

Domestic Abuse Policy

Overall purpose of policy

Domestic abuse is a crime and will not be tolerated.

We aim to support people and their families who have suffered or are experiencing domestic abuse by providing an effective response to their needs through close working with partner agencies and ensuring that all reports are treated as high priority.

How the policy will be implemented

We will provide a safe environment to give person(s) at risk the confidence to report domestic abuse and help make informed decisions on steps that can be taken.

We will work in partnership with the Wakefield Domestic Abuse Service (DASS) and other agencies involved in supporting a person(s) at risk of domestic abuse and actions taken against perpetrators.

We will adopt a person centred and gender sensitive approach to ensure that those suffering domestic abuse receive a fair and consistent level of service.

We will ensure that training and awareness to front line colleagues is offered to help understand the emotional and physical suffering that people at risk experience.

Performance measures, targets and triggers

We will measure performance against:

- support offered to the person(s) at risk who live in our homes to reduce repeat offending of domestic abuse;
- completion of Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment (DASH) risk assessments where we receive first disclosure of domestic abuse;
- our participation at Wakefield MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) panels;
- number of colleagues receiving awareness and training on domestic abuse issues; and
- our support to the Wakefield Sanctuary Project and target hardening to improve home security for a person(s) at risk.

We will aim to meet the following targets:

- 100% attendance by us at Wakefield MARAC.
- All person(s) at risk reporting domestic abuse to us to be contacted within one working day. If this falls below 90%, a review of the policy will be triggered.
- 100% of colleagues who receive training to report that they are more knowledgeable and aware of domestic abuse issues. If this falls below 90%, a review of the policy will be triggered.
- 100% compliance of all referrals for improved home security as part of
- Wakefield Sanctuary Project. If this falls below 90%, a review of the policy will be triggered.

Date Approved by CMT: 2 April 2024

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Date Due for Review: 2 April 2027

Responsible Officer: Head of Community Safety and Landscapes

Domestic Abuse Policy

1 Statement of intent

- 1.1 We regard domestic abuse as totally unacceptable and firmly believe that no one should live in fear of violence or harassment from a spouse, partner, other member of their household or visitor, and will take positive steps to assist and support any person suffering from or threatened with domestic abuse.
- 1.2 We will take the strongest action possible against perpetrators of domestic abuse where we have the power to do so and will work closely with community safety partners providing support services to ensure support and assistance is offered to the person(s) at risk to reduce incidents of repeat offending.
- 1.3 We encourage our residents to report domestic abuse, whether that abuse is systematic and repeated or a single incident, and whether they are a person(s) at risk of, or witnesses to such incidents.
- 1.4 We understand that we may be a person's first and only contact regarding a domestic abuse issue. It is therefore essential that people who experience domestic abuse feel safe and supported in order that they can talk about their experiences.
- 1.5 We aim to increase awareness of the effects of domestic abuse amongst colleagues to ensure that colleagues who are in contact person(s) experiencing, or have experienced, domestic abuse and their families, are well informed of the pressures and levels of intimidation that they face.
- 1.6 We will also be an active member of the Wakefield MARAC for those who are experiencing domestic abuse and are deemed to be high risk. The MARAC will meet regularly to plan actions of support between different agencies to prevent repeat offending of domestic abuse in cases that are referred.

2 Outline of service

- 2.1 We accept the definition of domestic abuse as:

Behaviour of a person (A) towards another person (B) if A and B are each aged 16 or over, are personally connected to each other, and the behaviour is abusive.

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; and
- psychological, emotional, or other abuse.

Behaviour can also consist of a single incident or a course of conduct.

2.2 **Controlling behaviour** is a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and / or dependent by 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 and regulating their everyday behaviour.

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

2.3 Domestic abuse can also include incidents of forced marriage and ‘honour’ based violence. A forced marriage is where one or both people do not consent to a marriage and pressure, or abuse is used against them. The pressure put on people to marry against their will can lead to physical, emotional, or financial abuse especially when someone is made to feel they are bringing shame on their family.

2.4 Where forced marriage concerns are reported to us, we will respond swiftly and work closely with relevant agencies, such as the police, to ensure victims receive the appropriate sources of support.

2.5 Although domestic abuse is most commonly perpetrated by men, this policy is intended to cover all instances where parties are personally connected regardless of sexuality, gender or family relationship.

2.6 Our tenants and residents are subject to the conditions of their Tenancy Agreement, which in general terms means:

- they must not inflict or threaten domestic abuse (including physical, mental, sexual, emotional and financial abuse and coercive / controlling behaviour) against their partner or children, their partner’s children or any other person living in the home; and
- if a partner leaves home because of threatened or actual domestic abuse and does not intend to return, we have the right to apply to the Court for possession, without prejudice to any other remedy or ground for possession available to us.

2.7 We will accept an incident as ‘domestic abuse’ if anyone (for example, the person(s) at risk, a witness, or our officer) perceives the incident to be domestic abuse. In these circumstances a report of domestic abuse should be recorded and dealt with by us as such.

2.8 We will work to prevent domestic abuse and reduce the risk of homelessness where domestic abuse occurs, whilst ensuring the safety of the person(s) at risk and their family.

2.9 We will adopt a person(s) at risk centred approach in dealing with domestic abuse and will ensure that confidentiality is always maintained.

2.10 If we investigate any case of domestic abuse, to determine breach of tenancy conditions or offer advice and assistance to the person(s) at risk, then we will try to provide an officer of the same sex if this is requested.

- 2.11 Recognising that evidence of domestic abuse may not always be readily available, officers will, in the first instance accept the incident without formal evidence until further investigations prove otherwise. This does not mean that the alleged perpetrator is immediately assumed to be guilty of this offence.
- 2.12 Our colleagues can offer support to the person(s) at risk of domestic abuse either directly or through sharing case information with the Wakefield Domestic Abuse Support Service (DASS).
- 2.13 The DASS offer's support to those experiencing domestic abuse which includes:
- safety planning;
 - housing advice;
 - family support / advocacy;
 - civil and criminal remedies;
 - support through court proceedings;
 - emotional support;
 - advice on other services available
 - target hardening; and
 - work in partnership with police and other agencies to maximise safety of victims and families.
- 2.14 The Wakefield Sanctuary Project is a person(s) at risk centred initiative, which aims to make it possible for those at risk of domestic abuse to remain safely in their homes. This service is provided by the DASS who will use us as the approved contractor through the work of our Target Hardening and Technical Services teams.
- 2.15 The safety of the person(s) at risk and their family is of paramount importance. Where it is practicable for the person(s) at risk to remain in their home, every effort will be made to provide additional security and support in consultation with the Wakefield Sanctuary Project, provided by the DASS.
- 2.16 This may include:
- provision of security equipment, such as a safe letterbox and additional door and window security, to safeguard the person(s) at risk and their home; and
 - replacement of broken windows, rubbish removal or the carrying out of any other emergency repair to the home as a result of a domestic abuse incident without delay (generally within 24 hours).
- 2.17 Where urgent rehousing is necessary, we will liaise with Wakefield Council's Housing Needs Service in an attempt to provide temporary accommodation.

- 2.18 Where it is identified, either through MARAC or the DASS, that rehousing by us to a different area will have a positive effect in reducing the likelihood of repeat offending and improve the welfare of the family, then assistance will be offered to the person(s) at risk in line with our Choice Based Lettings Policy.
- 2.19 Where a survivor of domestic abuse has barriers to rehousing (including debts to Vico Homes) that would normally prevent rehousing, we will consider whether there are exceptional circumstances.
- 2.20 We will discuss and involve the person(s) at risk, and any person who is advocating on their behalf, in deciding the course of action taken in partnership and we will regularly communicate with them to ensure that they are kept well informed on progress made.
- 2.21 When dealing with perpetrators of domestic abuse, we will work closely with the police and other agencies to ensure that the full range of civil and criminal remedies are considered and pursued where appropriate.
- 2.22 Our Tenancy Support Team will also facilitate the flow of intelligence information from our colleagues through to the Police Safeguarding Unit where there are any concerns over the welfare of the person(s) at risk or the whereabouts of the perpetrator. This is in line with the Joint Protocol on Information Exchange between us and West Yorkshire Police.
- 2.23 Where a survivor contacts us about a rechargeable repair invoice they have received for property damage caused by their perpetrator of domestic abuse, we will consider removing the recharge in accordance with our Rechargeable Repairs Procedure and confirmation from either West Yorkshire Police or their advocate / support service.
- 2.24 The action taken against perpetrators will depend upon the individual circumstances. For us, this may include possession action against a perpetrator where other members of the household have left the home due to domestic abuse. Dependent upon the circumstances this would provide an opportunity for the person(s) at risk and their family to return to the home, or we may help to provide them with alternative accommodation.
- 2.25 We recognise the importance of ensuring that front line colleagues and especially those responsible for visiting residents in their own home are aware of the effects of emotional and physical suffering caused to the person(s) at risk and their families through domestic abuse. We will therefore arrange for colleague awareness sessions to be held where appropriate, facilitated by leading practitioners experienced in this area of work, either within Wakefield or elsewhere.
- 2.26 The overall purpose of such sessions will be to provide the opportunity for our colleagues to increase understanding of the person(s) at risk and families experiencing domestic abuse and the decisions that they make at that time whilst carrying out our housing management function.

- 2.27 We will offer continuing support to the person(s) at risk of domestic abuse even when they have been rehoused until they feel confident in their home and within the community, and if need be, call upon the expertise that is available from the DASS to assist our colleagues in their work.

3 Specific needs

We will take into account the specific needs of all colleagues, customers and other stakeholders which may arise in accordance with this Policy. These needs relate to taking account of all differences, whatever they maybe. We will particularly promote equality and inclusiveness, in accordance with our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, based on the nine Protected Characteristics. During the review and development of this policy an equality assessment has been completed to consider those with protected characteristic and mitigate any impact on them from delivery of this policy.

4 Consultation

Internal

- 4.1 The Domestic Abuse Policy has been circulated to all relevant managers for consultation and comment.

External

- 4.2 Consultation has been held with Wakefield Council's Domestic Abuse Team and Wakefield PETALS (Potential, being Empowered, Together Achieve and Learn and have Strength), a district wide support group for women who have survived domestic abuse.
- 4.3 The policy has been presented to the Customer Excellence Group (CEG) and Virtual Panel, for the comments of our customers to be considered.

5 Responsibility for implementation

- 5.1 Our Board and Chief Executive are responsible for ensuring that this policy is implemented.
- 5.2 Under the delegated authority contained within our Standing Orders it is the responsibility of all colleagues and those working on our behalf to ensure that their work is carried out in line with this policy and any related procedures.
- 5.3 We are committed to the highest standards of customer care and will apply this policy in line with the standards published in our Customer Charter Standards. If customers are dissatisfied with the service that they have received or with the application of this policy, they should refer to our Complaints Policy.

6 Monitoring

- 6.1 Where relevant information is available, we will benchmark our performance against other organisations to ensure the highest standards of service delivery.
- 6.2 Performance targets outlined in the policy will be monitored via the Safeguarding Working Group.

7 Review

- 7.1 We will undertake a review of this policy whenever there are any relevant changes to legislation, regulatory requirements, case law or good practice that would impact on this policy or in the light of any required service improvements identified through internal audits, service reviews, learning from complaints or regulatory judgements. Considerations will also be made where performance against the policy's measures and targets meet or are forecasted to hit the triggers identified.
- 7.2 We will regularly review service provision and will undertake reviews, when appropriate, to ensure continuous improvements and value for money in the delivery of our services.
- 7.3 Our Board and / or the Vico Executive Team will be responsible for ensuring that reviews of this policy are carried out and that the policy contributes to, and complements, our strategic objectives.
- 7.4 In carrying out any such review account will be taken of our commitment to diversity and inclusion. For further information, please refer to our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

8 Risk

- 8.1 The potential risks relating to this policy have been identified and are being managed in accordance with our Risk Management Policy.

Risk Reference – CE2

Failing to work in partnership to provide safe communities.

Risk Reference – CE3

Failing to have support arrangements in place to ensure tenancy sustainment.

9 Legislation and other documents

9.1 We will ensure that this policy complies with all relevant legislation and takes account of current best practice.

- Housing Act 1996.
- Family Law Act 1996.
- Civil Partnership Act 2004.
- Antisocial Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014.
- Serious Crime Act 2015.
- Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- The Equality Act 2010.
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Human Rights Act 1998.
- Regulator of Social Housing Regulatory Standards (Neighbourhood and Community).
- Antisocial Behaviour Policy.
- Antisocial Behaviour Procedure.
- Harassment Policy.
- General Data Protection Regulations 2016