

Domestic Abuse and VAWG

Housing Management Policy 16

Keniston

1. Introduction

This policy outlines our approach to dealing with Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). This policy details the principles for providing assistance and taking action in cases of domestic abuse or VAWG. This policy aims to ensure that those who have experienced domestic abuse are supported in a sympathetic and sensitive way, in accordance with their needs. It aims to ensure all staff act in a non-judgemental way.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following policies where applicable:

- Safeguarding Adults Policy
- Safeguarding Children Policy
- Antisocial Behaviour Policy
- Lone Working procedure
- Data Protection Policy
- Tenancy Policy
- Selection & Allocation Policy
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

2. Scope

This policy applies to all Keniston residents and household members, including leaseholders.

Some adults who are experiencing domestic abuse or VAWG may also require safeguarding, for example where there are additional vulnerabilities such as a disability. In such cases, a referral will be made to Adult Services. Children living in a household with domestic abuse will always require safeguarding and will be referred to Children's Services in all cases. Our approach to safeguarding aims to prevent and reduce the risk of harm to adults and children who are experiencing, or are at risk from, abuse or neglect.

Where staff are experiencing domestic abuse or VAWG, please refer to our Staff Handbook.

3. Key terms and definitions

Domestic abuse is any single incident, course of conduct or pattern of abusive behaviour between individuals aged 16 or over who are "personally connected" to each other as a result of being, or having been, intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality.

Children who see, hear or experience the effects of the abuse and are related to either of the parties are also considered victims of domestic abuse.

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
- Psychological, emotional or other abuse

This includes incidences where the abusive party directs their behaviour at another person (e.g. a child).

Economic abuse means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on someone's ability to acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or obtain goods or services.

The term Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) refers to the following range of serious crime types which are predominantly, but not exclusively, experienced by women and girls:

- Domestic Violence and Abuse;
- Sexual Offences;
- Stalking;
- Female Genital Mutilation (FGM);
- Crimes Said to be Committed in the Name of 'Honour';
- Forced Marriage;
- Sex work and
- Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation.

Where a resident is assessed to be at high risk of serious harm or homicide, we will refer their case to the local Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC). MARAC is a non-statutory, multi-agency meeting where information is shared and coordinated action plans created.

4. Our approach

Keniston will ensure residents are able to report domestic abuse or VAWG to us through a variety of methods, and we will investigate all reports that we receive. We will respond to reports within one working day.

We will ensure that our staff receive specialist training at the appropriate level on domestic abuse.

While women and girls are disproportionately affected by all forms of VAWG, and some are gender specific such as FGM, we will support those individuals experiencing VAWG or domestic abuse irrespective of age, sex, gender, sexuality, disability, ethnicity, religion, social background or any other protected characteristics identified in the Equality Act.

We will work with our partners to support individuals experiencing domestic abuse or VAWG and, where appropriate, take action against perpetrators where we can do so without compromising the safety of the individual experiencing abuse.

We take a person-centred approach when working with individuals, family members and representatives, to support and assess their circumstances and recognise the confidentiality of all the individuals concerned. However, the safety of the individual is paramount.

Where an incident or offence is witnessed by our staff, they will immediately call the police. Where high risk of serious harm or homicide is identified, we will share relevant and proportionate information with statutory and non-statutory services to minimise that risk.

At our first point of contact, we will aim to carry out a risk assessment using the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour Based Violence (DASH) Risk Identification Checklist and will co-create an action plan to provide support for the person experiencing domestic abuse or VAWG, their children and anyone else deemed to be at risk.

We will share information with other agencies in accordance with the Data Protection Act and UK-GDPR. This may mean sharing relevant and proportionate information without the resident's consent, where appropriate.

Where necessary, we will arrange, or attend, multi-agency meetings to ensure support is offered by all relevant agencies.

Some people may find it easier to disclose their experiences to someone with whom they identify, for example someone of the same sex. We will always try to accommodate such requests.

People experiencing abuse will be able to meet staff in confidence at our offices or at an agreed choice of safe venue. At the first point of contact, we will also agree the safe method and time of contact the individual wishes us to use.

In the case of joint tenancies, it should be noted that the perpetrator has the right of access to the tenancy file. We will not share any information relating to domestic abuse with the perpetrator. This is not seen by the perpetrator, or anyone representing the perpetrator.

We will provide improved security to a resident's home in conjunction with external agencies, such as the Sanctuary Scheme, where required.

Our Rent Income Officer will provide any support relating to financial issues and refer to other debt agencies as required. We will refer people experiencing domestic abuse or VAWG to external agencies who can offer further advice and support dependent upon their needs, using specialist 'by and for' services where appropriate.

5. Response to perpetrators

Domestic abuse is a breach of tenancy and we will:

- Support the police and local authority in prosecuting perpetrators by providing evidence. We'll only do this if we have permission from the victim, unless the law makes us do so.
- Charge them for any damage they've caused to the home.
- Refer to perpetrator intervention programmes or other support where available and if appropriate.

- Share information in line with data protection legislation.

We will take action (where evidence is available and the law permits) against anyone responsible for domestic abuse or VAWG. This will only be done in cases where we can do so without compromising the safety of the individual, and we will work closely with partner agencies and keep them informed of any action taken.

We will report incidents to the police on behalf of individuals or support them in doing so (with their permission), where they feel too intimidated to report incidents themselves.

Where emergency temporary accommodation is needed, we will support the person experiencing abuse to approach the Homeless Person's Unit of their choice. This can also involve referral to refuges via the National Domestic Violence Helpline.

5. Legislation and Regulation

- Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004
- Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- Domestic Abuse Act 2021 statutory guidance
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- The Family Law Act 1996
- Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003
- Human Rights Act 1998
- The Housing Act 1996
- The Equality Act 2010
- Sexual Offences Act 2003
- The Data Protection Act 1998 and General Data Protection Regulation
- Homelessness Act 2002
- Crime & Security Act 2010
- Serious Crime Act 2015
- Stalking & Harassment (protection of) Freedom Act 2012
- Regulator of Social Housing – Neighbourhood & Community and Tenancy Standards

6. Responsibilities

The Operations Director has overall responsibility for delivery and compliance with the policy.

7. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Everyone at Keniston, our external partners and customers are required to:

- Treat people fairly, give equal access to jobs, homes, services and contracts without discrimination, harassment, bullying and prejudice, and meet diverse needs through reasonable adjustments whenever possible and appropriate.

- Not discriminate against any individuals or groups, not tolerate attitudes and behaviours that amount to or could result in discrimination and swiftly handle any reports of victimisation, bullying or harassment.
- Acknowledge and value the differences by recognising people's individual circumstances, unique aspirations and needs and responding appropriately.
- Comply with relevant legislation, statutory codes and guidance designed to promote equality of opportunity and eliminate discrimination, such as the Equality Act 2010, Housing and other Regulatory Standards, and the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code.

This policy was agreed by the Board on 23 January 2025.

Next review date: January 2028.