



Places to live. Space to grow.

Domestic Abuse Policy

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1 Introduction and purpose

- 1.1 This policy sets out how we will assist and support anyone experiencing or threatened with domestic abuse. It applies to all residents, including children.
- 1.2 Domestic abuse is a hidden crime that can affect anyone, regardless of gender, age, disability, race, or any other protected characteristic. While it can happen to anyone, women are disproportionately affected, especially those with a disability. Men's experiences are often under reported due to fear, shame, or economic dependence.
- 1.3 As a housing provider, we are well placed to recognise the signs of domestic abuse. It is essential that we take all reports of domestic abuse seriously and work positively and pro-actively with the survivor to offer support.
- 1.4 We are committed to providing safe homes for all our residents, including all household members, and exercise zero tolerance for domestic abuse.

2 Definition of domestic abuse

- 2.1 The statutory definition of domestic abuse is found in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 [1]. It defines domestic abuse as behaviour of a person (A) towards another person (B) if:

A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other; and the behaviour is abusive. Abusive behaviour includes:

- *Physical or sexual abuse*
- *Violent or threatening behaviour*
- *Controlling or coercive behaviour*
- *Economic abuse*
- *Psychological, emotional or other abuse.*

- 2.2 Definition of 'personally connected':

Two people are "personally connected" to each other if:

- *they are, or have been, married to each other*
- *they are, or have been, civil partners of each other*
- *they have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated)*
- *they have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been terminated)*

- *they are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other*
- *they each have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child*
- *they are relatives.*

2.3 In addition to the statutory definition, we will consider people cohabiting as personally connected.

2.4 The legal definition means those in an intimate personal relationship or are related. It recognises children as victims of domestic abuse if they see, hear of experience the effects of abuse and are related to the abuser or person abused.

2.5 We will often not be the lead agency to take action. However, we can signpost victims to relevant agencies, participate in Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) and partnership working, and lead on housing related issues such as enhanced security and rehousing.

2.6 The term Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) refers to the following range of serious crime types which are predominately, but not exclusively, experienced by women and girls. Domestic violence and abuse, sexual offences, stalking, female genital mutilation (FGM), crimes said to be committed in the name of 'honour' or faith, forced marriage, prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation. We will consider these crimes under this policy.

3 Aims and objectives

3.1 We are committed to providing safe homes for all our residents 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.

3.2 We will:

- **Get our response right first time** by ensuring victims/survivors can contact us quickly and easily to report abuse. All staff will have the knowledge to respond correctly to victims/survivors of domestic abuse and save lives.
- **Take a survivor-centered approach** in responding to and encouraging those experiencing domestic abuse, to report it and be confident that reports will be treated seriously, sympathetically and in confidence.
- **Complete specialist services** referrals to ensure:
 - LGBTQ+ 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 the victim/survivor and the differing courses of action available and appropriate that they may wish to take to end the abuse. We will give residents the right to choose the actions and outcomes that are safe for them.
- **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 act, where evidence allows, to evict the perpetrator of domestic abuse using the powers available under the Housing Act. When making decisions on action against the perpetrator 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 access support**, providing advice to the victim/survivors, and working with stakeholders.
- **Carry out safeguarding referrals.** 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 in line with our safeguarding policies and procedures.
- **Provide advice for staying 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 our security budget for extra locks or security lighting and referrals to SAFER Scheme to install additional security at the property.
- **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 security of tenure.
- **Support victim/survivors** by ensuring relevant support is provided to continue to live well. This could include counselling, therapeutic and group programmes, and 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. We will try to reach out to victim/survivors who experience barriers to reporting or accessing services. We will promote campaigns and educational interventions ensuring they are RESPECT accredited.
- **Ensure that all staff and partnering contractors** complete training to understand domestic abuse and enable them to respond appropriately to reports. If they see or feel that 'something is not quite right' they will report to the appropriate person.
- **Have a dedicated case manager**, this will be the Community Safety Officer. We will agree any requests for a case to be managed by a staff member of the preferred gender of the victim/survivor.
- **Nominate a domestic abuse lead** who will have the knowledge to lead and oversee our response to domestic abuse, this is the Community Safety Manager.
- **Nominate a domestic abuse champion/s** who will have the knowledge to provide staff with support and advice on managing domestic abuse cases.
- **Recognise impact of historical domestic abuse** which often means that survivors carry on living with trauma. We will tailor our services to make sure that survivors of domestic abuse feel safe in their homes (for example, lock change requests for safety).

4 Recognition and reports of domestic abuse

- 4.1 Anyone can be a victim of domestic abuse, and it affects each person differently.
- 4.2 Some of the signs of domestic abuse are easy to identify, whereas others may be things that you overlook. It is important to recognise signs that may indicate that someone is in an abusive relationship, such as:
- Coercive control (for example, being told where to go and what to wear, isolation from friends and family, gaslighting)
 - Physical abuse (for example, being punched, kicked, cut, or hit with an object)
 - Emotional abuse (for example, constant undermining, swearing, intimidation, ridicule, harassment, or threats) We have a new reporting category for 'shouting and arguing' which prompts our staff to make enquiries to determine if domestic abuse is happening in homes where this is reported.
- 4.3 We recognise the barriers to seeking help for domestic abuse and that victims will often feel isolated and fearful of reporting the abuse. We will handle cases sensitively and will act on reports and/or evidence provided by the victim even if it is unconfirmed or unsubstantiated.

- 4.4 Reports of domestic abuse can be made by phone to a dedicated domestic abuse line, in person at our office or to our staff at a visit, by email or reporting on our website.
- 4.5 We will investigate reports of concerns from third parties such as neighbours and relatives.
- 4.6 All reports of domestic abuse will be handled sensitively and confidentially.

5 Case management and timescales

- 5.1 We will aim to contact any residents who are the victim/survivor of domestic abuse within one working day of the abuse being reported.
- 5.2 All domestic abuse cases are managed by the community safety team. A resident may disclose an incident of domestic abuse to any member of staff.
- 5.3 We will complete a Domestic Abuse Stalking and Harassment (DASH) risk indicator checklist on all reports of domestic abuse within two working days of the report, unless another agency has already completed this. The DASH will identify any risk and support needs for the survivor.
- 5.4 Where the home 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), at no cost to the victim/survivor.
- 5.5 All domestic abuse cases will be recorded on our systems and survivors will be flagged as potentially vulnerable and perpetrators flagged for any potential risk.
- 5.6 We will work with other agencies, such as the local authority's housing options teams, domestic abuse support services and police, to support survivors' immediate housing needs.
- 5.7 We will carry out security improvements to keep you safe victims/survivors safe in their homes. This may also be done by Kent County Council's SAFER Scheme.
- 5.8 The community safety manager will regularly review case work and provide supervision support to the community safety team.

6 General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and partnership working

- 6.1 During the initial contact a risk assessment will be taken to determine the impact and type of abuse taking place. The outcome of the assessment will determine whether the case is referred to the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC).
- 6.2 The MARAC is a meeting where professionals from different agencies collaborate to safeguard people who are at risk of serious harm due to domestic abuse. We will advise victims/survivors if we are completing a referral.

6.3 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).

6.4 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.

7 Perpetrator management

7.1 We will work alongside the survivor of domestic abuse and consider their wishes throughout the investigation. Where agreed by the survivor, and appropriate to do so, we will hold perpetrators of domestic abuse accountable.

7.2 We will:

- **Respond to all reports of domestic abuse** in line with our policy and procedures, reiterating to the perpetrator that domestic abuse is a breach of their tenancy agreement and that action to end their tenancy may be taken where appropriate.
- **Refer perpetrators to multi-agency panels** such as Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) or Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) to assess and mitigate the risk of harm to the survivor, and to discuss behaviour change opportunities and offender management.
- **Refer perpetrators to relevant intervention programmes**, where appropriate. Programmes such as Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Programme (DAPP) are available to support perpetrators of domestic abuse to who recognise and seek to change their behaviour.
- **Consider alternate ways to minimise the risk of harm to the survivor**, for example, relocating the perpetrator, or offering a sole tenancy to both person A and person B if they share a joint tenancy.
- **Work in partnership with Kent Police** to share information and evidence to support a prosecution where evidence has been provided. We will always take into consideration the wishes of the survivor in providing evidence to assist prosecution.
- **Take appropriate enforcement action** if it is necessary to do so to stop perpetrators abuse towards the survivor.

8 Staff training and awareness

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

8.2 The mandatory training includes key topics such as:

- Recognising signs of domestic abuse
- Responding to disclosures
- Trauma informed approaches
- Cultural competency to better serve diverse survivor populations
- Safety planning
- Referrals
- Confidentiality

9 Reporting

- 9.1 We report on the number of domestic abuse cases to the executive team monthly, and the communities and housing committee on a quarterly basis.

10 Regulation

- 10.1 This policy supports our compliance with the following regulation:

Regulator of Social Housing Consumer Standards, in particular the Neighbourhood and Community Standard 1.4.1 requires registered providers to work co-operatively with other agencies tackling domestic abuse and enable tenants to access appropriate support and advice.

11 Consultation

- 11.1 The community safety manager has prepared this policy with input from colleagues. As part of the development of this policy a review by a resident involvement panel has been undertaken. As part of this, residents shared their feedback on its content via a focus group. The outputs of that review were considered to shape the policy before publication.

12 Communication

- 12.1 This policy will be published on our intranet and website and will be communicated to all staff as an updated policy.
- 12.2 It will be issued to all new staff as part of their induction, with a particular focus for staff in resident facing roles.

13 Review

- 13.1 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.

Summary of key material/changes

- Change to paragraph 1.2 to represent the impact on male survivors of Domestic Abuse
- Added in definition of “personally connected”
- Provided more details on how we will manage a report of Domestic abuse
- Made it clear who manages reports of domestic abuse.
- Made reference to the SAFER Scheme
- Added in section regarding recognition and reporting
- Added in section around perpetrator management
- Provided more information about staff training
- Added in section regarding Regulation
- Added in section regarding Consultation
- Added in section regarding Communication
- Added in section regarding Review

Related policies and supporting documents

Legislation:

- Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- The Care Act 2014
- The Children Act 1989
- Adoption and Children Act 20023
- The Family Law Act 1996
- Housing Act 1985 as amended.
- Housing Act 1988 as amended.
- Data Protection Act 2018
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
- Human Rights Act 1988 Article 8
- Modern Slavery Act 2015

Policies:

- Safeguarding Adults Policy
- Safeguarding Children Policy
- Community Safety Policy
- Equality and Diversity Framework
- Code of Conduct Policy
- Disciplinary Policy and Procedure
- West Kent Whistleblowing Policy
- Safeguarding: Safer Recruitment DBS Procedure
- Move or Stay Policy