

CUSTOMER DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY

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Revision number:	1
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1 TITLE

1.1 Customer Domestic Abuse Policy

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 As a housing provider, Stockport Homes Group (SHG) are a key stakeholder when it comes to identifying and responding to domestic abuse. This applies to tenants, as well as SHG's wider customer base.

2.2 This policy outlines:

- The definition of domestic abuse
- SHG's values and principles in respect of domestic abuse
- The statutory and strategic context
- The core policy statement
- Equalities considerations
- Ownership, monitoring, and review

2.3 This policy informs the related procedure, which outlines the approach that must be adopted when addressing domestic abuse issues. It should be read in conjunction with SHG's safeguarding policies and procedures.

2.4 SHG also has a separate policy for colleagues affected by DA.

3 DEFINITION OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

3.1 Domestic abuse is defined in the 2021 Domestic Abuse Act as being abusive behaviour between two people aged 16 or over where they are personally connected to each other.

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

- Physical or sexual abuse - rape, coerced sex, forcing a person experiencing domestic abuse to take part in unwanted sex acts, refusal to practice safe sex or use contraception, threatened or actual sexual abuse of children.
- Violent or threatening behaviour - hitting, punching, kicking, slapping, hitting with objects, pulling hair, pushing, or shoving, cutting, or stabbing, restraining, strangulation, choking, honour-based violence, refusal to administer prescriptive medication.

- Controlling or coercive behaviour - pattern of humiliation, intimidation or other behaviour that is used to harm, punish, or seek to assert control.
 - Economic abuse - controlling bank accounts or benefits, making a person experiencing domestic abuse account for all their spending, running up debts in a person's name.
 - Psychological, emotional, or other abuse - creating isolation, using threats, putting a person down, humiliating, undermining them, verbal abuse, forced marriages.
- 3.3 Abusive behaviour may also exist where a person is targeted through behaviour towards another individual, for example if directed at a person's child.
- 3.4 A person is considered personally connected if they:
- Are, or have been, married or civil partners of each other.
 - Have agreed to marry one another or enter a civil partnership (whether the agreement has been terminated).
 - Are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other.
 - Each have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child.

4. Values

- 4.1 When addressing domestic abuse, SHG has adopted the values of the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA):

Integrity

- Seeking to 'do the right thing' to increase the safety and housing security of victims/survivors and hold perpetrators to account.

Collaboration

- Work with other stakeholders, including people with lived experience of domestic abuse to develop and deliver services.
- Recognise the role and expertise of specialist services and those focussing on the needs of black and minoritized victims/survivors.
- Share information in a timely and proportionate manner where necessary.

Empathy

- Responding to domestic abuse in a person centred, trauma informed, non-judgemental manner; avoiding the need for people to repeat their circumstances as far as possible and offering a flexible, supportive, and welcoming service.

- Recognising the difficulties in disclosing domestic abuse and particular intersectional needs, taking a victim/survivor led approach.

Empowerment

- Listening to victims/survivors and working collaboratively to arrive at decisions that meet their wishes, needs and aspirations. Ensuring that people have the knowledge and support to decide what course of action is the right one for them and determine what type of service may be most appropriate.

Respect

- Aligned with SHG's organisational values, ensure people can express their needs and views in a non-judgemental and believing environment. Actions, decision making, and language used to demonstrate respect for individuals their needs and wishes.

Accountability

- Taking responsibility for agreed actions and acting in an open and transparent manner with customers and partner agencies. Learning from mistakes and reflection upon service delivery, including domestic homicide reviews and serious case reviews.
- Recognising that domestic abuse is 'everyone's business' whichever part of SHG someone works in.

5. Legislative Context

5.1 The 2021 Domestic Abuse Act introduced a range of new measures impacting upon how the issue is addressed in society. This included:

- A wider ranging definition of domestic abuse to include non-violent behaviours.
- Extended duties upon local authorities strategically and operationally.
- A strong housing focus, from homelessness support to greater security of tenure.
- A wider range of legal remedies for victims/survivors and options for addressing abusive behaviour.

5.2 This is supplemented by a statutory code of guidance, outlining the approach that should be adopted when implementing the Act's provisions.

5.3 In addition – the following legislation has direct relevance:

- 1996 Housing Act – outlines local authority duties towards homeless people and the requirements for location policies.
- Children Act 2004 – covers safeguarding obligations towards children and keeping them healthy and supported.
- Care Act 2014 – covers safeguarding for adults and ensuring relevant needs are met.

6. Strategic Context

- 6.1 The 2021-2024 Stockport Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy outlines a collaborative approach for all stakeholders in the Borough to support victims/survivors, address abusive behaviour and promote healthy relationships from an early age.
- 6.2 Its objectives include:
- Preventing domestic abuse happening, escalating and repeat victimisation.
 - Workforce development to ensure all services can offer appropriate support.
 - Protecting communities with coordinated service sand a restorative approach, with Strong links to the Safer Stockport Partnership.
 - Taking a joined-up approach to sharing of intelligence.
 - Ensure co-ordinated services are available for victims and perpetrators
 - Further educate children, young people, families, and communities that domestic abuse is unacceptable and to enable them to make informed choices for healthy relationships.
 - Provide behaviour change approaches that support victims and hold perpetrators/abusers accountable for their behaviour.
 - Ensure an effective response to domestic abuse for all individuals alike by raising awareness and understanding of the different experiences and barriers an individual may face if they are an older person, LGBTIQ, BAME (Black and Minority Ethnic), male, or an individual with a disability.
- 6.3 The Strategy recognises the gendered nature of domestic abuse, and how that sits within the wider context of Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG). While acknowledging that DA primarily consists of violence against women by men, the Strategy and SHG's approach is fully engaged with addressing abuse experienced by men.
- 6.4 Stockport's 2021-2024 homelessness strategy also addresses the issue of domestic abuse, with key actions to improve services to those affected.
- 6.5 SHG works sub-regionally with other housing providers, local authorities, and stakeholders. Its approach is aligned with the relevant domestic abuse and homelessness strategies at a Greater Manchester (GM) level and is signed up to the GM Housing Providers Group Domestic Abuse Standard.
- 6.6 Stockport Homes is additionally a signatory of the Make a Stand Pledge which has been developed by the Chartered Institute of Housing in partnership with Women's Aid and DAHA.

7. Related Policies and Procedures

- 7.1 Other related SHG policies and procedures include:
- Safer Communities Policy and Procedure
 - Hate Crimes Policy
 - Equality and Diversity Strategy and Action Plan
 - Allocations Policy
 - Relationship Breakdown Policy
 - Safeguarding Children and Adults at risk Policy and Procedure

8. POLICY STATEMENT

8.1 SHG has a key role to play in identifying, preventing, and responding to domestic abuse. Through collaborative work with partner agencies and victims/survivors of domestic abuse it will:

- Foster a culture towards DA that encompasses the values of integrity, collaboration, empathy, empowerment, respect, and accountability.
- Ensure that victims/survivors are given accurate advice and support to assist them in making informed decisions.
- Ensure all colleagues have the skills and confidence to identify and respond to domestic abuse, either directly or by raising appropriately with others.
- Promote local and national domestic abuse services, events, and campaigns.
- Take a single risk management approach to cases of domestic abuse to ensure a shared understanding of risk between staff and partners.
- Use the legislative framework to ensure the protection of victims/survivors of domestic abuse and avoid repeat victimisation.
- Provide a supportive housing options service geared towards the prevention and relief and homelessness.
- Facilitate the implementation of increased security measures including sanctuary schemes through the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) process.
- Follow any relevant child protection/safeguarding procedures where it is believed a child is at risk due to an abusive relationship.
- Provide a confidential service and only exchange information with other agencies with the persons written consent unless child protection or safeguarding issues are suspected (in line with the Safer Stockport Partnership information sharing protocol).
- Meet any accessibility needs of the victim/survivor.
- Ensure the intersectional needs of someone experiencing domestic abuse are met, accessing specialist services where needed.
- Collate details of instances of domestic abuse across SHG properties to ensure interventions can be effectively reviewed and performance managed.
- Work in partnership with other agencies, recognising our role in dealing with domestic abuse in a multi-agency context.
- Address perpetrating behaviours through appropriate support and/or use of legal remedies
- Ensure that staff are given appropriate training covering the impact of domestic abuse and SHG's repose.

9. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

9.1 An Equality Impact Assessment of this policy has been undertaken and no adverse impacts have been identified.

10. OWNERSHIP, MONITORING & REVIEW

10.1 The domestic abuse Policy is 'owned' by the skylight directorate, but there is responsibility in each Directorate for the implementation of the policy.

- 10.2 DA statistics will be monitored quarterly and reported to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), Safeguarding Board and relevant domestic abuse operational and strategic boards as required.
- 10.3 The policy will be reviewed in October 2026 or in the light of a meaningful change to the legal or policy framework.