

Domestic Violence and Abuse

Housing Management Policy 16

Keniston

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to explain our approach to individuals experiencing domestic violence and abuse. It includes what we will do when domestic violence and abuse is reported to us and what we can do to help protect someone. By responding effectively, we aim to keep people and communities safe. The purpose of this policy is also to improve staff confidence to deal with people affected by domestic violence or abuse.

2. Who this policy applies to

This policy applies to all Keniston residents and their household members. Keniston recognises that domestic violence and abuse can happen to anyone and we also recognise that it affects both male and female victims.

3. Policy statement

Everyone has the right to live free from domestic violence and abuse. We take all reports seriously and work with other organisations to support victims and their families. Keniston is committed to providing a sensitive and confidential response to anyone approaching us for assistance. This can be anyone who is suffering or threatened with domestic violence and abuse. Housing staff are ideally placed to help identify and prevent domestic violence and abuse in our properties.

4. Legal and regulatory requirements

Housing Act 1996

Homelessness Act 2002

Family Law Act 1996

Crime and security Act 2010

Homes and Communities Agency (Neighbourhood and Community standard)

5. Introduction

Domestic violence and abuse has a significant impact on individuals, families and communities. It covers a range of abusive behaviour and includes any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse that takes place within an intimate or family type relationship and forms a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour. However, they do not need to be partners and they need not live in the same property.

There are many kinds of domestic violence and includes physical assault, wounding, sexual assault, threats to kill and harassment. These are all criminal offences. Domestic abuse isn't always violent and can include verbal abuse and disrespect, emotional abuse, financial control and isolation from family and friends.

6. Definitions

The Government definition of Domestic abuse is:

'any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:

- Psychological

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- Physical
- Sexual
- Financial
- Emotional

Controlling behaviour is a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.

7. How we will deal with reports of domestic violence and abuse

- We will give immediate practical advice on the options available, first considering whether the person needs immediate protection for themselves, children or their property.
- We will not encourage the person to leave home, as this increases their risk and is a difficult decision to make. Our role is to provide the person with the necessary support and information and not to make decisions for them.
- We will reassure the person of our policy on confidentiality, and that we will handle it sensitively and in a non-judgemental way.
- We will always put the safety of the person and any children first when giving advice.
- We will ask if the person has left home, even if temporarily and whether they intend to return. We will try to ensure that they have somewhere safe to stay that night.
- We will confirm with the person how they want to be contacted.
- We will encourage the person to report any incidents to the police if they haven't done so already. We will if asked to, and with their permission, report it for them. We will accept reports of domestic violence and abuse by any method such as by phone, letter, email, office visit or a home visit if requested or at any other safe venue.
- We will always put the feelings of the person first and we'll be guided by them, as to when and how to make contact.
- We will help protect the person by making the home more safe and secure, helping them to access refuge accommodation if they want to or help with a transfer to another Keniston property in another area. Tenants experiencing domestic violence and abuse will be given high priority.
- We will signpost to legal services that can help with injunctions such as a non-molestation order or an occupation order.
- We may not charge the person to repair damage to their home, if it has been caused by a domestic incident.
- If the person chooses to stay in their home we'll provide added security by working with Local authority Sanctuary schemes. We may install security lights, additional locks and chains and fire proofed letter boxes.
- If it is safer to leave the home and go to a refuge, we will offer to contact Women's Aid to find available refuge space.
- If the person has to end a joint tenancy then we will not grant another tenancy to the perpetrator.

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- We will carry out a risk assessment to identify whether the person meets the threshold for a referral to the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) which is a panel consisting of relevant partners including housing who share information.
 - We will work with our partner agencies to prioritise the person and their children's safety.
 - We will encourage the person to take part in support programmes to encourage self-empowerment and prevent repeat victimisation.
 - We will refer to the Income Officer for welfare benefit advice and support around financial issues.

8. Prevention and Awareness

We will promote the policy to raise awareness that Keniston will deal with reports of domestic violence and abuse. We will promote the policy through our website, local information leaflets, notice boards, tenants meetings and social media campaigns. We will also publicise the policy and its accompanying procedure to all staff. We will record and monitor all incidents reported to us.

9. Training

Staff will be kept up to date on best practice for dealing with domestic violence and abuse. There will be one lead officer who attends a local domestic abuse forum and acts as advisor to other staff. Staff will receive support from their managers.

10. Consultation

The relevant staff have been consulted on this policy and so has our resident panel. The draft was also publicised on our website and social media.

11. Equality and Diversity

This policy applies to all our tenants. It is acknowledged that certain groups may have difficulty accessing information and support. We will aim to identify them and ensure they are addressed. It is generally acknowledged that the majority of people experiencing domestic violence and abuse are women. Many services are focussed on providing support for women. However, men can need additional support too and will be signposted to appropriate agencies. Support will be provided regardless of sexual orientation.

12. Agreed by the Board on 14/05/2015. Next review May 2016