

HALTON HOUSING TRUST

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE POLICY

Date due for Review:

Introduction

Halton Housing Trust (the Trust) in developing this policy has taken account of the rules and procedures contained in its allocations policy and the nominations agreement agreed with Halton Borough Council.

The Trust is also aware of the need for customer-focused services to be provided to any cases of domestic violence that it has to deal with.

Policy Statement

The Trust believes that none of its tenants should live in fear of violence 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 violence. Such violence may be physical, emotional or psychological. It is most often perpetrated by men but may also be perpetrated by women and between gay and lesbian partners as well as heterosexual partners. This policy is intended to cover all such circumstances.

The Trust aims to offer assistance to any of its tenants or their families who are suffering from domestic violence or threats of violence from someone within their home or from someone outside their home (such as boyfriend/girlfriend or former partners).

Wherever possible the Trust will endeavour to ensure that it assists those threatened with or suffering violence by providing them with secure accommodation free from the threat or fear of violence. Where this is not possible the Trust will provide advice to the victims of violence on alternative sources of accommodation and support including assistance from relevant voluntary organisations, Police Domestic Violence Unit and Halton Borough Council.

A victim-centred approach will be taken in responding to cases of domestic violence. Recognising that evidence of violence may not always be readily available, the Trust will accept the victim's account and will not insist on the victim providing proof of violence. The Trust will also be guided by the victim in determining the most appropriate course of action in responding to an incident of domestic violence.

Action will be taken to evict the perpetrators of domestic violence using the appropriate legal powers available to the Trust and subject to the wishes of the victim.

A flexible approach will be taken in responding to incidents of domestic violence to take account of the varying circumstances of victims of violence and the different courses of action that may be possible and appropriate.

The Trust will work closely with Halton BC, the Police Domestic Violence Unit and other local agencies to develop appropriate strategies for responding to the needs of those experiencing domestic violence.

Implementation

All victims of domestic violence will be interviewed within 24 hours of making a report to the local housing office by a Trust officer or by a representative from a nominated organisation. Referrals can also be made by the Police or other agencies.

The victim will be offered an interview with an officer of the same sex and/or cultural background should it be requested and wherever possible. Where it is necessary to use an interpreter he or she should also be of the same sex as the victim if this is requested.

Interviews will be carried out in a sympathetic and supportive manner. The victim will be assured of confidentiality.

The victim will be advised of possible courses of action both to respond to the immediate situation and to deal with the longer term. This will include possible legal remedies (such as injunctions), rehousing options and other sources of advice and assistance (such as Women's Aid and the Police Domestic Violence Unit).

Where appropriate the officer conducting the interview will contact external agencies such as Halton BC, the Police, or a local Advice Agency. The officer will also provide a list of local solicitors if this is requested. The officer will only do any of this with the permission of the victim.

If the victim is unable to return home the officer dealing with the case will liaise with Halton BC or the Woman's Aid Refuge regarding the provision of temporary accommodation subject to the wishes of the victim who may prefer to stay with friends or relatives.

Where the victim has left the accommodation and subject to their wishes the Trust will consider taking action to evict or rehouse the perpetrator of the violence.

If the victim is able to remain in his/her home temporarily the Trust will explore the option of offering him or her alternative accommodation. Such a case would

receive priority under the Trust's Meeting Housing Need and Access to Housing Policy.

Where a transfer is offered to the victim this will normally be on a 'like for like' basis and wherever possible and depending on the wishes of the victim away from the victim's local area. If a transfer away from the local area cannot be achieved from within the Trust's own housing stock then efforts will be made to seek a reciprocal arrangement with another housing agency.

If the victim feels able to remain in his or her home either temporarily or permanently but requests additional security measures the Trust will always try to arrange for these to be installed on an emergency basis.

All cases involving domestic violence will be kept under constant review until it is deemed that the problem has been resolved satisfactorily.

The Trust will maintain an up-to-date list of local agencies which might be in a position to offer advice or support to victims of domestic violence and will participate in any local forums established to consider the needs of those suffering from domestic violence. This will include representation on Halton's Domestic Violence Forum.

Responsibility

The Deputy Chief Executive will be responsible for the effective implementation of this policy, and for ensuring that all appropriate staff are aware of and trained in the Trust's policy and procedures for dealing with this type of case.

Consultation

The Trust will ensure that suitable arrangements are in place for consulting with Halton Housing Community Voice, the Customer Panel, tenant and residents' groups, Halton BC, the Police and relevant voluntary agencies on the effectiveness of this policy.

Any consultation carried out will be in compliance with the Trust's Customer Involvement Policy.

Monitoring and Review

Reports on the effectiveness of this policy will be submitted to the Trust's Board and Halton Housing Community Voice annually detailing the number of cases dealt with and actions taken in relation to them.

The Trust will review this policy annually to ensure that it takes account of legislative changes and best practice initiatives in relation to domestic violence.

Associated Documents

Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
Harassment Policy
Relationship Breakdown Policy
Meeting Housing Needs and Access to Housing Policy
Equality and Diversity in Service Delivery Policy
Customer Care Policy
Customer Involvement Policy
The Trust's Tenancy Agreement
The Trust's Customer Handbook