

# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE POLICY

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Association considers the definition of domestic violence or abuse as any incident of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of their gender or sexuality. Violence and abuse of this nature will not be tolerated, and the Association will respond to any reports with the utmost seriousness.

This policy is designed to be read alongside the Association's Anti-Social Behaviour and Safeguarding Policies.

## 2. SUPPORTING VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

The Association aims to ensure that victims of domestic violence and abuse are aware of all the options and support available to them so that they can make informed decisions about the route they wish to take to end the abuse and rebuild their lives. The Association acknowledges that issues are likely to arise and change over a period of time; as a result flexibility in response is necessary.

To support and protect tenants experiencing domestic violence, the Association will:

- provide a supportive environment to encourage reporting;
- give information and advice to help support victims;
- take relevant action against those responsible where possible;
- provide a range of options to support victims;
- work with relevant agencies where necessary;
- always make sure tenants are safe and keep all information confidential; and
- respect the resident's choices.

## 3. SUPPORTING VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

After the first report of domestic violence a member of the Association's staff, typically the relevant Regional Housing Manager, will contact the resident as promptly as is necessary to discuss the case and how best to progress it based on an assessment of the severity of the report and other relevant factors. Any conversation will be completely confidential and information will not be shared unless absolutely necessary for the benefit of the victim and in accordance with the Association's Data Protection policy.

The Association may also take other steps to assist victims, including but not limited to;

- Repairing damage to the property
- Offering extra security at the property
- Making a referral to a 'sanctuary' scheme

Security measures may be arranged and provided at the Association's discretion, or a referral made to an external agency for assistance.

#### 4. OTHER AGENCIES

The Association recognises that not all staff will be experts in this area and that there may not be the resources or structures to deal with all aspects of domestic violence/abuse. The Association will therefore work in partnership with legal statutory and voluntary services to ensure services are provided in a co-ordinated way.

Victims will be referred with their consent to other agencies that provide support, including but not limited to:

- Police
- Domestic violence support agencies
- Victim Support
- National domestic violence helplines
- Legal advice (normally accessed via a support agency)

Victims will be supported as necessary in accessing any of the above services.

The Association will encourage a joint and co-ordinated approach to addressing domestic violence and abuse and will liaise with the Police, local authorities, voluntary agencies and community groups as necessary, working to improve channels of communication and promote any initiatives to protect and support victims of domestic violence and abuse.

#### 6. ACTION AGAINST PERPETRATORS

The Association will support victims to take legal action against perpetrators of domestic violence and abuse and help them access advice about their options. Where the perpetrator is a resident or household member of one of the Association's properties, legal action may be initiated against them in accordance with the Association's Anti-Social Behaviour Policy.

If the victim and perpetrator have a joint tenancy, the Association cannot intervene to decide which party should occupy the property. The victim will be advised to seek independent legal advice on their options.

Where the perpetrator is not a resident or a household member, the victim will be referred or signposted to access appropriate support to increase their safety and seek advice on taking legal action.

Any action taken will be pursued in consultation with the victim as far as is reasonable. The overriding consideration of any intervention taken the Association is to reduce the risk to the victim. Legal action will not be pursued where this is likely to increase the risk to the victim.

## 7. TRAINING

The Association will endeavour to provide all staff responsible for implementing this policy with comprehensive training as required and is committed to ensuring that relevant frontline staff are trained to respond effectively to reports of domestic violence and abuse, and to feel confident in handling cases and supporting victims.

The Association will support staff who are involved in dealing with cases of domestic violence/abuse, and ensure that they receive appropriate training, advice and counselling where necessary.

## 8. MONITORING

The Association will monitor reports of domestic violence and abuse received, action taken and outcomes achieved, and case management in accordance with anti-social behaviour commitments. Progress and performance will be reported regularly to the Domestic Violence Lead (the Head of Housing Services) and escalated further as necessary.