

Domestic Abuse and VAWG Policy

DOMESTIC ABUSE AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS (VAWG) POLICY	
Purpose	To ensure an effective response to reports of domestic abuse and violence against women and girls.
Applies to	All employees and contractors
Date first implemented	January 2025
Author	Housing Manager
Date first approved by Leadership Team	December 2024
Date first approved by Board of Trustees	December 2024
Review Frequency	Next review December 2025 then Three yearly (or earlier in event of serious case review)
Service Area	Housing Management
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CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS (made prior to full policy revision)		
Amendment Date	Nature of Amendment	Revised by
February 2025	Definitions added and text reordered to improve flow.	Chief Executive and Lead Trustee.

VERSION HISTORY			
Revision Date	Version No.	Revised by	Approved by

CURRENT POLICY REVISION	
Date revised	November 2024
Revised by	Housing Manager
LT approval date	December 2024
Board of Trustees Approval date	December 2024
Next revision due	December 2025

1. Policy Statement

- 1.1 Domestic abuse is a serious crime that often takes place in the home. It affects the safety of individuals, households, and communities.
- 1.2 The definitions of Domestic Abuse and Abusive Behaviour that we use are set out in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 as follows:
- 1.3 Abusive behaviour is defined by the Act as any of the following:
- Physical or sexual abuse
 - Violent or threatening behaviour
 - Controlling or coercive behaviour
 - Economic/financial abuse
 - Psychological, emotional or other abuse

- 1.4 Abusive behaviour is considered to be Domestic Abuse if both parties are over 16 and 'personally connected'. This means people who:
- are married to each other or in a civil partnership
 - have previously been married or entered into a civil partnership with one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated)
 - are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other
 - have, or have had, a family relationship with each other
 - have a child (whether they share parental responsibility or not)
 - are relatives

This is not limited to partner-to-partner violence, but includes violence between any extended family members, including child to parent violence (and vice versa).

- 1.5 It is important to note that Domestic Abuse can also include, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse and exploitation:
- Stalking and harrassment
 - Honour-based violence
 - Forced marriage
 - Female genital mutilation
 - Technological abuse

Although Domestic Abuse can vary in terms of severity and frequency, just one incident counts as abuse.

- 1.6 The United Nations Definition of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of

such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”.

- 1.7 Men and boys, and those who identify as non-binary or gender fluid, may also be victims of gender-based violence. However, it is acknowledged that women and girls are disproportionately affected by all forms of Domestic Abuse, and some forms of abuse such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) are gender specific.
- 1.8 Any child who sees, hears, or experiences the effects of Domestic Abuse and is related to the person being abused or the perpetrator, is also to be regarded as a victim of domestic abuse. This may apply to visitors and family members of our residents if they witness abuse whilst visiting our property.
- 1.9 The aim of this policy is to support and improve the safety of our residents affected by Domestic Abuse and VAWG by encouraging earlier reporting, responding rapidly and ensuring this policy is accessible on our website, as well as widely publicised by other channels to our residents.
- 1.10 We will deal with all reports of Domestic Abuse or VAWG as a high priority. We will focus on reducing harmful behaviour, and protecting the reporter, and anyone directly affected, as quickly as possible.

2. Policy Principles

- 2.1 We will work actively with other agencies to ensure the safety of survivors and meet their needs. This includes making referrals to and attending the local authority Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) which is a regular local meeting to discuss how to help people at high risk of murder or serious harm. It includes a Domestic Abuse specialist (Independent Domestic Violence Advisor – IDVA) and is attended by police, social services, health services and other relevant agencies.
- 2.2 In cases where staff members are experiencing Domestic Abuse we will refer to the same agencies as well as signpost the employee assistance service we provide to staff. More information can be found on SafeHR, our HR system.
- 2.3 Where appropriate we will seek disclosure about a resident/potential resident under the [Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme](#) (Clare’s Law). This has 2 functions:
 - Right to ask – enabling someone to ask the police about a partner’s previous history of domestic violence or violent acts.
 - Right to know – allowing the police to proactively disclose information in prescribed circumstances.

3. Implementation

- 3.1 All staff will be made aware of this policy through Harrison Housing's internal communication channels, including email.
- 3.2 Changes to this policy and its associated procedure, if applicable, will be communicated to all staff.
- 3.3 All staff will be required to read this policy, and to confirm that they have read and understood it.
- 3.4 This policy will be published to residents through our website.

4. Other Legislation and Policies

- 4.1 This policy should be used in conjunction with the following legislation and policies:
 - Domestic Abuse Act 2021
 - Protection from Harassment Act 1997
 - The Family Law Act 1996
 - ASB, Crime & Policing Act 2014
 - Human Rights Act 1998
 - The Data Protection Act 2018
 - The Housing Act 1996
 - The Equality Act 2010
 - Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
 - Data Protection & Confidentiality Policy
 - Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Policy

5. Responsibility

- 5.1 We will ensure that the whole organisation receives mandatory specialist training on Domestic Abuse at the appropriate level, within 12 months of the adoption of this policy.
- 5.2 The training provided will include guidance on how to recognise signs of Domestic Abuse and how to report concerns.
- 5.3 The Housing Manager will ensure that clear procedures are in place to manage reports of Domestic Abuse and VAWG.
- 5.4 The Asset Manager will ensure that contractors are aware of Domestic Abuse/VAWG and how to report their concerns.
- 5.5 All Harrison Housing employees are responsible for adhering to this policy.

- 5.6 All Harrison Housing employees and contractors must report any patterns they identify in the reporting or repairs that could be indicators of Domestic Abuse/VAWG e.g., damaged internal doors or windows broken from inside.
- 5.7 All employees are responsible for feeding back any improvements which could be made to this policy and associated procedures, or problems they have experienced when trying to implement it.

6. Our Victim-Centred Approach

- 6.1 We use the term “victim” to refer to someone who is experiencing or has experienced Domestic Abuse. If the person reporting an incident feels that they are experiencing Domestic Abuse, we will deal with it as such. We understand that the term “victim” may be viewed as disempowering but in this context is used to emphasise that our approach starts from the perspective of the person who is making the report to us.
- 6.2 We will deal with reports in a sympathetic, sensitive and non-judgemental manner, recognising that not every victim will want to end their relationship with the perpetrator.
- 6.3 We will ensure that residents are able to report Domestic Abuse or VAWG to us through a variety of channels, and will investigate all reports we receive. We will respond initially within 2 working days, and where there is immediate danger advise the victim to contact the police.
- 6.4 We do not however require the victim to take legal action or contact the police before we provide assistance. Any action we take will be with the victim’s consent unless there is a risk of serious harm to the victim or others. We also have an obligation to report safeguarding concerns, and this can in some circumstances be done without the resident’s consent.
- 6.5 We will provide the victim with the opportunity to speak with a staff member of a specific gender and will where needed support the victim to make a report with the assistance of an interpreter.
- 6.6 We will provide an office space where we can meet with a victim in confidence, or at an agreed safe venue. We will agree a safe method of contact with the victim.
- 6.7 We will agree an action plan with the victim and maintain regular contact via the agreed method of contact. Our victim centred approach also means that we will not interview alleged perpetrators to get their version of events, as we would with other types of ASB.

- 6.8 We will aim to support the victim to access support with benefits, and other relevant services. We will signpost access to legal advice where appropriate.
- 6.9 We will offer practical measures to improve home security, working with partner agencies, so that the victim can stay in their home if that is their preference. We do not usually charge the victim for damage to the property caused by the perpetrator.
- 6.10 Harrison Housing does not have emergency accommodation and manages a small number of properties (including almshouses managed for other charities). We will assist victims to liaise with the local authority and refuge services to seek emergency accommodation. If permanent re-housing is required, we will liaise with the relevant local authority, and will consider a transfer under our Transfer Policy where a suitable property becomes available.

7. Information Sharing and Confidentiality

- 7.1 We will complete a risk assessment using the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour Based Violence (DASH) Risk Assessment Checklist and safety plan with the victim. This is to provide support for the person experiencing Domestic Abuse or VAWG, unless the victim confirms which agency has already completed this. If another agency has completed the assessment, we will ask the victim's consent to contact the agency to request details.
- 7.2 Where the DASH risk assessment score meets the local authority threshold for a MARAC referral we will share this information between agencies, where in our judgement a referral is required. For cases which meet the MARAC threshold, or if we have safeguarding concerns, we have a legal duty to share information with the relevant agencies.
- 7.3 We will seek the victim's consent to participate in multi-agency meetings to ensure support is received from all relevant agencies where the DASH risk assessment score does not meet the local authority threshold for a MARAC referral.
- 7.4 In the case of joint licences, the alleged perpetrator has a right of access to the property file. When a Subject Access Request (SAR) is received, before any information is disclosed to an alleged perpetrator, any necessary redactions will be made in line with our data protection policy.

8. Our Response to Perpetrators

- 8.1 We will take firm action (where sufficient evidence is available) 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 to keep them informed of any action taken.

- 8.2 If a perpetrator acknowledges their behaviour, wants to change and consents to a referral being made, we will signpost them to agencies which can offer them support.

9. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

- 9.1 For Harrison Housing, diversity is about respecting people's individual differences and ensuring that all people that come into contact with us have access to the same high standards of behaviour and service.
- 9.2 We are committed to ensuring that no resident or staff member will be treated less favourably because of any Protected Characteristic.
- 9.3 We will provide translation services where necessary and not rely on family members/friends to translate.