



POLICY: DOMESTIC ABUSE

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Copies of this Policy may be made available in alternative formats on request.

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Yes

1. Aims of the Policy

- 1.1 This policy sets out how we will deal with domestic abuse that affects our residents or their families and how we will assist victims of domestic abuse. It also sets out the action we will consider taking against perpetrators of domestic abuse. This policy applies to all our residents and those living with them. It also applies to everyone who receives a service from us.
- 1.2 This policy supports us in meeting our legal and regulatory requirements and our commitment to supporting victims of domestic abuse, whilst providing signposting and direction for perpetrators of domestic abuse.

We aim to:

Take appropriate action to reduce the risk of abuse where we think it might happen by:

- Keeping the victim of domestic abuse safe by working proactively with them, identifying the risk of further abuse.
- Providing the victim of domestic abuse with options and allowing them to make choices so that they can identify the option that best meets their individual circumstances.
- Liaising with the lead statutory agency and other relevant local bodies, including charities, to reduce risk.
- Support the lead statutory agency in acting against perpetrators of abuse. This includes taking tenancy enforcement action against perpetrators where it is appropriate to do so; and working in partnership with statutory agencies with any actions decided as part of partnership working.
- Improve our response to domestic abuse by learning from victim feedback and the feedback from a range of other agencies.

2. Background and definition

- 2.1 Domestic abuse is a criminal offence and a breach of our tenancy agreements. It impacts on the safety of individuals, their households, and local communities. Domestic abuse often takes place in the home and so we have a role in identifying these issues and supporting the people affected.
- 2.2 The definition of domestic abuse is “any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence, or abuse between those aged 16 or over, who are personally connected to each other, as defined by the following:
 - they are or have been married to each other.
 - they are or have been civil partners to each other.
 - they have agreed to marry one another (whether or not that agreement has been terminated)

- they have entered into a civil partnership (whether or not the agreement has been terminated)
- they are or have been in an intimate relationship with each other.
- they each have or there has been a time when they both had a parental relationship in relation to the same child.
- they are relatives.

3. Receiving reports or concerns of domestic abuse

- 3.1 Concerns about, or reports of, domestic abuse could be reported to any employee. We will accept reports and disclosures of domestic abuse through any available means.
- 3.2 Where an employee suspects or witnesses domestic abuse taking place in our homes, they must record the concerns as a potential safeguarding issue and notify the Head of Housing or Chief Executive as soon as possible.
- 3.3 We will provide guidance and training for all employees on how to be alert to the indicators and signs of domestic abuse and how to report their concerns. Our contractors will also have information on how to report any concerns of domestic abuse to us.

4. Roles and responsibilities for employees

We will be alert to the symptoms and signs of domestic abuse. It is all employees' responsibility to understand this Policy as safeguarding is everyone's business.

Specifically, this will be by:

- Reading and understanding this Policy and procedure.
- Understanding and recognising indicators or signs of domestic abuse.
- Knowing where to go for support and assistance.
- Supporting residents to keep safe.
- Being aware for signs or indicators domestic abuse.
- Reporting any concerns to the Head of Housing or Chief Executive promptly.
- Ensuring that their training is up to date.
- Recording safeguarding allegations, incidents, or concerns.
- Knowing how to report and record safeguarding concerns internally and to external bodies such as the Local Authority and CQC (Care Quality Commission) if appropriate.
- Understanding data protection and information sharing law in how it applies to domestic abuse and issues of consent.
- Attending safeguarding case conferences/serious case reviews when requested by the Local Authority or MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) or other high risk safeguarding meetings when invited.
- Work in partnership with domestic abuse agencies, the Police and local authorities.

5. Assessing the risk

- 5.1 We take a risk-based approach to managing any ongoing threat to victim of domestic abuse so that, with the victim, we can consider the best options available to prevent further abuse from happening. We understand that the risk will increase to any victim at the time a disclosure is made.
- 5.2 Effective prevention of further domestic abuse often requires successful multi-agency partnership working. Therefore, we will risk-assess the reported abuse and then collaborate with specialist external agencies to develop an action plan to find a solution for the victim.
- 5.3 We will always accept the victim's account as a true reflection of actual events upon receiving their reports and support the victim to make enquiries or seek support from statutory and non-statutory agencies.
- 5.4 We will help the victim to tell us about the abuse quickly and safely so that telling us does not put them at further risk. As part of the action plan, we will agree with the victim on how future contact can be made safely.

6. Managing domestic abuse cases

- 6.1 We will repeat the risk assessment and action plan at appropriate points throughout our involvement to ensure we continue to take appropriate action.
- 6.2 We will act to secure the victim's home where a domestic violence incident has been reported to us. Measures to specifically reduce the threat of harm are set out below.
 - 6.2.1 We will put a safety plan in place as a key part of the action plan. We will agree the safety plan with the victim and any supporting agencies where perpetrators remain in the home or have ongoing access to enter (for instance in the case of joint tenancy). This will set out specific details to equip the victim and their family with a strategy to leave the property and go to a safe place quickly if they feel at risk of harm.
 - 6.2.2 We will promote the opportunity for the victim to remain in their home where it is their choice, and it is safe for them to do so. This may involve putting in place additional security measures, as described below.
 - 6.2.3 Where we agree with the victim that rehousing is the best option, we will explore other housing opportunities. We continue to monitor the risk throughout and after the move, until we are satisfied that it has been reduced to an acceptable level.

7. Tools and resources to reduce harm and risk of harm.

- 7.1 We will work with the victim to decide whether security measures (such as lock changes or blocking letterboxes) are required to reduce or remove the risk of harm to the victim/survivor whilst at home.

- 7.2 In the homes we manage, we will ensure that the necessary action is taken. We will normally ensure that emergency work is completed within 24 hours of it being reported.
- 7.3 If we are unable to complete work within 24 hours, we may decide to temporarily move the victim while we complete the work.
- 7.4 We will seek specialist advice on whether other security measures will be beneficial and/or feasible.
- 7.5 We will explore the use of modern technologies to support victims and manage risk. This includes promoting new mobile applications available to victims for them to record incidents. Victims may also use these applications to access help and support services.

8. Working in partnership

- 8.2 Where the risk threshold is met, we will consult with the local Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC). This is coordinated by the local authority (or police) for the area where the victim lives. We will also consult with the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangement (MAPPA). We will do this where the local threshold is met, where we have serious concerns, or if the risk of harm originates from them.
- 8.2 We will complete the multi-agency action plan actions assigned to us by the MARAC. We will also ensure we understand our role and the correct processes to follow.
- 8.3 We will actively participate in other relevant local partnerships where appropriate and we will work with specialist support agencies such as Victim Support.

9. Support needs, adults at risk and vulnerability.

- 9.1 We may offer additional support such as budgeting advice to victims and members of their household where an additional support need is identified.
- 9.2 We will offer domestic abuse victims the opportunity to access translation services if needed or give them the opportunity to speak to an employee of the same gender.
- 9.3 If the victim disengages from their agreed support plan, and that places them or their family at greater risk; or the abuse is having a negative impact on the wider community, we will review what action to take to manage that risk and impact most effectively.

10. Perpetrators of domestic abuse support and actions

- 10.1 We will consider the available legal action as a landlord or remedies (both civil and criminal) available to us to deal with perpetrators of domestic abuse. We will monitor and seek to understand what action is being taken by the statutory agencies in this respect to ensure that we are working together. In

circumstances where it is appropriate to do so, we may signpost perpetrators to domestic abuse perpetrator programmes.

- 10.2 Legal actions which we may take as a landlord, provided investigations have been completed; could include possession of a property where it is occupied by a couple and one partner is forced to leave the property, as a result of the others domestic abuse and is unlikely to return.
- 10.3 All domestic abuse perpetrators will be offered signposting for Domestic Abuse Perpetrator support services. Any actions taken to support the perpetrator must not increase the risk of harm or cause harm to the domestic abuse victim/survivor.

11. Training, awareness, and support

- 11.1 We will ensure that all our employees are aware of their potential role in receiving reports of domestic abuse risks and concerns, and what they should do.
- 11.2 Our front-line staff will be trained to spot the signs of abuse and to be able to provide basic advice to victims. This includes how residents can access help and support and how they can best report further domestic abuse. It also includes how front-line staff can support those suffering from or are a victim of domestic abuse.

12. Raising resident awareness

- 12.1 As part of our commitment to tackle domestic abuse, we will display information about domestic abuse in the communal areas of our developments.
- 12.2 We will ensure our website has information that is regularly reviewed.
- 12.3 We will provide publicity in other languages and other formats to raise awareness of domestic abuse as the need is identified.

13. Data protection and confidentiality

- 13.1 We will comply with our obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018 when dealing with domestic abuse cases. This includes sharing information with statutory agencies, MARAC information sharing arrangements and MARAC operating protocols.
- 13.2 We will share information where we are legally required to do so. All information-sharing decisions will be recorded, including the reasons for that decision.
- 13.3 We will report potentially criminal acts to the police.

14. Tenancy and arrears

- 14.1 We will work in partnership with the local authority and commissioners to tackle domestic abuse and ensure that the victim is not left at risk of homelessness.

Every resident who has or is experiencing domestic abuse should be offered appropriate safe accommodation, whilst being mindful of the resident's level of need and experiences.

- 14.2 The domestic abuse victim will be prioritised for a management move within Sandbourne. If the resident has arrears, a payment plan will be arranged as soon as the transfer has occurred, providing the resident with safe accommodation. Domestic abuse management transfers will not revert to a starter tenancy, (assuming that the starter period has expired) all victims' will retain their assured tenancy status in line with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- 14.3 Alternatively if the victim wishes they should with our support be referred to the relevant local authority to provide suitable alternative accommodation.
- 14.4 The domestic abuse victim will be supported to apply for different benefits and payments as appropriate.

15. Equality impact assessment/ Protected characteristics (as at 1 July 2024)

Neutral

16. Consultation arrangements

We will consult all residents and recognised residents' bodies on any substantive changes to this Policy and their views will be taken into account by the Board before adopting it. Our employees will also be consulted on any substantive changes to this Policy and any reasonable suggestions will be taken into account before the Policy is approved by the Board.