3.3.3 The staff members carrying out the repair should be informed of the circumstances, ideally through a note on the repair order, so they are fully prepared. Any note on the repair order should be professionally phrased so that it does not cause any distress to the tenant if they happened to see it and maintenance staff and contractors should be careful to make sure that doesn't inadvertently happen.
- 3.3.4 For out-of-hours calls, where maintenance staff do not have access to Omni, they should refer to the list provided by the Maintenance

Administrator that indicates which tenants are to be visited in pairs. The on-call person should contact colleagues to establish who is going to come with them to carry out the repair.

### 3.4 Initiation and review of VIP Markers

- 3.4.1 Any member of staff can request that a VIP Marker be placed on a tenant's record but the decision to do so can only be taken by the Housing Manager or, in their absence, the Chief Executive.
- 3.4.2 The decision to put a VIP Marker on a tenant's file must be based on a specific incident, or a clear and verifiable expression of concern, rather than in response to a general opinion about an individual. The tenant should pose a genuine risk and the decision should be based on objective and clearly defined criteria (see below). The Housing Manager or, in their absence, the Chief Executive is responsible for ensuring the necessary file note is made and retained. The file note must explain the reasoning behind the decision and should be retained on the tenant's file.
- 3.4.3 The Housing Manager should also update the VIP Record Sheet with the reason why the tenant has been marked as VIP, with the date added and the date this decision is due to be reviewed.
- 3.4.4 When making a decision whether a tenant's record should have a VIP Marker placed against it, the following risk factors should be considered:
  - a The nature of any incident (physical or non-physical)
  - b The level of risk of violence the individual poses;
  - c The impact on staff;
  - d The likelihood that the incident will be repeated;
- 3.4.5 Whether an incident, whilst perhaps not serious in itself, is part of an escalating pattern of behaviour; and
- 3.4.6 Whether behaviour presents a risk to the health and wellbeing of staff.

3.4.7 Every Warning Marker will be reviewed at least every 12 months by the Housing Manager, in consultation with any staff involved in any initial incident, to see if there is sufficient reason to continue to keep it in place.

3.5 It should be noted that GDPR Legislation gives individuals the right to require an organisation to stop processing their personal information if this is likely to cause them substantial and unwarranted damage or distress. If an individual serves a legal notice making such a request, SHAL may ultimately have to justify, in court, the reasons for creating the VIP Marker. For that reasons, accurate and timely file notes are essential.

### 3.6 Informing the Tenant

3.6.1 SHAL will normally, within a week of the decision being made, inform tenants for whom a VIP Marker has been added to their record.

3.6.2 The letter telling them of that decision should come from the Housing Manager and should set out why the behaviour was unacceptable and how this has led to the VIP Marker being created. The letter should tell the tenant:

- a the nature of the threat or incident that led to the decision to use a VIP Marker;
- b that their records will show a VIP Marker;
- c the wording of any notes relating to the VIP Marker;
- d who SHAL may pass this information to; and
- e when the decision to add a VIP Marker to the record will be reviewed

3.6.3 There may, however, be situations where informing the individual would in itself create a substantial risk of a violent reaction from them, for example, because of the nature of the incident or the risk to another individual. In these cases, the Housing Manager may decide not to inform the individual and a file note will be made confirming the reason for that decision.

- 3.6.4 If a tenant asks to see the content of their personal records, SHAL would normally disclose to them that a VIP Marker was in place (although, in the vast majority of cases, they will have already been told that). However, where the decision was previously taken not to disclose the use of a VIP Marker to the tenant, the Housing Manager will need to decide whether the existence of a VIP Marker should be disclosed. This decision should be made on a case-by-case basis with due consideration given to:
- a Other individuals (third parties) that may be put at risk by disclosing the information;
  - b Whether the tenant’s physical or mental health might be affected by the disclosure

#### 4. Outcomes

- 4.1 SHAL’s Duty of Care to Employees will be properly exercised and employees will be safe at work.
- 4.2 Risk will be assessed and eradicated or effectively managed.
- 4.3 Any incidents, accidents or near misses will be recorded and reviewed to ensure that learning is communicated throughout SHAL and changes to processes made when necessary.
- 4.4 Incidents and accidents will be prevented as a result of risk intelligent assessments and management.
- 4.5 Employees will feel confident that they can carry out their work safely. Tenants will be given a consistent and safe service.

#### 5. Consultation

- 5.1 A draft copy of this policy will be available on our website to allow members of the public an opportunity to comment on its contents prior to being submitted for approval by SHAL’s board.
- 5.2 All tenants will be contacted by text to advise of its availability online and a draft copy will also be made available on request.

5.3 SHAL’s tenant scrutiny panel will also be invited to review the policy and suggest any comments and amendments prior to the policy being approved by the board.

## 6. Equality and Diversity

6.1 SHAL are committed to the principles of equality and diversity throughout the organisation. In the context of dealing with domestic abuse cases, we aim to:

6.2 Meet the needs and choices of people from all backgrounds and take into consideration gender, age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership and pregnancy or maternity.

6.3 Ensure our service is responsive and meets the needs of our existing and prospective tenants and customers.

6.4 Understand the cultural implications and barriers to responding to domestic abuse.

## 7. Value for Money

7.1 We will regularly review our processes to ensure resources and services are providing best value for money to our residents.

**8. Owner**

8.1 Housing Manager

**9. Version and Revisions**

9.1 This policy will be reviewed every 5 year(s)

9.2 Revisions

New version	Date	Revision details