

We're making a stand against

# DOMESTIC ABUSE



## Domestic abuse policy (council tenants and leaseholders) February 2024

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## Policy summary

We believe that nobody 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 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. 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 or in writing. If you're in an emergency, you should always call the police on 999.

We want to improve the safety of people affected by domestic abuse and we want to help prevent further abuse by encouraging earlier reporting and responding rapidly.

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

We take a zero-tolerance approach to domestic abuse and will hold perpetrators of abuse to account. Our approach is survivor-centred, and we will consider the views and ongoing safety of the individual when deciding the most appropriate course of action. If you have any queries about this policy or our approach to domestic abuse, you should contact the Service Improvement Officer, who oversees our response to domestic abuse, with support from other employees.

## Policy scope

This policy applies to all Southampton City Council tenants and leaseholders. We have a separate Employee Domestic Abuse Support Policy for employees experiencing domestic abuse.

Within the Domestic Abuse Act and this policy, domestic abuse is defined as:

- 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.

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

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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 the agreement is still in place)
- Have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether 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 victims if they see, hear, or experience the effects of the abuse or are related to the survivor or the perpetrator

If a tenant tells us about abuse in other circumstances, such as abuse by a carer we will consider this under our Safeguarding Policy.

## **Dealing with reports of domestic abuse**

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

You can report domestic abuse to us through any contact you have with us, for example, through by telephone, by email, in person or in writing. We will make sure anyone can report domestic abuse to us, providing interpreters and translating information into other languages or formats as needed.

If you report a case of domestic abuse, we will respond the same working day and will liaise with you about the next steps.

We employ staff who are specially trained to deal with reports of domestic abuse. Once you've reported domestic abuse, we will offer you an interview with a trained employee.

We will 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.

We will carry out a risk assessment using a Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour Based Violence Risk Identification Checklist, which is a UK wide accredited form used by us and partner organisations to plan how We will support the survivor and any children.

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## Action

We take a zero-tolerance approach to domestic abuse and will hold perpetrators of abuse to account. We will be clear that domestic abuse is never the fault of the survivor or their children

We will base our support on the survivor's individual needs. We recognise that not all people see themselves as victims and we will make sure that these labels aren't associated with you. We will always be sympathetic and supportive.

Our approach is victim centred and we will consider their views and ongoing safety when deciding the most appropriate course of action.

We will make sure the victim is always aware of our response and that they agree any actions. This may include a referral for specialist support or additional security in their home, based on a risk assessment of that person's circumstances.

We will use the full range of remedies as appropriate, considering the needs of each individual case. We will advise about possible courses of action, both to respond to the immediate situation and to deal with it longer term. We won't pressure victims to take legal action but will offer advice if it is something they wish to pursue. This may include helping the victim by getting legal advice about a non-molestation order, or possession proceedings.

We will provide relevant advice and help, including information about alternative housing, additional security measures in the home and suitable support from specialist organisations.

We recognise that housing is one of the main factors why victims don't leave abusive homes. If you fear for your immediate safety, we will help you consider your housing options. This could include temporary accommodation or a permanent transfer if there is no prospect of a safe return.

If you need to move home, we will work with you to identify areas that will minimise the risk of future abuse. We will also continue to act against the perpetrator with your consent where safe and appropriate.

A significant number of adults or children who experience domestic abuse will also require safeguarding. Employees are trained to be aware of this and to make safeguarding referrals as needed to make sure people are protected.

We will keep all cases involving domestic abuse under review until the victim is satisfied it's been resolved.

Whilst we are dealing with the case and after it's been resolved we will provide support for victims, their families, and witnesses to make sure they feel safe in their home and the community in which they live.

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## **Working in partnership**

We work in collaboration with relevant organisations when responding to domestic abuse. We will take account of each person's circumstances and the different courses of action that may be possible and appropriate.

We keep an up-to-date list of a range of local and national agencies which may be able to offer advice or support depending on victims' circumstances.

We will maintain strong partnership working with local agencies and will share information through the High-Risk Domestic Abuse process.

We will refer victims to our Welfare Rights & Money Advice Team or other relevant agency if they need any support relating to financial issues. We will also signpost organisations for legal advice as appropriate.

We will work in partnership with appropriate agencies to support or signpost perpetrators of domestic abuse who recognise and want to change their behaviour.

We respect tenants right to privacy and will act in line with our Data Protection Policy. We will never force anyone to share any information they don't want to with us. We will only share information with the victim's permission, unless there is a risk to the safeguarding of children, or a vulnerable adult and it is a duty of care.

## **Awareness of domestic abuse**

We will widely publicise information to raise awareness about domestic abuse, telling our residents how to get help if they need it and the type of response, they can expect from us.

We will provide information about the support we provide around domestic abuse when tenants move into their home.

We will also support national campaigns to increase awareness.

We will carry out a rolling programme of employee training to make sure domestic abuse is always at the forefront of our minds. Our employees are trained to spot signs of domestic abuse when working in homes or having conversations with victims. They are aware of how to act and report any concerns confidently and sensitively, such as through our Whistleblowing (Duty to Act) Policy.

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## **Feedback, consultation, approval, and review**

A group of Residents viewed and fed back on this policy.

This policy will be reviewed every three years. We will regularly review best practice, changes to legislation and feedback from our employees and customers, reviewing this policy as required more frequently to improve the way we work.

We value the views of our tenants and ask for feedback about the service we provide. We will do this in several different ways, including through working groups and informal conversations.

We will listen to feedback and use it to improve the way in which we work when dealing with domestic abuse.

## **Equalities considerations**

We will make sure our services are accessible and inclusive. This includes providing a variety of ways to report domestic abuse and arranging interpreters and translating information into other languages or formats as needed. This is to make sure that we do not create additional barriers and that everyone can access our service in the way they need.

We recognise that victims' experiences of domestic abuse may in part be defined by their background, for example, economic status, gender, sexual orientation, ability, age, religion, ethnic group, or immigration status.

We will recognise this intersectionality and understand that certain individuals may face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. We will consider the individual needs of each victim when tailoring our approach.

Although domestic abuse can affect anyone, certain people may be disproportionately affected or particularly vulnerable and some groups are affected by specific forms of domestic abuse. We also understand there are cultural and other barriers to reporting domestic abuse. We will take all of this into account in the support we provide.

We will train employees to understand how domestic abuse differently affects individuals and work in partnership with specialist providers to act and make sure victims get the right support.

We will partner with and support local organisations with all relevant experience and understanding to better support victims' needs.

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## Policy context

This policy supports [Southampton Domestic Abuse and Violence against Women and Girls Strategy 2023-2028](#)

This policy supports the following legislation:

- Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003
- Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014
- Care Act 2014
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- Equality Act 2010
- Housing Act 1996

This policy is linked to the following related Southampton City Council policies:

- Allocations Policy
- Antisocial Behaviour Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Domestic Abuse Policy
- [4LSAB Multi-Agency Safeguarding Adults Policy and Guidance](#)
- Whistleblowing (Duty to Act) Policy