

personal indicators (red & blue flags)

Responsible Officer:	Assistant Chief Executive Neighbourhood Services
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Scope:	Group Wide

Personal Indicators (Red & Blue Flags) Policy

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Incommunities Group seeks to improve the lives of the people in our communities. We deal with many customers on a daily basis for a wide range of issues and staff members are expected to treat customers with dignity and respect at all times.
- 1.2 In the overwhelming majority of cases, no problems occur. Occasionally, like with any customer facing organisation, we may have to deal with frustrated or annoyed customers. All customer facing staff undergo periodic training to deal with such situations so that they are dealt with sympathetically and with understanding, and flags are not designed for these instances.
- 1.3 Occasionally cases are more severe and staff members may face abuse. Incommunities Group will not tolerate any violence or abuse towards staff as set out in our Tenancy Agreements. This policy outlines how Incommunities group fulfils its duty of care to staff and wider safeguarding duties where customers may pose a risk to staff or others (red flags).
- 1.4 We are also aware that many of our customers experience vulnerabilities at differing times of their lives, and/or live with a condition that makes them more likely to be vulnerable and therefore may require a tailored service. These vulnerabilities and negotiated actions are categorised as blue flags. This policy outlines how Incommunities group operates to support our more vulnerable customers.
- 1.5 Personal Indicators are features of our Housing Management software which identify various circumstances. Red and blue flags must only be assigned to a customer (i.e. added to files against people's names) not against property files (i.e. added against files identified by addresses).

2.0 Statement of Intent

- 2.1 Incommunities Group will:
 - Assign and use Personal Indicators in a fair, appropriate, proportionate and consistent manor
 - Communicate red flags and their implications for customers clearly
 - Take customer vulnerabilities into account and protect our customers
 - Fulfil its duty of care to staff and wider safeguarding duties
 - Treat all customers with dignity and respect at all times.
- 2.2 Neighbourhood Managers and the Intensive Housing Manager will always seek to resolve issues without applying red flags.

3.0 Scope

- 3.1 Incommunities Group refers to Incommunities Housing Association and Sadeh Lok Housing Association. This policy applies to all staff members but has been written specifically for those working in customer facing roles.
- 3.2 The term Housing Manager is used and applies to Neighbourhood Housing Managers, the Support services Manager and the Intensive Housing Manager.
- 3.3 Any breaches of this policy will face disciplinary action, which could result in dismissal for misconduct.

4.0 Red Flags

The allocation of a red flags leads to a reduced service for customers and should only be issued where there is no lesser appropriate action and only in the situations outlined in the criteria at 4.3 of this policy.

4.1 Reporting

Reports of incidents that may result in red flags can come from:

Staff: In line with the Violence at Work Policy & Procedure, all staff (referrer) must complete a (V10) 'Violence at Work Form' to report an incident. This form is not discretionary. It is the responsibility of the Department Manager/Team Leader receiving the violence at work form to:

- As soon as practicable, e-mail the relevant Housing Manager/Sadeh Lok Team Leader using the "Incident Reporting" group email, with details of the incident. Housing Managers will acknowledge emails within 48hrs.
- It is the responsibility of Line Managers/Team Leaders to provide their staff with any necessary support in relation to the incident, and also to liaise with the Housing Manager in relation to any further information or statements which may be needed to deal with the incident in an appropriate manner to ensure employee safety and welfare.
- **Operations Manager/Trustcare Team Leader:** During bank holidays/out of office times, a notification and evidence can be provided by the Operations Manager and Trustcare Team to the relevant Housing Manager/Housing Services Team Leader, alerting them to review the case. Red Flags can be added by the Operations Manager (BS) and Trustcare Team Leader.
- **Third Party:** Notification of an incident or concern may come from a third party, e.g. police, local authority, contractors, etc.

4.2 Responding to reports and assigning flags

Housing Managers will consider the information/evidence received and the risk to staff and decide on the appropriate response. This could include: taking informal action, requesting further information or assigning a red flag to the individual.

The allocation of a red flag will include precautions that will help to reduce risks. These will be proportionate to each case. For example, in one instance there may be a requirement for staff to visit the customer in pairs in their home or the office environment.

Where the Housing Manager/Sadeh Lok Team Leader is unsure regarding the assignment then advice can be sought from the Neighbourhood Director.

4.3 Red Flag Criteria

It is important to highlight that many of our customers have invisible vulnerabilities and they may present as agitated/aggressive on a daily basis. Because staff should never place themselves in vulnerable situations and should always work within the line working procedures, we must ensure that we assess and act on each customer on a case by case basis. Where we deem people to potentially be a risk to themselves we also have a duty to safeguard and staff should follow the Incommunities Group Safeguarding Policy.

In all cases, the threats may not just be specifically targeted at Incommunities Group staff members but the risk assessment carried out may conclude that there is a risk to staff or others following an incident.

4.3.1 Violence – Armed

This includes any violence whatsoever where a weapon is used. Weapons include articles such as firearms (guns) and knives but can also include other items that are used as weapons such as baseball bats, planks of wood, bricks, etc. A threat of such violence would also warrant a red flag – e.g. where a tenant holds a knife in his hand and threatens to injure someone.

4.3.2 Physical Violence

This includes any violence whatsoever where physical force is used. This can include actions such as punching, kicking, hitting, pushing and shoving, spitting, using ones body to restrict the movement of others ('body blocking'), this is to include residents animals etc. A threat of such violence is sufficient to warrant a personal indicator – e.g. an individual holding his fists up to a staff member and threatening to punch them, but not actually doing so.

4.3.3 Verbal Abuse

This includes any words which are spoken in order to threaten, intimidate, belittle, insult or in any other way are spoken to cause alarm, upset or distress to the recipient. This also includes spitting.

4.3.4 Aggressive

This red flag is designed to cover behaviour where the individual acts in an aggressive manner. Care should be taken to distinguish between an individual who is simply frustrated and one who is acting in an aggressive manner unreasonably.

4.3.5 Abuse – Discrimination

This concerns abuse where a customer, on balance, has been proven to exhibit discriminatory behaviours that breach our expectations that customers will not make derogatory reference to staff about matters pertaining to their gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, gender status appearance, age or any other identifying feature.

4.3.6 *Where there is a notification of an incident or scenario made that indicates there is a potential risk to staff or where there is unlikely to be a risk to staff but where staff need to be aware in order to fulfil their safeguarding duty within the community, for example being made aware of a conviction of paedophilia.*

4.4 **Informing customers of red flags**

4.4.1 The relevant Housing Manager/Sadeh Lok Team Leader will inform the customer in writing of the allocation of a red flag, including details of the reason/s and implications and review timescales of the decision, as well as their right to make a complaint. The customer will also be notified where a red flag is removed.

4.4.2 There may be extreme cases where it is not appropriate to inform the individual because it would in itself create a substantial risk of a violent or extreme reaction. This may be because of the nature of the incident or the risk to another individual. Where an individual is not informed, for example due to their mental health, then their appropriate advocate must be informed.

4.4.3 A decision not to inform/notify a customer that they have been red flagged must be approved by the relevant Neighbourhood Director/Head of Sadeh Lok and the reasons for the decision recorded on IBS/QL.

4.5 **Staff and Third Party Notification**

Tenancy Enforcement: will be notified in situations where the behaviour may warrant enforcement action being taken against the tenant.

Contacts/third parties: requests for passing information should be checked by the legal services representative to ensure there is no breach of Data Protection.

4.6 **Staff support**

It is the responsibility of Line Managers/Team Leaders to provide their staff with any necessary support in relation to the incident, and also to liaise with the Housing Manager in relation to any further information or statements which may be needed to deal with the incident in an appropriate manner to ensure employee safety and welfare.

4.7 Red Flag Review Periods

Red flags should only be kept on files for so long as is necessary in each individual case and regular reviews are carried out. Flags can be removed if a situation changes with the customer.

All Red flags will be reviewed on a 6 monthly basis by the relevant Housing Manager/Sadeh Lok Team Leader and details of the review should be recorded in order to:

1. Ensure the information is kept up to date;
2. Check whether the red flag is still necessary;
3. Monitor the behaviour of the tenant and liaise with Tenancy Enforcement where appropriate.

Housing Managers will remove the red flag from the system once a review has found that it is no longer required.

Where there is uncertainty about the allocation of the flag, for example where the lack of further incident might be due to there being no contact with the tenant since the incident, rather than confirmation that the customers' behaviour has improved, the flag should remain at least until the next review date.

5.0 Blue Flags

5.1 Blue flags are assigned in order support individuals and the sustainability of tenancies. The blue flags communicate a customers' vulnerability to staff in circumstances where it may affect the delivery of services. The way in which the service may need to be tailored will depend on the customers' individual case.

5.2 Where there is any concern of risk in relation to a vulnerable customer, staff must follow safeguarding procedures.

5.3 Assigning Blue Flags

Blue flags can be assigned and removed at any point during a customers' tenancy. Some vulnerabilities may be lifelong, whereas others may be temporary.

Customers or their Independent Mental Capacity Advocate can directly request that information about their vulnerability is stored.

Housing Officers may ask a customer if they would like certain information to be recorded, this can only be done with consent from the customer. Before asking for consent the relevant Housing Officer will explain to the customer that:

- Incommunities Group operates a system for recording customer's vulnerabilities
- The records are used solely to facilitate service delivery to customers
- The information may be shared with our partners and contractors

If the customer does not agree to a record being made then the officer will take no further action.

If the customer does agree to a record being made, it should contain enough detail for staff to understand the key aspects of the delivery of services that may be affected, for example needing to phone/text a customer with a hearing impairment and rather than relying on their doorbell.

5.4 **Vulnerability definitions**

It is not possible to outline every situation where a resident could be considered vulnerable and the cases outlined might not necessarily mean that a customer needs a blue flag allocated. The scenarios are designed to assist rather than replace staff judgement.

For the purpose of this policy a vulnerable adult is defined as a person aged over 18 and: "Who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental disability, age or illness and who is or may be unable to take care of him or herself or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation". (No Secrets 2000 DOH). This might include the cases in the following list. This list is not exhaustive and customers may self-define as vulnerable. We should assess on a case by case basis.

- People suffering domestic abuse
- People suffering hate crime
- People with a physical or sensory disability
- People with a learning disability
- People with mental health problems
- People who are seriously ill, have a degenerative illness/conditions
- People who have been discharged from hospital
- Pregnant women (especially teenagers)
- People with substance abuse problems
- People who have difficulty understanding, speaking or reading English
- Care leavers
- People with young children
- A recent history of homelessness, rough sleepers, refugees and those with no experience of independent living
- A period of change from supported housing to independent living
- Older people

6.0 Associated Documents

- Incommunities Group Violence at Work Policy
- Incommunities Group Lone Worker Policy
- Incommunities Group Safeguarding Policy
- Sadeh Lok Zero Tolerance Policy
- Sadeh Lok Unacceptable Customer Behaviours Policy
- Incommunities Chargeable Repairs Policy

7.0 Performance Management

- 7.1 Housing Managers/Sadeh Lok Team Leaders will report on the operation of this policy to the Neighbourhood Director and Head of Sadeh Lok on an annual basis to ensure fairness and compliance with this policy and external legislation, including data protection and safeguarding issues.
- 7.2 The following information will be monitored:
- The number of red flags allocated
 - The reason for their allocation
 - The number of red flags removed and length of time they remained on the system
 - Any complaints relating to red flags
- 7.3 The blue flags system will be monitored by recording any complaints from staff or customers regarding inappropriate or unclear blue flag allocation.
- 7.4 Violence at Work forms are monitored by the Health & Safety Manager.

8.0 Review

- 8.1 This policy will be reviewed every 3 years or sooner if there is a fundamental change of legislative or regulatory provisions or if other best practice information becomes available.