

## Domestic Abuse Policy

### Introduction

This policy sets out how West Kent will take steps to assist and support any person experiencing or threatened with domestic abuse; it applies to all customers including those living with our tenants.

Domestic abuse is still a largely hidden crime and measuring the true scale of the issue is difficult. Domestic abuse can happen in all communities regardless of gender, age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, marriage or civil partnership and pregnancy or maternity. However, we are aware that domestic abuse disproportionately affects women and is mainly perpetrated by men and is twice as likely to happen to women with disabilities. There is also evidence that men's experiences of domestic abuse are underreported.

As a Housing Provider we are well placed to recognise the signs of domestic abuse. It is absolutely essential that we take all reports of domestic abuse seriously and work positively and pro-actively with the survivor to offer support.

### Definition of Domestic Abuse

This is the first part of the statutory definition of domestic abuse, from the Domestic Abuse Act 2021

For the full definition, please visit:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/part/1/enacted>

Behaviour of a person ("A") towards another person ("B") is "domestic abuse" if:

- A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and the behaviour is abusive.
- Behaviour is "abusive" if it consists of any of the following:
  - physical or sexual abuse;
  - violent or threatening behaviour;
  - controlling or coercive behaviour;
  - economic abuse (see subsection (4))
  - psychological, emotional or other abuse

It does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.

- (4)“Economic abuse” means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on B’s ability to
  - acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or
  - obtain goods or services.

For the purposes of this Act A’s behaviour may be behaviour “towards” B despite the fact that it consists of conduct directed at another person (for example, B’s child).

References in this Act to being abusive towards another person are to be read in accordance with this section.

## **Aims and objectives**

We are committed to providing safe homes for all our customers and people experiencing domestic abuse will be believed, treated in a sympathetic, supportive and non-judgemental way. A survivor’s disclosure alone is sufficient for them to be given advice and assistance as a matter of priority by staff.

### **We will:**

- **Get our response right first time** by ensuring victim/survivors can contact us quickly and easily to report abuse. All staff have the knowledge to respond correctly to victims/survivors of domestic abuse and save lives.
- **Take a survivor-centred approach** in responding to and encouraging those experiencing domestic abuse, to report it and be confident that complaints will be treated seriously, sympathetically and in confidence.
- **Complete specialist services** referrals to ensure:
  - Any individual that has a protected characteristic can access specialist support, including:
  - LGBT+ individuals can speak to a support officer of the same sexual orientation.
  - Victims of all ages, especially adolescents and older survivors can access support.
  - People with disabilities receive specialist support.
- **Adopt a proactive multi-agency approach** with all essential agencies, working together to ensure the safety of those suffering from domestic abuse.
- **Be flexible in our approach** in responding to incidents of domestic abuse, taking into account the varying circumstances of victim/survivor and the differing courses of action available and appropriate that they may wish to take to end the abuse.
- **Hold perpetrators accountable for their abusive behaviour** We will work in partnership with perpetrators of domestic abuse who recognise and seek to change their behaviour. If necessary, we will take action to stop perpetrators continuing to

abuse and ensure that they are held accountable through the courts. We will ask the police to prosecute for criminal damage and take action to evict the perpetrator of domestic abuse using the powers available under the Housing Act. When making decisions on prosecution we will always take into consideration the wishes of the victim/survivor and their future housing needs.

- **Keep consistent, accurate and relevant records**, to ensure that the abused person does not have to constantly repeat the same information. This may need agreement to be shared with other agencies.
- **Assist and guide victims to obtain support**, providing advice to victim/survivors, and working with stakeholders.
- **Safeguarding**; our approach is to prevent and reduce the risk of harm to adults and children who are experiencing or are at risk from abuse or neglect by completing safeguarding referrals that have recognised links to domestic abuse acting in line with our safeguarding policies and procedures. A safeguarding audit group will complete regular checks on safeguarding cases to ensure good management, best practice and learning is recognised.
- **Stay safe at home** where the victim/survivor wishes to remain in their home and keep local family or friends' support, we will consider additional security. This could include using legal tools to remove the perpetrator from the property, signposting to the police for panic alarms, use of the west Kent security budget for extra locks or security lighting. We will also consider extra funding from any viable 'sanctuary scheme' through the local authority to increase home security.
- **Assist victim/survivors to find alternative accommodation**, if it is not possible for the victim/survivor to stay safe at home, we will support their decision to move. Where possible we will liaise with other housing providers to ensure the survivor moves as quickly as possible to a safe property with the same tenancy tenure.
- **When safe support victim/survivors to fulfil their aspirations** by ensuring relevant support is provided to continue to live well. This could include, counselling, therapeutic and group programmes, access to training and employment advice.
- **Publicise and promote** a clear message through our website, social media, neighbourhood news, and information displayed in communal areas that we will not tolerate domestic abuse and try to reach out to victim/survivors who experience barriers to reporting or accessing services. Promote campaigns and educational interventions ensuring they are RESPECT accredited.
- **Ensure that all staff and partnering contractors** undertake training to understand domestic abuse and enable them to respond appropriately. If they see or feel that 'something is not quite right' they will report to the appropriate person.
- **Staff safety** A separate domestic abuse policy for West Kent employees suffering from domestic abuse will be completed in 2021.
- **Nominate a West Kent Domestic Abuse Lead** who will have the knowledge to lead and oversee our response to domestic abuse.
- **Nominate West Kent Domestic Abuse Champion/s** who will have the knowledge to provide staff with support and advice on managing domestic abuse cases.

## **GDPR and Partnership Working**

All information that we gather when managing cases of domestic abuse will be stored on our systems securely. We may have to share information with agencies including the police or social services when a child or adult is at potential risk of harm. For children this includes emotional harm and neglect.

For cases which meet the MARAC risk rating threshold or if we have child protection concerns, we have a legal duty to share this with agencies. In cases where the threshold is not met, with the agreement of the victim/survivor, we will make referrals to other support from relevant agencies (vulnerability conferences, police, victim support etc).

## **Case Management and Timescales**

We will aim to contact any residents who are the victim/survivor of domestic abuse within 24 working hours of the abuse being reported. We will agree any requests for a case to be managed by a staff member the same gender as the victim/survivor.

Where our property has been damaged and the safety of the occupant(s) is at risk we will carry out emergency repairs within 24 hours, including locks (if permitted).

All domestic abuse cases will be recorded on our systems and survivors will be flagged as vulnerable, and perpetrators for any potential risk.

## **Staff Training**

The success of this policy and its implementation depends on the knowledge and confidence of the staff. All staff will receive mandatory training and will be expected to support our commitment to managing domestic abuse.

## **Appeals and Complaints**

Appeals and complaints will be dealt with through our complaint's procedure.

## **Monitoring and continuous improvement**

This policy will be reviewed every three years – unless legislation, business or sector developments require otherwise – to ensure that it continues to meet the stated objectives and takes account of good practice developments.