



HONEYCOMB GROUP

Customer Domestic Abuse Policy

Policy owner/ author:	Housing Manager (Staffs Housing on behalf of Honeycomb Group)
Team:	Group wide policy for all staff
Approved by:	Executive Team
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Next review date:	March 2025

1. Policy statement

We are committed to offering support and assistance to anyone affected by domestic abuse. We believe that all customers have the right to be treated with respect and should not live in fear of abuse or intimidation from either a current/ former partner or family member.

We recognise that domestic abuse has a significant impact on children and young people of all ages and that children are victims in their own right if they see, hear, or experience the effects of domestic abuse. We are committed to safeguarding children and ensuring that children as victims receive the support they need.

We can provide a range of domestic abuse support services across the counties of Staffordshire and Derbyshire as well as education programmes for children and young people and training for professionals. We also provide safe accommodation services in Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire for women and men escaping abuse.

This policy has been reviewed in line with the DAHA (Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance) Accreditation Toolkit.

2. Aims and objectives

This policy details the actions to be taken in cases of domestic abuse. Further information can be found in the associated guidance and procedures across Staffs Housing, Glow, Concrete and Revival.

The policy aims to ensure those experiencing domestic abuse are supported in a sympathetic and sensitive manner without judgement.

This policy does not cover cases of staff experiencing domestic abuse. We will follow our Domestic Abuse in the Workplace Policy for staff who report this.

3. Definition of domestic abuse

The definition as set out in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021

Definition of domestic abuse

- (1) This section defines “domestic abuse” for the purposes of this Act.
- (2) 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.
- (3) Behaviour is “abusive” if it consists of any of the following:
 - (a) physical or sexual abuse
 - (b) violent or threatening behaviour
 - (c) controlling or coercive behaviour
 - (d) economic abuse (see subsection (4))
 - (e) psychological, emotional or other abuse

and it does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.

- (4) “Economic abuse” means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on B’s ability to:
 - (a) acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or

(b) obtain goods or services.

(5) For the purposes of this Act A's behaviour may be behaviour "towards" B even though it consists of conduct directed at another person (for example, B's child).

(6) References in this Act to being abusive towards another person are to be read in accordance with this section.

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

Coercive behaviour is an act or a pattern of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.

This definition includes 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, and is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group.

We recognise that older people may have come to accept some aspects of domestic abuse as the 'norm', dependent on their generation. On average, older victims experience abuse for twice as long before seeking help, compared with those aged under 61, and nearly half have a disability. Yet older clients are hugely underrepresented among domestic abuse services. Victims aged 61 and above are also more likely to experience abuse from an adult family member and a current intimate partner than those aged 60 and below¹.

We will work specifically with staff working in our older persons accommodation to make sure they are specifically trained to deal with victims of domestic abuse in a sensitive and appropriate way and for older customers within our general need's accommodation.

The ASB specialist housing staff will also be trained to recognise additional barriers that older people may have regarding domestic abuse.

¹ Safe Later Lives: Older People and Domestic Abuse
<https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Safe%20Later%20Lives%20-%20Older%20people%20and%20domestic%20abuse.pdf>

We recognise that some customers who may receive care from family members may also be vulnerable to domestic abuse, and that receiving care may be a barrier to reporting any issues they may face.

Criminal offences

Many forms of domestic abuse are also criminal offences. These include physical assault, threats of violence, rape, and sexual assault.

4. Principles

The principles underpinning the policy are:

- The safety of the victim survivors will be our priority (we use the more positive term victim survivor within our day-to-day operations, so within this policy where we have used ‘victim’ we are referring to victim survivors.)
- Protecting children who see, hear, or experience the effects of domestic abuse.
- We will make sure residents are able to report domestic abuse easily, through a variety of methods, and we will investigate all the reports we receive.
- Our policy is victim centered – this means action will not be taken without a victim’s consent unless there is a specific safeguarding issue e.g. emergency or life-threatening situations or where there is a direct risk to a child.
- We will accept the victim’s report to be true and accurate and respond accordingly. (This would only change if evidence later revealed that the victim report was untrue).
- We will work in partnership to support victims and to meet their short- and long-term accommodation needs.
- We will sign-up to information sharing protocols to enable information exchange with key agencies.

5. Outcomes

- Customers can report incidents of domestic abuse with confidence that we will listen and respond promptly and positively.
- Customers find it easy to report incidents of domestic abuse and are able to exercise choice around what happens.
- We take effective action in response to reports of domestic abuse.
- Children are recognised and supported as victims in their own right, children have trust in HG staff, they feel believed and receive the support they need
- If it is their wish to remain, victims feel safe and supported in their own home.
- Perpetrators will be made aware that our policy states domestic abuse in our properties is not acceptable, and we will take action against perpetrators who break tenancy/ license conditions.
- Domestic abuse complainants feel that they are dealt with in a fair, consistent and timely manner.

6. Equality & diversity

Honeycomb Group recognises that women and girls are disproportionately affected by domestic abuse, however we will support any individual experiencing domestic abuse irrespective of age, gender, sexuality, disability, ethnicity, religion, social background, or any other protected characteristics identified in the Equality Act. All victims will be treated in accordance with the Equality and Diversity Policy.

We recognise that although most victims of domestic abuse are women; men and older people in dependent family relationships may also be victims of domestic abuse. It doesn't matter what their age, race, gender or sexuality is, anyone can be affected by domestic abuse. Honeycomb Group will promote equality of access to services, including providing interpretation services, wherever possible.

7. Implementing this policy – how we will respond

We will:

- Make sure that people experiencing domestic abuse can access appropriate services as early as possible and are given advice to make choices about what to do next.
- Support people who are or have experienced abuse to rebuild their lives by working in partnership with them and other support agencies.

Make sure that where children and young people are affected by domestic abuse, they too have access to services as early as possible.

- Support victims to use civil and criminal laws which can offer them protection and act as a preventative measure to avoid further abuse.
- Make sure that people experiencing abuse are not deterred from reporting abuse.
- Seek appropriate solutions for perpetrators of domestic abuse to prevent abuse recurring.
- Follow the relevant child protection and safeguarding children procedures if we believe a child is at risk due to an abusive relationship.
- Follow the relevant safeguarding adult's procedure if we believe a vulnerable adult is at risk due to an abusive relationship.
- Work in partnership with other organisations to prioritise the safety of victims and support them to access emergency accommodation or permanently move home when necessary. Existing rent arrears will not be a barrier to transfer requests.
- Work in partnership with specialist services to offer support to perpetrators of domestic abuse who recognise and demonstrate willingness to change their behaviour. Support victims to approach the police, local authority housing teams and specialist agencies

where requested. We will also participate in multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACS).

- Take action to deal with offences promptly, firmly and sensitively in line with our procedures.
- We will ensure target hardening work is readily available to those in need (in line with our Maintenance Policy)

8. MARAC (multi agency risk assessment conference)

High risk domestic abuse cases are heard at fortnightly MARACs, which are attended by an appropriate member of staff from housing services, alongside representatives from other services including health services, police, domestic abuse support services and appropriate officers from the relevant local authority.

At the MARAC meetings, agencies discuss the victim, the family and the perpetrator, and share information. The meeting is confidential.

An action plan is written for each case, and agencies are given responsibility for carrying out tasks to make sure the victim and their family are safeguarded, that the right support is in place, and that the appropriate action has been taken against the perpetrator.

Any referrals to MARAC will be made after discussion with, and consent from, the victim. However, if consent is not granted and there is an immediate or potential risk, (to the victim or the victim's family), a referral may be made without the consent of the victim to protect them and their family from potentially serious harm.

9. Training and Awareness

Training will be provided to staff so they are equipped to identify, interview and support victims. The training will be focused on giving information and initial support, directing victims to the most appropriate services. This will be specialist training, delivered at the appropriate level dependent on the staff member's job role.

We are committed to training domestic abuse 'champions' across the Group who will be confident in advising both staff and customers on domestic abuse issues.

10. Performance Monitoring and Review

Staff from across Honeycomb Group will receive a separate domestic abuse procedure (relevant to their organisation/brand within the wider Honeycomb Group) which will give them further detail and guidance on how to deal with reports or disclosures of domestic abuse and where to record information.

We will monitor the number of domestic abuse cases which are reported to each team. We will take into account any good practice, or any changes in legislation.

This policy will be reviewed every three years, or due to:

- a) changes in relevant legislation.
- b) any issues raised about the policy by an independent organisation who require a review of this policy.

10. Other references

This policy should be referred to in conjunction with the following policies, procedures and legal guidance:

- Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- Domestic abuse in the workplace policy
- Maintenance Policy
- Housing Act 1988
- Safeguarding Adults Policy
- Child Protection Policy
- Data Protection Act 1998
- Anti-Social Behavior, Crime and Policing Act 2014
- Equality Act 2010
- Anti-Harassment and Anti-Bullying Policy
- Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 (2012 Amendment)
- Lettings policy
- Procedures on domestic abuse, relationship breakdown, anti-social behaviour and anti-harassment
- 'One Staffordshire' - Multi-Information Exchange Protocol
- Serious Crime Act 2015 section 76
- <https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Safe%20Later%20Lives%20-%20Older%20people%20and%20domestic%20abuse.pdf>