

Domestic Abuse Policy

Scope of Policy

This Policy sets out the principles and objectives that Platform Housing Group will deliver when assisting and supporting our customers (including those living with our customers) who are experiencing or threatened with domestic abuse and, where necessary, taking proportionate action against the perpetrator.

Applicability

The Policy applies to all members of Platform Housing Group (the Group).

1. Policy Statement

- 1.1 The Group firmly believe that all of 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.
- 1.2 Domestic abuse impacts upon all communities creating a sense of fear and the potential for reprisals and criminal activity. Domestic abuse is a serious and widespread crime affecting all members of our society, including children.
- 1.3 The Group takes all forms of domestic abuse seriously and recognises that it has a responsibility to provide advice and support to anyone who experiences abuse, in a positive and proactive way. Such abuse may be (but not limited to) physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, financial, emotional, discriminatory, honour based, forced marriage and female genital mutilation.
- 1.4 The Group will work with Local Authorities and other agencies, both statutory and voluntary organisations, to develop appropriate strategies for responding to the needs of those experiencing domestic abuse.

2. Context

- 2.1 The Group will make use of appropriate legislation to sanction those who are perpetrators of domestic abuse, including injunctions and possession proceedings to ensure that our approach is of high quality, reflects best practice, and delivers an appropriate, effective and timely response to all incidents of domestic abuse.
- 2.2 We will endeavour to assist perpetrators of domestic abuse who wish to positively change their behaviour by signposting them to other relevant organisations to access support and assistance.

2.3 The Care Act 2014 specifies that freedom from abuse and neglect is a key part of an individual's wellbeing. It describes numerous types of abuse including:

- Domestic violence
- Psychological abuse
- Financial and material abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Physical abuse

2.4 Practitioners should not be constrained in their view of what constitutes abuse or neglect. (Appendix 1 – Employee Guidance)

3. Aims and objectives

3.1 The Group will:

- Take a victim centred approach in responding to cases of domestic abuse to try and minimise any danger to them. A victim's disclosure alone is sufficient for them to be given priority advice and assistance in an empathetic, supportive and non-judgemental way.
- Be guided by the victim in determining the most appropriate course of action, taking into account what the person experiencing the abuse wants and feels, together with the severity of the abuse and any additional criminality. This will also include offering support to extended family members.
- Acknowledge the importance of equality and diversity and will deal with customers sensitively and professionally, acknowledging ethnicity, cultural differences and vulnerability.
- Make safeguarding referrals for children where appropriate (following the relevant child protection/Safeguarding children procedures), to ensure that children and young people who are affected by domestic abuse, have access to services as early as possible.
- Make safeguarding referrals for adults (following the relevant safeguarding adults procedure) where we believe a vulnerable adult is at risk due to an abusive relationship.
- Ensure that a range of public awareness materials are available and visible to customers.
- Support perpetrators of domestic abuse who recognise and seek to change their behaviour by signposting to specialist support agencies.
- Work in partnership with other relevant agencies to support victims of domestic abuse to rebuild their lives, e.g., enhanced security features, Womens Aid, alternative accommodation within or outside of area.
- Ensure that any barriers are removed which deter victims from reporting.
- Provide support to any of our employees who are victims of domestic abuse, through our internal network of dedicated Domestic Abuse Champions.
- Fully comply with the conditions contained within the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) unless it is clearly demonstrated that there are Safeguarding issues, in respect of either adults or children

at which point we would, irrespective of any victim consent, make the necessary Safeguarding referral.

4. Policy outline

4.1 The Group believe that:

- Every person has a right to be safe from fear and abuse;
- Domestic abuse is unacceptable and should not be tolerated;
- Abuse is a serious criminal and social issue leading to significant human and financial consequences;
- Domestic abuse not only affects the victim, but children, families and the wider community; and
- Anyone experiencing domestic abuse should be supported and protected from further abuse.

4.2 The Group will:

- Signpost victims of abuse to specialist services designed to support them.
- Ensure that our employees, who may come into contact with incidents of domestic abuse, receive appropriate training to deliver victim centred advice and support.
- Ensure that the needs of any children are considered and where appropriate, make referrals in accordance with the Safeguarding Children provisions.
- Work with other agencies to undertake improvements to home security where relevant.
- Where appropriate, utilise available legal interventions, i.e. enforcement of Tenancy Agreements.
- Respect that victims of abuse may wish to be interviewed in a neutral and safe venue by an employee of the same gender and/or similar ethnic or cultural background.
- Ensure that we take account of communication needs when offering support to victims of domestic abuse.
- Establish and support a Domestic Abuse Steering Group from across all areas of our business to promote and raise awareness of domestic abuse.

5. Equality and Diversity

5.1 We are committed to fairness and equality for all regardless of their colour, race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, age, religion or belief, family circumstances or offending history, as referred to in our relevant Group policies. Our aim is to ensure that our policies and procedures do not create an unfair disadvantage for anyone, either directly or indirectly.

6. Monitoring and review

- 6.1 We will monitor the effectiveness of this policy through performance information which will be reported through the relevant Group Management Team.
- 6.2 This policy will be reviewed every three years or on the introduction of new legislation or best practice guidelines, whichever is the sooner.

7. Associated documents / policies

7.1 List of documents/associated policies/publications/legislation:

- Housing Act 1996 – Part 7
- Family Law Act 1996 – Part IV
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004
- Children Act 1989
- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014
- Crime and Disorder Act 1998
- Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999
- Serious Crime Act 2015
- Police and Justice Act 2006
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Data Protection Act 1998
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018
- Homelessness Act 2002
- Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- Equality Act 2010
- Protection of Freedoms Act 2012
- Care Act 2014
- Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS – also known as Clare’s Law)

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Appendix 1

Domestic Abuse – Employee Guidance

The cross-government definition of domestic violence and abuse is:

‘Any incident or pattern of incidents 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 gender or sexuality.’

Incidents involving any parties aged 16 or under will be recognised and addressed as part of our Safeguarding (Children) Policy. Platform Housing Group will recognise all behaviours listed below as domestic abuse.

Coercive and Controlling Behaviour

Coercive and controlling behaviour in relation to domestic abuse is a criminal offence. Coercive and controlling behaviour often underpins domestic abuse and is explained as a range of purposeful behaviours, including intimidation, isolation, emotional abuse and manipulation. These behaviours are often used as the primary mechanisms for achieving power and control in an abusive relationship and these behaviours reinforce the threat of fear or the reality of physical abuse.

Coercive behaviour is an act or pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish or frighten their victim. Victims of coercive control can have every aspect of life controlled by their partner, often being subjected to daily intimidation and humiliation.

Controlling behaviour includes a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capabilities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

The law helps protect victims by outlawing sustained patterns of behaviour that stops short of serious physical violence, but amount to extreme psychological and emotional abuse.

Further Definitions of Abuse

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

- Psychological and Emotional
- Physical
- Sexual
- Financial
- Discriminatory
- Family and Inter-Generational
- Elder Abuse

Psychological and Emotional

Psychological and emotional violence and abuse has a profound impact upon victims and their children. It can leave a victim with little confidence that they can do anything to change the situation. Examples include:

- Creating isolation e.g. not allowing them to see other people, preventing them from making their own friendships, not allowing them to go anywhere on their own, causing them to be depressed and then using this against them.
- Use of threats e.g. threats to kill their family, children, friends, pets; to throw them out and keep the children; to find them if they ever leave; to have them locked up; to tell everyone they are mad.
- Putting them down – humiliating and undermining them in front of others or in front of their children; telling them they are stupid, hopeless, unlovable, that no one would believe them, or that they are a bad parent.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse can include:

- hitting
- punching
- kicking
- slapping
- hitting with objects
- pulling hair
- pushing or shoving
- cutting or stabbing
- restraining
- strangulation
- choking

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse can include:

- rape and coerced sex
- forcing a victim to take part in unwanted sexual acts
- refusal to practice safe sex or use contraception
- threatened or actual sexual abuse of children

Financial Abuse

Financial abuse can include:

- controlling money and bank accounts
- making a victim account for all their expenditure
- running up debts in the victim's name
- allowing no say on how monies are spent
- refusing to allow them to study or work

Discriminatory Abuse

Discriminatory abuse (with reference to Forced Marriage) may manifest itself as any of the other categories of abuse. However, what makes discriminatory abuse distinctive is it is motivated by oppressive and discriminatory attitudes towards a person's:

- Disability
- Physical appearance
- Learning disability
- Mental ill-health
- Sensory impairment
- Race
- Religion
- Gender / gender identity
- Age
- Culture
- Sexual orientation
- Appearance

Family and Inter-Generational Abuse

Domestic abuse approaches have traditionally focused upon heterosexual partner abuse and more recently have been seen to address abuse in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender relationships. More focus is required to address family and inter-generational abuse, and how it differs from partner abuse e.g. the perpetrator is the victim's teenage or adult

sibling, child or grandchild. Careful consideration is required when dealing with family and inter-generational abuse due to the complexities of family composition and safeguarding implications.

Elder Abuse

Research has found that domestic abuse is experienced by both women and men regardless of age, disability and ethnic background. Elder abuse can be even more detrimental to a victim's wellbeing due to problems with mobility, mental health and social isolation. Older people may have come to accept some aspects of domestic abuse as the 'norm' dependent upon their generation. For example, in the past the male of the relationship may have been the only one to work and was traditionally seen as the 'breadwinner' and thus have control over their finances and limit their partners' access to money, we would now accept this as financial abuse.

Wellbeing

The Care Act 2014 specifies that freedom from abuse and neglect is a key part of a person's wellbeing. The guidance outlines that abuse takes many forms, and practitioners should not be constrained in their view of what constitutes abuse or neglect. It describes numerous types of abuse including:

- Domestic violence
- Psychological abuse
- Financial and material abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Physical abuse

The Care Act guidance outlines specific aims to stop abuse and neglect, prevent harm and address what has caused the abuse.

Making the Link to Safeguarding

A significant number of adults who need safeguarding are often experiencing domestic abuse in some form. Despite the overlap between supporting abuse victims and safeguarding adults, the two have developed separate professional practices.

If domestic abuse is an isolated issue and there are no other safeguarding concerns then support can be sought via forums such as MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference).

If there is more than one safeguarding issue present, such as domestic abuse, in addition to physical or mental health disabilities, then a referral should be made to Safeguarding Adults, in order that services can be coordinated to deal with the potentially complex issues.

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