

Domestic Abuse Policy

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Important notice:
Printed paper copies of this procedure are **uncontrolled**.
The current version of this procedure is available on the SHG Intranet site

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Contents

1.	Purpose -----	3
1.1	Exceptions -----	3
2.	Definitions -----	4
2.1	Domestic abuse -----	4
2.2	Sanctuary schemes -----	4
3.	Legislation, Regulatory and Good Practice Requirements -----	4
3.1	Relationship with other Strategies, Polices and Procedures -----	5
4.	Domestic abuse policy -----	6
4.1	Training -----	7
4.2	The Right to Appeal -----	8
4.3	Monitoring and Control -----	8
4.4	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion -----	8
4.5	Equality Impact Assessment -----	8
4.6	Responsible Officers -----	8

Status	Approved
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1. Purpose

This policy applies to Signpost Housing Association and Signpost Care Partnerships' (the Associations) properties and any accommodation directly managed by the Associations, and applies to incidents of domestic abuse caused by, or inflicted upon, any person residing in the associations' property or any person visiting the Associations' property.

This policy has been developed to ensure the Associations comply with current legislation, Tenant Services Authority Standards, Housing Corporation guidance and good practice and includes:

- ensuring staff are fully committed to effectively deal with, and prevent incidents of domestic abuse
- pro-actively managing incidents of domestic abuse by working in partnership with other agencies and the wider community
- supporting, and contributing towards, Crime Reduction Partnerships and local authority statutory homelessness duties
- working with relevant agencies with the aim of achieving tenancy sustainability and taking a victim centered approach
- ensuring that when a member of staff becomes aware of a significant issue which could be considered to be criminal then this issue will be referred to the Police.

The Associations strive to achieve the Spectrum Group mission:

'To be recognised and respected for providing quality homes and services. Empowering people, supporting active communities and building better futures'.

This policy supports the Associations' overarching plans and strategies to deliver quality services and ensure accessibility to these services for all the association's customers.

1.1 Exceptions

Incidents of domestic abuse directly involving the Associations' staff will be dealt with under the Group Health & Safety Policy.

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2. Definitions

2.1 Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is defined by the Home Office report 'Domestic Violence – A National report, 2005) as:

'Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate with partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality.'

Family members are defined as father, mother, stepfather, stepmother, son, daughter, stepdaughter, stepson, grandmother, grandson or granddaughter, brother, sister, uncle, aunt, niece or nephew (whether of full blood, half blood or affinity) of that person's spouse or former spouse. This also includes cohabitants, who if they were married to each other, would fall into one of these categories.

This definition is also intended to include forms of so called 'honour violence'. While there is no such thing as honour-based violence sometimes the notion of honour is invoked to justify violence. This is based in unequal and unjust gender relations where women are denied the right to exercise choice and control over their own lives. It includes forced and early marriage, dowry-related incidents and female genital mutilation.

It is accepted that while the majority of domestic abuse incidents are against women, men may also experience domestic abuse.

2.2 Sanctuary schemes

Sanctuary Schemes exist to help victims of domestic abuse to feel safe and secure when they choose to remain in their own homes. These schemes improve the security to the property with professionally installed security measures. These schemes are not an immediate response to the problem, but are a long-term solution to prevent homelessness and improve a victim's quality of life.

3. Legislation, Regulatory and Good Practice Requirements

This policy complies with and aims to support:

- Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003

Status	Approved
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- Data Protection Act 1998
- Chartered Institute of Housing, Good Practice Brief : Equality, Diversity and Good Relations in Housing (April 09)
- Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homeless Act 2002)
- Housing and Regeneration Bill 2008
- Housing Corporation Good Practice Note 8 Equality & Diversity
- Housing Corporation Guidance ‘Behind Closed Doors’
- Housing Corporation Regulatory Code and Guidance 2005
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Key Lines of Enquiry Diversity and Tenancy and estate management
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Supporting People Quality Assessment Framework.

3.1 Relationship with other Strategies, Polices and Procedures

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following Spectrum Housing Group(SHG), Signpost Housing Association (SHA) and Signpost Care Partnerships (SCP)policies and procedures:

- Adult Protection from Abuse Policy (SHA/SCP)
- Anti-social Behaviour Policy and Procedure (SHA/SCP)
- Appeals Procedure (SHA/SCP)
- Allocation and Lettings Policy (SHA/SCP)
- Safeguarding and Protection from Abuse, Vulnerable Adults and Children, Policy (SHA/SCP)
- Community Involvement Strategy (SHA/SCP)
- Confidentiality, Privacy and Data Protection Policy (SHG)
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy (SHG)
- Financial Inclusion Strategy (SHA/SCP)
- Homelessness Policy (SHA/SCP)

Status	Approved
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4. Domestic abuse policy

The Associations are committed to taking a pro-active approach in managing and reducing incidents of domestic abuse including:

- nominating a domestic abuse champion and ensuring staff are appropriately trained to deal with domestic abuse
- ensuring staff are fully aware of the need to maintain the highest standards of confidentiality in order to ensure the safety and well being of both victims and staff
- being part of appropriate information sharing and domestic abuse protocols and service level agreements
- not disclosing information to other agencies without the prior consent of the victim. The exception to this will be where a person (including children) is considered to be at risk, or if there is a risk of serious harm to anyone involved in the situation, or when required to do so by law or by an order of a court
- ensuring new residents are fully aware of their tenancy or occupancy obligations and the Associations' commitment to dealing with domestic abuse before they move into their new home
- undertaking comprehensive risk and support planning prior to, and where appropriate, during the tenancy, to identify risk, provide support, and achieve tenancy sustainability
- ensuring support needs and/or the need for protection is identified and is accessed by working in partnership with other specialist agencies, and that where appropriate this is on-going
- by taking a victim centered approach and by working with specialist organisations to ensure appropriate support is available
- recognising that a child experiencing domestic abuse is a child in special circumstances and may be a child in need of protection
- being sensitive to the diverse needs of victims and children irrespective of gender, race, religion, age, disability, or sexual orientation
- providing advice and assistance and a supportive environment, which encourages people to report domestic abuse to the police and other relevant agencies
- taking a multi-agency approach in holding perpetrators accountable for their actions and ensuring that the full range of civil and criminal remedies can be pursued

Status	Approved
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- using publicity in the residents newsletter ‘Your Voice’ and other appropriate methods such as newspaper articles, to raise awareness of domestic abuse and to provide information about available support and specialist agencies such as the National Domestic Violence helpline and Womens Aid
- taking a pro-active role to support sanctuary schemes by making budget provision to provide, where appropriate, additional security such as additional locks, to the Associations’ properties
- supporting, in liaison with the appropriate local authority, a transfer where a move to alternative accommodation is appropriate due to the seriousness of the situation
- monitoring all reports of domestic abuse to ensure any trends are identified and corrective action can be taken
- responding to reports of domestic abuse in accordance with agreed service standards and monitoring satisfaction with the process.

4.1 Training

The Associations will ensure staff have ongoing training with regard to the range of remedies and services that are available and how to use them, as well as, an understanding of the cost and the limitations of invoking those remedies. It is the aim that all relevant staff will be trained to take the most appropriate and effective action in all circumstances. The training will include:

- where appropriate, detailed training of the current domestic abuse policy and related procedures is undertaken as part of the planned induction programme for new staff
- training staff who may initially receive reports of potential domestic abuse to understand the requirements of the domestic abuse policy and procedure
- ensuring best practice, new legislation and case law is disseminated to relevant staff and is communicated effectively by either service area team meetings, Operational Management Team briefings, legal briefings or the internal intranet
- identifying on-going training needs and arranging appropriate training, as required, for staff, residents and Board members.

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4.2 The Right to Appeal

Any appeal against the decision to take action, or otherwise, against a perpetrator of domestic abuse will be dealt with in accordance with the Associations' Appeals procedure.

4.3 Monitoring and Control

Incidents of domestic abuse will be monitored and reported to the Associations' Boards as part of the Performance Information pack.

A review of actions taken and their effectiveness will be linked to the annual review of the Anti-social Behaviour Strategy and the Homelessness Action Plan.

4.4 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

This policy has been developed to ensure the Associations provide equality of access and service delivery and includes:

- ensuring that no customer is disadvantaged irrespective of their race, gender (including gender reassignment), religion or belief, colour, ethnic or national origin, sexual orientation, marital status, age, disability, or social position in accordance with Spectrum Housing Group Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- ensuring specific communication or support requirements and equal access to the service is available
- identifying and addressing any inequality of access to the service
- recording and monitoring incidents of domestic abuse and actions taken to ensure no individual or group is excluded.

4.5 Equality Impact Assessment

This policy has had an equality impact assessment that has concluded that this policy does not discriminate either directly or indirectly and does not disadvantage any individual or group.

4.6 Responsible Officers

The Divisional Director Housing Services, Signpost Housing Association, and the Divisional Director Support Services, Signpost Care Partnerships will be responsible for monitoring and implementing this policy.

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