

Customer Domestic Abuse Policy

Scope of Policy

This policy sets out Platform Housing Group's (the Group) approach to dealing with domestic abuse.

Applicability

This policy applies to all Group customers regardless of tenure and household members.

1. Policy Statement

1.1 We firmly believe that all 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.

This policy sets out our commitment to deal with all reports of domestic abuse effectively and efficiently.

1.2 We will take all reports of domestic abuse seriously and will provide person centred support tailored to the needs of the individual.

1.3 We will work in partnership with specialist agencies, both statutory and voluntary, to develop a coordinated approach when responding to the needs of those experiencing domestic abuse.

2. Definition of Domestic Abuse

2.1 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 defines domestic abuse as the following:

Behaviour of a person ("A") towards another person ("B") is "domestic abuse" if:

- (a) A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and
- (b) the behaviour is abusive.

2.2 Behaviour is "abusive" if it consists of any of the following:

- physical or sexual abuse
- violent or threatening behaviour
- controlling or coercive behaviour
- economic abuse
- psychological, emotional, or other abuse

This definition includes modern day slavery, coercive control, honour-based abuse, forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

This definition goes well beyond intimate partner violence (IPV) in the home and also recognises that a child who sees or hears, or experiences the effects of, domestic abuse and is related to the person being abused or the perpetrator, is also to be regarded as a victim of domestic abuse in their own right.

Abusive behaviour can be a one off or multiple incidents.

Whilst both men and women may experience domestic abuse, women and girls are disproportionately affected and are more likely to experience repeated and severe forms of abuse.

3. Definition of Harm or Abuse

- 3.1 Physical abuse can include assault, hitting, slapping, pushing, kicking, misuse of medication, being locked in a room, inappropriate sanctions or force-feeding, inappropriate methods of restraint, and unlawfully depriving a person of their liberty.
- 3.2 Sexual abuse can include rape and coerced sex, forcing a victim/survivor to take part in unwanted sexual acts, refusal to practice safe sex or use contraception, indecent exposure, sexual harassment, inappropriate looking or touching, sexual photography, subjection to pornography or witnessing sexual acts, sexual exploitation.
- 3.3 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. This can also include forced marriage and so called 'honour based abuse'.
- 3.4 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.
- 3.5 Psychological and emotional abuse can include isolation from support networks or services, gaslighting, use of threats, humiliation, blaming, telling them they are stupid, hopeless, unlovable, that no one would believe them, or that they are a bad parent.
- 3.6 Economic 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, refusing access to joint bank accounts or making fraudulent benefit claims in the victim's name.

4. Our Responsibility

4.1 We will:

- take a person-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/survivor in determining the most appropriate course of action, considering 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.
- make sure all our services are accessible and range of options are available for reporting domestic abuse. Information will be supplied in other languages and interpreters and translation services will be arranged to ensure we do not create any unnecessary barriers to report domestic abuse and make our services accessible and inclusive to all.
- recognise that survivors' experiences of domestic abuse may be in part defined by their background and understand that certain individuals may face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and will recognise this intersectionality and tailor our service accordingly.
- respect that victims/survivors of abuse may wish to speak to be supported 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 those experiencing domestic abuse.
- make safeguarding referrals for children where appropriate (following the relevant child protection/safeguarding vulnerable adults and 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 vulnerable adults and children procedure) where we believe a vulnerable adult with care and support needs is at risk due to an abusive relationship.
- ensure that a range of public awareness materials are available and visible to customers.
- carry out robust partnership working with other relevant agencies to support victims/survivors of domestic abuse to rebuild their lives, e.g., Women's Aid, police, or other community-based specialist services.

- carry out target hardening in conjunction with partner agencies to enhance the security of a property should a victim wish to remain in their home.
- provide support to any of our employees who are experiencing domestic abuse, through our internal network of dedicated Domestic Abuse Champions.
- fully comply with the conditions contained within the Data Protection Act 2018 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.
- ensure that our employees, who may encounter incidents of domestic abuse, receive appropriate training to deliver person centred advice and support.
- establish and support a Domestic Abuse Steering Group and a Stay Safe Steering Group from across all areas of our business to promote and raise awareness of domestic abuse.
- take firm action against anyone responsible for domestic abuse. This will only be done in cases where it is in the best interest of the victim/ survivor and where we can do so without compromising the safety of the individual. We will work closely with partner agencies and keep them informed of any action taken.

5. Supporting Victims/Survivors of Domestic Abuse

5.1 We will:

- listen to the victim/survivor's voice when determining the most appropriate course of action and empower them to make decisions and be involved in the solutions to keep them protected.
- carry out target hardening in conjunction with partner agencies to enhance the home security should they wish to remain in their home.
- give clear and concise advice on their housing options and signpost them to specialist agencies for additional support.
- consider a management move to an alternative address should it be clear it is unsafe for them to remain in their current home.

6. Taking Action Against Perpetrators

6.1 We will:

- hold perpetrators to account for their behaviour and take firm action (where evidence is available) against anyone responsible for domestic abuse. This will only be done in cases where it is in the best interest of the victim/survivor and by including them in the decision making.
- make use of appropriate legislation and/or civil remedies to sanction those who are perpetrators of domestic abuse where we can do so without compromising the safety of the person experiencing the domestic abuse. We will work closely with partner agencies and keep them fully informed and involved.
- support perpetrators of domestic abuse who recognise and seek to change their behaviour by signposting to specialist support agencies.

7. Stakeholders

7.1 We will work in partnership with a variety of specialist agencies, the local authority and statutory organisations so our customers receive the protection and support they need.

The Group does not directly provide legal advice or counselling services, but we will ensure our employees have a good local knowledge and work closely with stakeholders such as social services, health and voluntary and specialist agencies such as Women's Aid.

High risk cases will be referred to the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC). This is a regular local meeting to discuss how to help people at high risk of murder or serious harm. Agencies in attendance are Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA), police, children's social services, health and other relevant organisations.

8. Information Sharing

8.1 The Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation (the 4 Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children July 2018 Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults and Children Policy 8 Data Protection regime) allows sharing of information without the consent of the individual in a safeguarding context where certain conditions are met:

- The public interest served outweighs the public interest served by protecting confidentiality.

- There is a lawful basis to do so which includes ‘safeguarding of children and individuals at risk’; and sharing the information is necessary to protect an individual from neglect or physical, mental, or emotional harm, or to protect the physical, mental, or emotional well-being of an individual.
- The information sharing of the information must be necessary, shared only with those individuals who need to have it, be accurate and up to date, be shared in a timely fashion, and be shared securely.
- Records must be retained regarding the decision-making process around sharing information outside of the Group. A record should be made of the information shared with whom and for what purpose.

9. Diversity and Inclusion

9.1 We have completed an equality impact assessment for this policy.

9.2 We will make sure all our services are accessible and range of options are available for reporting domestic abuse. Information will be supplied in other languages and formats as required. Interpreters and translation services will be arranged to ensure we do not create any unnecessary barriers to report domestic abuse and make our services accessible and inclusive to all.

9.3 We are committed to fairness and equality for all regardless of economic status, race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, age, religion, ethnic group or immigration status.

We recognise that survivors’ experiences of domestic abuse may be in part defined by their background. We understand that certain individuals may face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and will recognise this intersectionality and tailor our service accordingly.

10. Complaints

10.1 The Group aims to meet the needs of its customers by providing an excellent service. However, it is acknowledged that occasionally our processes are not fully followed, and customers may wish to complain. Should the need arise to make a complaint, please refer to the Group’s [Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy](#).

11. Monitoring and Review

11.1 Key performance information will be provided to the Senior Leadership Team which will determine the effectiveness of this policy.

11.2 This policy will be reviewed every three years or on the introduction of new legislation, best practice guidelines or operational changes, whichever is sooner.

11.3 Approved documents are valid for use after their approval date and remain in force beyond any expiry of their review date until a new version is available.

12. Associated Documents/Policies

12.1 List of documents/associated policies/publications:

- Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- Housing Act 1996 – Part 7
- Family Law Act 1996 – Part IV
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Children Act 1989
- Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014
- Crime and Disorder Act 1998
- Serious Crime Act 2015
- Police and Justice Act 2006
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Data Protection Act 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)
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults and Children Policy and Procedure
- Lettings Policy
- Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Policy and Procedure
- Domestic Abuse Policy (Employees)

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