

# Housing Options & Neighbourhood Services – Customer Domestic Abuse Policy

## Policy Summary

We believe that no person should live in fear of violence or abuse. This policy sets out our commitment to take efficient and effective action to deal with all reports of incidents of domestic abuse. It explains how we provide support tailored to the needs of the individual, working in partnership with specialised agencies to provide a coordinated response.

We take all reports of domestic abuse seriously and employ staff trained to deal with reports of domestic abuse. We'll always treat people experiencing domestic abuse in a sympathetic, supportive and non-judgemental way.

We will base our support upon the survivor's needs, and will always take into account the views and ongoing safety of the individual when deciding the most appropriate course of action.

You can report domestic abuse to us through any contact you have with us, for example, through our website, by telephone, by email, in person, in writing or through a third party including internal and external agencies. **If you are in an emergency situation, you should always call the police on 999.**

We take a zero-tolerance approach to domestic abuse and will work with partners across the borough to hold perpetrators to account.



## 1. Policy Scope and Definitions

This policy applies to all service users of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets Council's Housing Service and Tower Hamlets Council tenants. We have a separate Domestic Abuse Policy for employees experiencing domestic abuse.

Within the [Domestic Abuse Act](#) and this policy, domestic abuse is defined as 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 violence, forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

Within this definition, economic abuse means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on a person's ability to do either of the following:

- Acquire, use or maintain money or other property
- Obtain goods or services

It doesn't matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or part of an ongoing pattern of behaviour.

For the definition and policy to apply, both people must be aged 16 or over and personally connected. Personally connected is defined in the act as people who:

- are married to each other
- are civil partners of each other;
- have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement is still in place);
- have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement is still in place);
- are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other;
- are, or have been, parents of the same child or children;
- are relatives

Children aged under 18 are also recognised as survivors in their own right if they see, hear or experience the effects of the abuse or are related to the survivor or the perpetrator.

If a customer tells us about abuse in other circumstances, such as abuse by a carer, we'll consider this under our Persons in Position of Trust Policy and Safeguarding Adults Procedure.

Most often domestic abuse is committed by men against women, but it can also be perpetrated by women against men, and can occur in gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender relationships. Sometimes other family members may be involved. This

policy applies to anyone who has been subjected to domestic abuse, regardless of their gender, sexuality, gender identity, race, religion or disability.

The Council has a VAWG (violence against women and girls) and Hate Crime Team which provides a coordinated community response to domestic abuse. The Team focus on preventing and reducing the harm these crimes cause to individuals, families and the community. Victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse can access the [LBTH VAWG Directory](#), which contains contact details for local and national support.

Within this document, where we use “you” and “your” we are referring to service users/customers. The terms ‘we’, ‘our’ and ‘us’ refers to Tower Hamlets Council’s Housing Options and Neighbourhoods service.

## 2. Getting help now

- 2.1 If you’re worried about violence or abuse from your partner, ex-partner or a member of your family, you can get help and advice. If you’re in immediate danger, you should always phone the police on 999. You can also contact the police on their non-emergency number: 101.
- 2.2 You can contact the National Domestic Violence Helpline on 0808 2000 247 if you are a woman experiencing domestic abuse. If you are a male experiencing domestic abuse you can contact the Men's Advice Line on 0808 801 0327. If you are in a same-sex relationship, you can call the National LGBT Domestic Violence Helpline on 0800 999 5428. Anyone can call the Samaritans on 08457 90 90 90 if you feel in despair and want someone to listen to you and provide emotional support. A full list of support services can be found via our [service directory](#).
- 2.3 If you are a Tower Hamlets Council tenant, you can contact your Housing Officer to discuss matters in confidence.
- 2.4 If you are in temporary accommodation provided and managed by the Council, you should contact your housing officer or caseworker.
- 2.5 If you are a housing association tenant, please contact your Housing Manager at your housing association.
- 2.6 If you do need to leave your home, try and take some essentials with you such as a change of clothes, toiletries and any medication you need to take regularly. Try to bring important items such as your passport, bank and credit cards and mobile phone.

## 3. Responding to reports of Domestic Abuse

### Our principles

- 3.1 We take all reports of domestic abuse seriously. Domestic abuse is a serious crime and we’ll always treat people experiencing domestic abuse in a sympathetic, supportive and non-judgemental way.

- 3.2 We take a zero-tolerance approach to domestic abuse and will work with partners across the borough to hold perpetrators to account.
- 3.3 We'll always base our support on the survivor's individual needs and will take into account the views and ongoing safety of the individual and their children when deciding the most appropriate course of action. We recognise that not all people see themselves as victims and we'll make sure that these labels aren't associated with you.
- 3.4 We understand that decisions regarding domestic abuse are complex and often require careful thought and planning. We will give you the time you need to consider the options available to you and make decisions.
- 3.5 We are dedicated to ensuring that domestic abuse remains a priority. This involves undertaking a rolling programme of employee training, having clear procedures in place for staff to follow and consistently reviewing our practices to ensure we are meeting the needs of victims and survivors.
- 3.6 We respect customers' right to privacy and will act in line with our [Data Protection Policy](#) at all times. We'll never force anyone to share any information they don't want to. We will speak with you about safe ways we handle the information you give us to ensure that we don't pass on information to perpetrators or their representatives.

#### **4. Disclosing domestic abuse**

- 4.1 You can report domestic abuse to us through any contact you have with the council, for example, through our website, by telephone, by email, in person, in writing or through a third party such as internal and external agencies.
- 4.2 We'll make sure everyone is able to report domestic abuse to us, through providing interpreters and translating information into other languages or formats as needed.
- 4.3 If you report a case of domestic abuse, we'll respond within 24 hours and will liaise with you about the next steps.

#### **5. When you make a report of domestic abuse**

- 5.1 You are able to bring a friend, family member or specialist domestic abuse support worker, such as an Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA), to any appointment to support you.
- 5.2 We'll offer you the option of being interviewed by an employee of the gender you request.
- 5.3 We will offer you an interview with an employee who is trained to deal with reports of domestic abuse. We will also offer you the opportunity to be referred for specialist, independent support through a charity that runs our domestic abuse casework service, or will signpost other support services available to you if you would like a different form of support.

- 5.4 We'll agree the method of contact you wish us to use when communicating with you. This includes talking to us over the phone, through an online video call, at our offices or another safe venue.
- 5.5 We'll carry out a risk assessment using a Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour Based Violence and Risk Identification Checklist (DASH RIC), which is a UK-wide accredited form used by us and partner organisations to plan how we'll support the survivor and any children.
- 5.6 We understand you may not be able to provide the usual level of documentation for initial review. You will not be denied any assistance due to this. We will give you a reasonable period (7 days) to provide any information, and we will put you in touch with agencies to assist you.
- 5.7 Our staff will be clear that you do not need to have reported the incident to the Police in order to receive assistance from us.

## 6. Taking Action

- 6.1 We will treat any requests of housing assistance from individuals fleeing domestic abuse as a homelessness application. As of 5<sup>th</sup> July 2021, a person who is homeless as a result of being a victim of domestic abuse automatically has a [priority need](#). The Housing Service will have a duty to prevent or relieve your homelessness under the Homelessness Reduction Act and having looked at your circumstances will set in writing the reasonable steps needed to prevent or relieve your homelessness. The Housing Service may have a duty to relieve your homelessness by giving you emergency interim accommodation.
- 6.2 You are entitled to apply to any council in England. You will not be referred back to your local authority of residence if there is a risk of violence if you return.
- 6.3 We will consider all available housing options. This could include Sanctuary measures to stay safely at your current address, assistance to move into an alternative home in the private rented sector, temporary accommodation, refuge or a permanent transfer if you are a council tenant and there is no prospect of a safe return, in accordance with our **Allocations Policy**.
- 6.4 More information on the homelessness process and your rights can be found on the following page:  
[https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lqnl/housing/housing\\_options\\_service/Know-your-rights-about-homelessness.aspx](https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lqnl/housing/housing_options_service/Know-your-rights-about-homelessness.aspx).
- 6.5 Our approach is survivor-centred and we'll always take into account survivor views and ongoing safety when deciding the most appropriate course of action. We'll make sure the survivor is always aware of our response and that they agree any actions.
- 6.6 We'll provide relevant information and advice about alternative housing options (such as Refuge, Management Transfer, The Pan-London Housing Reciprocal, Private Rented Sector), additional security measures in the home

(such as those through the Sanctuary Scheme) and suitable support from specialist organisations.

- 6.7 We will provide information about specialist ‘by and for’ organisations who can provide tailored support to victims/survivors, such as those which focus their support on Black and Minority Ethnic communities or those that have direct service provision in multiple languages. These will be signposted either through the charity who manage our domestic abuse casework service, or directly by our frontline staff. We recognise that victims and survivors’ experiences of domestic abuse are in part defined by the intersecting needs and characteristics of the individual and that this may impact upon them seeking support.
- 6.8 We won’t pressure survivors to take legal action but will signpost to legal advice if it is something they wish to pursue. For example, survivors may wish to obtain legal advice about a molestation order, demotion of tenancy or possession proceedings.
- 6.9 We will signpost to organisations that may be able to assist you financially or with meeting your needs (such as the council’s Residents Support Scheme and services such as Bow/Bethnal Green Food Banks, Christ Church Isle of Dogs, FoodCycle, etc.).
- 6.10 A significant number of adults or children who experience domestic abuse will also require safeguarding. Our employees are trained to be aware of safeguarding and to make safeguarding referrals as needed to make sure people are protected.
- 6.11 Those who have No Recourse to Public Funds are not eligible for housing assistance. However, we will provide advice and offer the services of our Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) or other specialist domestic abuse support. They may be able to support you in applying for the Destitute Domestic Violence Concession, which supports those who have entered or stayed in the UK as a spouse, unmarried partner, same-sex or civil partner of a British Citizen, or settled citizen and this relationship has permanently broken down due to domestic violence and abuse.

## 7. Working in Partnership

- 7.1 We respect customers’ right to privacy and will act in line with our [Data Protection Policy](#) at all times. We will speak with you about safe ways we handle the information and why we may need to share this with our partners to ensure your safety.
- 7.2 We work in collaboration with relevant agencies when responding to incidents of domestic abuse to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable. We will maintain strong partnership working with local agencies and will ensure that where victims of DA are at high risk of serious harm or domestic homicide, their cases are referred to the MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference).
- 7.3 We’ll continue to be an active member of the Community Safety Partnership and use that to influence strategic decision-making regarding support services available in the communities where our customers live.



- 7.4 When working with other organisations, we may need to share some information about the case and the individual. We'll only share information with the survivor's permission, unless there is a risk to the safeguarding of children or a vulnerable adult and it is a duty of care.
- 7.5 In addition, agencies such as the police may request personal data about our clients as part of their own ongoing investigation. In these cases, we will assess the sharing of data on a case-by-case basis, in line with our [Data Protection Policy](#).
- 7.6 We'll refer survivors to our Resident Support Team or other relevant agency if they need any support relating to financial issues.
- 7.7 We'll signpost any perpetrators of domestic abuse who recognise and want to change their behaviour to appropriate agencies which can support them, such as Respect (*Tel: 0808 802 4040*), Culturally Integrated Family Approach (CIFA) or Positive Change Service.
- 7.8 Whilst we are dealing with the case and after it's been resolved, we'll work with other services and agencies to support families and witnesses to make sure they feel safe in their home and the community in which they live.
- 7.9 We keep an up-to-date list of a range of local and national agencies for perpetrators and survivors in our [VAWG Service Directory](#).

## **8. Awareness and Feedback**

- 8.1 We'll provide information on this policy to our service users, advising them on how they can obtain help if they need it and the response they will receive from us. We also actively take part in national and international domestic abuse awareness campaigns and events.
- 8.2 We undertake a rolling programme of employee training to ensure that domestic abuse is always at the forefront of the minds of our staff.
- 8.3 We value the views of our residents and always welcome any feedback about the service we provide. Any feedback you provide will be considered and used to improve the way in which we respond to domestic abuse.

## **9. Equalities Considerations**

- 9.1 We have completed an equality impact assessment for this to ensure that it is fair and does not present barriers to participation or disadvantage any protected groups.
- 9.2 We will make sure our services are accessible to our community. This includes providing translators and enabling residents to report domestic abuse to us through a number of methods.
- 9.3 We recognise that victims and survivors' experiences of domestic abuse are in part defined by the intersecting needs and characteristics of the individual. We will work to ensure that no discriminatory barriers exist within our services which may prevent certain individuals from receiving the support they require, and will always consider individual needs when deciding our approach.

- 9.4 We will train employees to understand how domestic abuse differently affects individuals and work in partnership with specialist providers to gain better experience and understanding in order to better support survivors' needs.

## **10. Policy approval and review**

- 10.1 This policy has been reviewed by Project Board members of the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance Project in Tower Hamlets Council.
- 10.2 This policy will be reviewed every two years, or amendments will be implemented sooner if required due to legislation changes or feedback from our customers.

## **11. Related legislation, policies and documents**

- 11.1 This policy supports the following legislation:
- Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
  - Domestic Abuse Act 2021
  - Domestic Abuse Crime and Victims Act 2004
  - Equality Act 2010
  - 'Clare's Law' 2012
  - The Housing Act 1996
  - Protection from Harassment Act 1997
  - Crime and Disorder Act 1998
  - Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014
  - Care Act 2014
  - Data Protection Act 2018
  - Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007
  - Civil Partnership Act 2004
  - Children Act (1989) (2004), Adoption and Children Act (2002)
- 11.2 This policy is linked to the following policies:
- Data Protection Policy
  - Tower Hamlets Allocations Scheme
  - Equality Policy
  - Persons in Positions of Trust Policy
  - Domestic Abuse Policy
- 11.3 This policy is linked to the procedure for responding to domestic abuse homelessness: a guide for housing options officers.