



## MUTUAL SUPPORT POLICY

One of the guiding principles of a Cohousing Community is that its members are willing to act as friendly neighbours, prepared to help each other out, especially in emergencies, and to be generally supportive and aware of each other's needs. This principle is adopted as policy by Older Women Cohousing (OWCH).

### **Every woman joining OWCH must understand that:**

- she needs to take full responsibility for herself and her own welfare
- she needs to be capable of independent living
- she is committing herself to be neighbourly and may therefore herself expect reasonable support from the group.

'Helpfulness' for one person can be experienced as 'intrusiveness' by another; 'respectful distance' can be interpreted as 'lack of support' - it is important therefore that members share and take responsibility for communicating a broad understanding of what they mean by 'being neighbourly' and what is to be understood by 'reasonable support'. This shared understanding is the necessary starting point for establishing a way to 'look out' for each other rather than 'looking after' each other.

### **What mutual support means in general:**

- The maintenance of a spirit of helpful and reciprocal caring
- Watching out for the safety, security and wellbeing of fellow residents.

A group commitment to 'mutual support' means that members undertake to offer reciprocal services and receive benefits in a spirit of neighbourliness. This is understood to mean one-off or short-term assistance for a range of minor contingencies, but not long-term and regular personal care that more properly should be provided by professional or welfare services.

Mutual support is entirely voluntary and cannot be required or expected as of right.

### **What mutual support might mean in particular instances:**

- Someone is unwell and needs a prescription to be collected, eye-drops administered, shopping done or a meal provided
- Someone needs a lift to a hospital appointment or the doctor called
- Someone needs plants watered and a pet fed while away from home

- Someone needs a neighbour to watch out for a delivery
- Someone notices and investigates a neighbour's unusual absence

**What mutual support would generally not mean:**

- The right to expect the regular cleaning and upkeep of a member's home or regular shopping, provision of meals or other regular services
- The right to expect personal care such as dressing, showering, toileting, changing dressings or other services of a personal nature.

***All arrangements must be agreed between the woman needing help and those able to support her.***

**Family members and friends**

OWCH keeps a list of a person or persons who may be contacted on behalf of residents in an emergency or at the request of the woman concerned.

**Sharing in the work and responsibilities**

All members will support the community, to the extent of their ability, by contributing to tasks involved in the maintenance of the building, garden, environment and OWCH.

**On departure**

It will be damaging to the community if flats become vacant without clear instructions from departed residents. Members therefore agree that OWCH needs:

- Every resident to have a valid Will
- Every tenant to authorise a named person or persons to deal with her property in case of her death and to inform OWCH and H4W
- Every leaseholder to give Powers of Attorney for Finance and Property
- Every resident member to make robust arrangements in case she lose capacity to care for herself or make informed decisions
- Every resident member to consider the advantages of making an Advance Decision and giving copies to her GP (to be noted on her Summary Care Record) and to anyone who might be involved in her care.

**Adopted by consensus December 2018**