

Policy	Domestic abuse policy
Date adopted	May 2021
Date of next review	May 2024
Version	1
Responsible board	Homes board
Responsible officer	Head of neighbourhoods

## 1. Policy statement

### 1.1. What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is any incident (or pattern of incidents) of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, or violence between persons over the age of 16 who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality.

This can encompass but is not limited to the following types of abuse:

- ◆ physical or sexual abuse;
- ◆ violent or threatening behaviour;
- ◆ controlling or coercive behaviour;
- ◆ psychological, emotional or other abuse;
- ◆ economic abuse - any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on a person's ability to:
  - ◆ acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or obtain goods or services

1.2. Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and exerting control over those means, and regulating their everyday behaviour.

1.3. Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim. This definition includes so called 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, and is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group.

1.4. At Housing Plus Group (HPG) we believe that domestic abuse is unacceptable and should not be tolerated. We believe that our customers and householders should not live in fear of violence or abuse from a partner, former partner or any other member of their household or visitor. All reports of domestic abuse are taken seriously, are dealt with sensitively and in the strictest confidence. HPG is committed to tackling domestic abuse, by working in partnership, sharing best practice, and ensuring our staff respond to this issue in a coordinated and consistent way. Our approach is as follows:

- ◆ We will not tolerate domestic abuse.
- ◆ We will always support Victims.
- ◆ We will treat any report as an emergency.
- ◆ We will be sensitive and listen.

- ◆ We will not put victims at further risk.
  - ◆ We will treat anything reported confidentially.
- 1.5. This policy relates to HPG customers. There is a separate policy for employees who experience domestic abuse.

## 2. Our policy aims to achieve the following

- 2.1. To provide employees with clear and practical guidance to ensure we support and protect victims of abuse, and allow those experiencing domestic abuse, to have more information about their choices so that they feel empowered.
- 2.2. To work in partnership to offer support to perpetrators of domestic abuse who are wanting to change their behaviour, and accept their abusive behaviour is not acceptable.
- 2.3. To create a safe environment where victims of domestic abuse feel they can approach us, are encouraged to talk, and are listened to, thus enabling them to make informed decisions about their lives and live more independently.
- 2.4. To work collaboratively with partners so that we can respond quickly to any cases of abuse and enhance the safety and security of those involved.
- 2.5. We will work with those individuals experiencing domestic abuse irrespective of age, gender, sexuality, disability, ethnicity, religion, social background or any other characteristics identified in the Equality Act 2010.
- 2.6. To promote the welfare of all victims of domestic abuse who come into contact with the Group.

## 3. How will Housing Plus Group respond to reports of domestic abuse?

- 3.1. We will encourage customers to report all incidences of threatened or actual domestic abuse and will offer a confidential service to ensure that those experiencing domestic abuse are given support and advice as appropriate to allow them to make choices about what to do next.
- 3.2. Customers reporting domestic abuse, either directly or by way of a referral from another agency, will be contacted within one working day and an action plan and associated risk assessment will be completed with them to agree how best to meet their needs.
- 3.3. We will be guided by the customer and appropriate professionals in determining the most appropriate course of action in responding to an incident of domestic abuse.
- 3.4. We will support victims to access the use of civil and criminal laws which can offer them protection and act as a preventative measure to avoid further abuse.
- 3.5. We will take appropriate enforcement action if there is sufficient evidence against anyone responsible for domestic abuse, however before doing so we will assess to ensure that acting will not compromise the safety of the victim.
- 3.6. It is not expected that employees will fulfil the counselling role of specialist agencies but will be able to offer sympathetic advice and assistance and where necessary signpost to specialist services e.g., Women's Aid, National Centre for Domestic Violence (NCDV).
- 3.7. We will always seek to support victims to remain in their homes if it is safe to do so. We will work with partner agencies and victims to consider target hardening, and other preventative measures, to protect victims of domestic abuse and sustain tenancies. Target hardening of victims' properties may include advice, installation of assistive technology, physical changes to properties such as increased security and imposing preventative measures against perpetrators of domestic abuse.

- 3.8. We will consider re-housing those experiencing domestic abuse if they are at risk in their current homes. In these cases, Housing Plus Group will undertake an assessment of how the risk will be mitigated if a move is arranged. We will consider management moves or direct let in line with our letting policy.
- 3.9. We will ensure that if a person is re-housed due to being a victim of domestic abuse their new tenancy will have the same security of tenure as their previous tenancy.
- 3.10. We will participate in the multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) process meetings to discuss and formulate actions plans to enable this to happen where practicable.
- 3.11. We will seek appropriate support solutions for perpetrators of domestic abuse to prevent abuse recurring, and we will undertake the most appropriate action against perpetrators of domestic abuse where we have sufficient information available to do so.
- 3.12. Where damage has been caused to one of our homes by the perpetrator, the customer experiencing the abuse will be encouraged, and supported where necessary, to report it to the police as criminal damage. We will work with the police to take action against the perpetrator and to seek compensation for the costs of repair.
- 3.13. We will ensure that where children and young people are affected by domestic abuse, they too have access to services as early as possible.
- 3.14. We will follow the relevant child protection / safeguarding children procedures if we believe a child is at risk due to domestic abuse.
- 3.15. We will follow the relevant safeguarding adults procedure if we believe a vulnerable adult is at risk due to domestic abuse.

## 4. Our strategic approach

- 4.1. Housing Plus Group will remain a fully participating member of the Safer Partnership groups in the areas we operate, and play a key role in the delivery of some of the Partnerships' overarching priorities to protect vulnerable people from a range of issues including domestic abuse.
- 4.2. We will share information in line with the Safer Partnership Information Sharing Protocols and Section 115 of the Crime & Disorder Act 1998 which allows Housing Plus and partners to share information for the purposes of preventing and detecting Crime & Disorder including domestic abuse. In doing so, we will also adhere to relevant data protection legislation. We have information sharing agreements in place with partners including the Police and Local Authorities which allow us to share information, where it is for the purpose of safeguarding the health and safety of individuals and/or preventing crime and/or disorder. This is made clear in our Privacy Statement on our website.
- 4.3. We recognise that confidentiality is fundamental to developing a relationship of trust with persons experiencing domestic abuse and guarantee that any information provided will be dealt with in the strictest of confidence unless a safeguarding issue is present or we are duty bound to report to statutory agencies.
- 4.4. Housing Plus Group recognises that it cannot work in isolation and the causes and effects of domestic abuse are wide ranging and varied and can affect persons experiencing domestic abuse in different ways. We will therefore seek to work in partnership with other agencies to ensure that the best possible individual and family support is developed, delivered, and evaluated. Some partners include but are not limited to:
  - ◆ Staffordshire/ Shropshire Police
  - ◆ Community Safety Hub Partnerships
  - ◆ Team Shropshire

- ◆ Social Services
- ◆ Children and Young People Services
- ◆ Safeguarding Children's Boards
- ◆ Safeguarding Adults Boards
- ◆ Victim & Witness Support Services
- ◆ Women's Refuge
- ◆ Women's Aid
- ◆ New Era
- ◆ Mankind
- ◆ Samaritans
- ◆ LGBT Foundation

## **5. Training of staff**

5.1. All staff dealing with domestic abuse cases will be given the training required to be able to fulfil the responsibilities found within our policy. This will be reviewed through the Group's appraisal system and any areas of need identified.

## Risk assessment

- ◆ The Group fails to maintain Consumer Standards in line with the objectives and framework set out by the Government (Risk Map ref: 6.2)
- ◆ Group policies do not incorporate current legislation, equality and diversity, or best sector practice and fail to protect the business (Risk Map ref: 1.2)

## Regulatory issues

National Standards are Neighbourhoods & Community Standard and Tenancy Standard.

## Links to other policies, procedures or documents

- ◆ Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- ◆ Hate Crime Policy
- ◆ Neighbourhood Management Policy
- ◆ Safeguarding Policy
- ◆ Privacy Policy
- ◆ Information Sharing Protocol
- ◆ Tenancy Conditions

## Supporting and associated information

- ◆ Housing Act 1985, 1988 and 1996
- ◆ Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act 2004
- ◆ Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- ◆ Serious Crime Act 2015 (section 76)
- ◆ ASB Crime and Policing Act 2014
- ◆ Human Rights Act 1998
- ◆ Children Act 1988
- ◆ Protection of Freedoms Act 2012
- ◆ Homelessness Act 2002
- ◆ Homeless Reduction Act 2018
- ◆ Women's Aid – [www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk)
- ◆ New Era – [www.new-era.uk](http://www.new-era.uk)
- ◆ Refuge – [www.org.uk](http://www.org.uk)
- ◆ Mankind Initiative – [www.mankind.org.uk](http://www.mankind.org.uk)
- ◆ Men's Advice Line – [www.mensadvice.org.uk](http://www.mensadvice.org.uk)
- ◆ Lesbian, gay, bisexual, & transgender (LGBT) – [www.stonewall.org.uk](http://www.stonewall.org.uk)
- ◆ Galop
- ◆ Forced Marriage Unit <https://gov.uk/stop.uk/stop-forced-marriage>

## Monitoring and review

This policy will be reviewed in 3 years unless legislation, business or sector developments require otherwise to ensure it meets its objectives and takes account of good practice developments.

## Impact assessments

An Equality and Diversity impact assessment has been carried out and there is no adverse impact for any customer groups.



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