

# Policy

Title: **Domestic Abuse**

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A policy should be a short statement which describes in general terms or objectives what a service area's principles and key objectives are on a particular subject and should be no longer than a 2 pages in length. The aim of the policy is to give practical effect of the strategy it supports.

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## Introduction

Domestic Abuse wrecks families and relationships. The following statistics shows its extent

- 1 in 4 women will be a victim of domestic abuse in their lifetime – many of these on a number of occasions.
- One incident of domestic abuse is reported to the police every minute.
- On average, Two victims are killed every week by a partner or ex-partner across England and Wales

The policy provides for an accessible, confidential service to customers providing the confidence to report domestic abuse in the knowledge that the Trust will be non judgemental, empathetic and proactive in supporting customers to resolve domestic abuse.

## Aims / Objectives

The Trust believes that none of its customers should live in fear of abuse from a spouse or partner, former spouse or partner or other member of their household and will take steps to assist and support any person suffering from or threatened with abuse. Such abuse may be physical, emotional or psychological. It is most often perpetrated by men but may also be perpetrated by women and between gay lesbian and transgender partners as well as heterosexual partners.

The aim of the Trust is to ensure the best outcome for any customer who is suffering domestic abuse this will be achieved by the following actions:

- Early identification of potential incidences of domestic abuse
- A primary aim of ensuring safety for the victim and any children of domestic abuse
- A victim centred approach where any action is at the pace and in agreement with the customer
- Working in partnership with other agencies to both support the victim and prevent further abuse
- Support to resolve any housing issues that may arise
- Legal action to support the victim and restrain the perpetrator
- Trained staff to provide the service identified above

## Scope

This policy is intended to cover the action taken by the Trust in dealing with domestic abuse from pro-active identification of abuse, followed by initial disclosure through all potential stages and actions with the aim of a supporting the victim to end the abuse.

The policy is for all the Trust's staff who may identify any incidences of domestic abuse but the main responsibility for action lies with Housing Management staff primarily the Area Housing and ASB Teams

## Policy Statement

The Trust believes that none of its customers should live in fear of abuse from a spouse or partner, former spouse or partner or other member of their household and will take steps to assist and support any person suffering from or threatened with abuse.

The government defines domestic abuse as :

*“Any incident of any threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality”*

The Trust recognises that domestic abuse is most often perpetrated by men but may also be perpetrated by women and between gay, lesbian & transgender partners as well as heterosexual partners. This policy is intended to cover all such circumstances and cases. The Trust is also aware that abuse can occur irrespective of age, race, ethnicity, disability, religion or belief.

The Trust aims to offer assistance to all customers and their families who are suffering from domestic abuse or threats of abuse from someone within their home or from someone outside their home (such as boyfriend/girlfriend or former partners).

The Trust adopts a victim centred approach to dealing effectively with domestic abuse being guided by the needs of all customers. In its approach the Trust offers support to all customers but is aware of the additional support some customers may need to assist in resolving domestic abuse. To meet the additional needs the Trust will ensure the following:

- Flexibility when offering interviews so that where ever possible an interview will be undertaken by the most appropriate member of staff on the basis of age, gender, race , disability ,sexual orientation & transgender and belief and religion
- An understanding of the needs and issues facing male victims of domestic abuse and ensuring that wherever possible information and support services are made available to address these needs
- Identification of the needs of customers with disability’s by providing additional support to enable a successful resolution of domestic abuse cases
- To understand the different religious and belief systems of customers but not allow perceived cultural differences to be an excuse to tolerate domestic abuse.

Due to the secretive nature of most domestic abuse the Trust has provided training to all staff to identify potential cases of abuse,. In most cases the use of power and control in abusive relationships and the potential denial of abuse and support of abusers by victims makes disclosure difficult. As a result the Trust encourages staff to be open to potential incidences of abuse and have an understanding of the difficulties of customers in an abusive relationship from admitting they are victim of abuse. By raising awareness, providing training and support, staff have the confidence to approach potential victims to discuss their concerns in a confidential and supportive manor developing a trusting relationship.

Upon the confirmation of an abusive relationship the Trust will then ensure a victim centred approach which means that it will take all reports of domestic abuse seriously and that a victim’s report alone will be sufficient for them to be given advice and assistance as a matter of priority. However supplementary evidence will be required if rehousing is requested or if there are other serious resource implications, this does not

mean that action is taken against the alleged perpetrator immediately. The Trust will only take action with the agreement of the victim (with the only exception if there is a health and safety risk to the victim or family members). We will act at the pace of the victim and provide support when required. The Trust understands that at times the victim's actions do not appear to be logical and lack common sense however we will continue to provide support despite the potential concerns over the victim's actions.

The Trust will have the victim's safety at the centre of its approach to domestic abuse. We will not undertake any action that will endanger the victim's safety, consideration will be given to the immediate and longer term safety needs. Strict confidentiality will be maintained at all times although victims will be encouraged to allow the association to share information with other agencies (including the police and local authority departments) to ensure that the full range of remedies can be pursued. All information provided by the victim however will be treated with the utmost confidence and only passed on to external agencies with prior consent. Action by the Trust will include additional security measures, accessing external support including the Police, Woman's Aid and Independent Domestic Abuse Advisor and also support and action against the perpetrator

In dealing with domestic abuse the Trust will build up its knowledge and skills to provide support whilst also working in partnership with other specialist organisations. It is important to understand that the Trust is unable to resolve all the issues surrounding domestic abuse and to achieve a successful outcome it needs to rely on the specialist services that are available. Using a network of support agencies and organisations via training and raising awareness staff will understand the most relevant services provided on an individual and wider basis to deal effectively with all reports of domestic abuse. With this support the Trust can provide staff with the confidence to deliver a service for victims of domestic abuse, while providing customers with a more seamless support service to achieve a successful outcome.

A primary responsibility in dealing with domestic abuse is to resolve any housing problems of the victims. The Trust will work to ensure the best outcome considering all options for our customers. In many cases the best solution is to enable the victim to remain within their current home. If this is requested the Trust will consider how it can provide security within the home either from its own resources or using the Sanctuary Scheme. This scheme is run independently of the Trust. This can entail the provision and installation of security measures to a customer's home which in turn will hopefully deter the perpetrator from any repeat incidents and allow the resident to feel safer in their home. Work to each customer's home is tailored to meet the needs and circumstances of the individuals involved. The main features can include:

- Window locks,
- Front and back door locks,
- Fire safety equipment,
- Alarms and a mobile phone can also be provided.

The Trust will also consider what action it can take to prevent the abuser from returning to the family home either on a temporary or permanent basis. There is also a need to consider the rehousing needs of victims of domestic abuse. When considering rehousing the Trust will consider the options within its stock and also across the borough working with the Halton Borough Council Housing Option Service, Registered Social Landlords, Police, and the Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) & Woman's Aid to consider the best rehousing options for victims.

Working with the victim the Trust may consider supporting and involvement in taking legal action against the perpetrator. The Trust will liaise with the Police on any criminal action ensuring that the victim is aware of the specialist Police PPU and the support they can provide. The Trust will also support the victim with any civil legal action including occupation and non molestation injunctions by providing information on solicitors especially those who may provide legal aid. If appropriate the Trust will consider legal action under housing law in support of the victim and against the perpetrator

To effectively provide a service there is a need to ensure all staff are trained to deal with domestic abuse. This training includes understanding of the policy and procedure, raising awareness to ensure staff understand the issues and complexity of domestic abuse and an understanding of the range and level of support available to all customers from external specialist agencies.

## **Responsibility**

The overall responsibility for the effective implementation of this policy will lie with the Director of Customer Services.

The day to day responsibility for implementing and monitoring the use of this policy lies with the Area Manager (Runcorn)

## **Service Standards**

The following service standards are applicable to this procedure

- The customer should be interviewed within 24 hours for a report of domestic abuse
- Upon receipt of the complaint a review will take place within 10 working days
- The Trust should aim to maintain fortnightly contact with the customer
- A 80% satisfaction level is expected to be achieved at the conclusion of the case

## **Performance Measures / Monitoring**

To ensure that the Trust is taking the most effective action to resolve domestic abuse cases it uses the Academy Customer Services Module (CSM) system for the recording, management and monitoring of cases.

The Performance Management system will monitor the following:

- Types and location of domestic abuse
- Age, sex and ethnicity of perpetrator and complainant
- Action taken to resolve domestic abuse
- Most successful action prior to resolution

The Trust should achieve a 100 % target for interviewing a customer within 24 hours of the initial complaint

Using a post case satisfaction survey there should be a 80% satisfaction level with the outcome of the complaint

With this information the Trust will be able to monitor effective action and target resources in the most effective way to provide value for money for the organisation and its customers.

## **Consultation arrangements**

Customer's views have been sought on the Policy in the following ways.

A panel from the Customer Forum have reviewed commented and amended the policy

Also the views have been obtained from voluntary and statutory agencies tackling domestic abuse within Halton including:

- Halton Woman's Aid - both staff and a customer panel
- The IDVA and the Relationship Centre in Halton
- Police Domestic Abuse Support Unit

## **Benchmark Analysis**

By working with other Registered Social Landlords providing a service within Halton, the Trust has been able to ensure that its approach meets the needs of customers and is compatible with the service provided by these partner landlords

## **Regulatory and/or Legal Compliance**

The Trust's Domestic Abuse Policy and its associated procedures are compatible with obligations imposed by existing legislation, including:-

- Housing Act 1985 (as amended by the Housing Act 1996);
- Homelessness Act 2002;
- Protection from Eviction Act 1997;
- Children Act 1989;
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995;
- Race Relations Act 1976 and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000;
- Human Rights Act 1998;
- Commission for Racial Equality Code of Practice on Rented Housing 1991
- Domestic Abuse, Crime and Victims Act 2004

## **KLOEs affected**

The Landlord Services KLOE on Tenancy and Estate Management poses the question: *"How does the organisation respond to the diversity of its community to ensure that all users, or potential users, have fair and equal access to tenancy and estate management services?"*

One of the descriptors used as an indication of how an excellent performing organisation would meet this question states that it *"has domestic violence and harassment policies in place that are flexible and have been arrived at with user groups."*

*The policies are effectively implemented and regularly monitored and reviewed. Feedback shows that residents are aware of the organisation's stance against harassment and domestic violence."*

This policy and the way it has been developed contributes to achieving the above requirement.

## **Equality and Diversity Considerations**

An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on the policy. It concluded the following:

- the policy is not directly or indirectly discriminatory
- the policy increase equality of opportunity by permitting or requiring positive action or action to redress disadvantages
- An action plan has been developed which can be adopted that will further enhance the equality of opportunity in the context of this policy.

## **Links to Strategies, Procedures and Associated Documents**

Diversity Strategy

Anti-Social Behaviour Policy & Procedure

Harassment and Hate Crime Policy & Procedure

Relationship Breakdown Policy

## **Business Impact**

It is not expected that this policy will have a direct impact on the Trust's Business Plan. However action via this policy may have a positive impact on its business activities in general. By supporting customers who are suffering domestic abuse this will help sustain tenancies and therefore communities . With sustained tenancies it is expected that the Trust will have lower void costs and rent loss which will increase revenue and reduce the Trusts costs. This will also have a less tangible positive impact of improving satisfaction with the Trusts homes and the communities served .

## **Self Assessment Compliance Statement (SACS) Considerations**

It is not envisaged that this policy will have any impact on the SACs document or that any changes/amendments will be required.