

# Domestic Abuse Policy

## 1 Purpose

“Domestic Abuse is one of the big challenges in our society, affecting 1 in 4 adults and their children. Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing supports those who experience Domestic Abuse because we recognise that as a Housing and Support Provider, we are uniquely placed to make a difference. We want survivors of abuse to be able to live safely in their homes or to move, without detriment, to break the cycle of abuse and live their best lives.

As an employer we also recognise we have a part to play in ensuring our colleagues who experience domestic abuse are offered work-related support at the point of need”

- **Geeta Nanda CEO, Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing**

This policy sets out our approach to domestic abuse and the measures in place to reduce the risks presented by domestic abuse to our customers, their children and our colleagues. We recognise that domestic abuse occurs in all areas of our communities, irrespective of background, gender, class, culture, sexuality, age and faith. As a major housing and support provider, as well as employer, we have a significant part to play in ending the cycle of domestic abuse in our communities and in supporting customers and colleagues to restore choice and control to their lives.

## 2 Scope

This policy sets out our approach to:

- Working with and supporting customers who are living with or are survivors of domestic abuse
- Supporting colleagues who are living with or are survivors of domestic abuse
- Working with customers and colleagues who are perpetrators of domestic abuse
- Managing concerns from customers and colleagues who may be the perpetrator of domestic abuse

The policy and accompanying procedures apply to:

- Customers who live in accommodation owned or managed by us
- Customers we deliver community-based services to or that we may encounter in our work
- All persons delivering a service on behalf of MTVH, including colleagues, consultants, contractors and suppliers
- All stakeholders/partners commissioned by us
- All colleagues affected by domestic abuse, including agency workers, bank workers, students, peer mentors and volunteers

## 3 Our Commitment

MTVH will create an open and supportive environment where we will:

- Listen to and acknowledge survivors of domestic abuse
- Support survivors to break the cycle of abuse



- Support our customers to live safely in their homes, or if they have to relocate, to suffer no detriment to their security of tenure
- Play our part in safeguarding children and young people exposed to domestic abuse
- Encourage a culture of prevention and early intervention of domestic abuse
- Have clear procedures for perpetrator management and signposting to specialist support agencies
- Recognise the diversity of our customers and colleagues, and that some communities may face additional barriers to accessing support, for example, language and communication barriers, religious/community/family pressures and immigration status
- Recognise that customers and colleagues with additional support needs or protected characteristics (for example customers with disabilities or older people) may be more at risk of domestic abuse, and/or experience abuse differently
- Provide specialist training so that all colleagues have the relevant skills and knowledge to work effectively with domestic abuse, tailored to their role
- Create a culture that challenges the stigma and barriers often associated with domestic abuse

### 3.1 Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibilities
<b>Case Owner</b>  e.g., Local Housing Manager, Resident Support Manager, Supported Housing Manager, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Act as main point of contact</li> <li>• Coordinate partnership working internally and with external agencies</li> <li>• Review/update Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment (DASH-RIC)</li> <li>• Liaise with the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Co-ordinator (MARAC)</li> <li>• Liaise with TELs and external partners to facilitate case management</li> <li>• Case recording</li> </ul>
<b>Housing Teams</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support with tenancy issues</li> <li>• Property security arrangements</li> </ul>
<b>Tenancy Enforcement Lead (TEL)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete all legal actions/proceedings as appropriate when enforcement against perpetrator is required due to breach of tenancy conditions</li> <li>• Attendance at MARAC as required</li> <li>• Case recording and review/closure</li> </ul>
<b>Assessment and Support Team</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Triage referrals</li> <li>• Safety planning</li> <li>• Completion of DASH-RIC</li> <li>• MARAC referral</li> </ul>
Role	Responsibilities

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support and advice for making statutory Safeguarding referral</li> <li>• Convening of case conference</li> <li>• Advice and signposting for internal colleagues</li> <li>• Coordination of information sharing</li> <li>• Case tracking and recording</li> </ul>
<b>Lettings Team</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support with emergency accommodation where available, for survivors needing to flee their property</li> <li>• Affordability checks for survivors to remain in their property if they wish (e.g., signposting for income maximisation)</li> <li>• Assessment for eligibility for internal transfers via panel hearings</li> <li>• Signposting to Local Authorities for rehousing</li> <li>• Support with accessing the transfer portal to express interest in available properties</li> </ul>

### 3.2 Definitions

Behaviour of a person towards another person is domestic abuse if they are both aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other and the behaviour is abusive.

Two people are “personally connected” to each other if any of the following applies:

- (a) they are, or have been, married to each other
- (b) they are, or have been, civil partners of each other
- (c) they have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated)
- (d) they have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been terminated)
- (e) they are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other
- (f) they each have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child
- (g) they are relatives

The statutory definition declares who can be a victim of domestic abuse behaviours and establishes how victims need to be connected to the suspect. In addition to this, children who are injured or witness the offending are deemed to be victims of domestic abuse if they live in an abusive household.

Domestic Abuse can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse:

**Physical Abuse** can include: hitting, punching, kicking, slapping, hitting with objects, pulling hair, pushing or shoving, cutting or stabbing, restraining, spitting, strangulation, choking.

**Sexual Abuse** can include rape and coerced sex, forcing a victim to take part in unwanted sexual acts, refusal to practice safe sex or use contraception, threatened or actual sexual abuse of children.

**Economic Abuse** can include: controlling money and bank accounts, making a victim account for all their expenditure, running up debts in a victim's name, allowing no say on how monies are spent, refusing to allow them to study or work.

**Psychological and Emotional Violence and Abuse** can include: creating isolation from friends/family, use of threats, humiliating and undermining them in front of others or in front of their children, telling them they are stupid, hopeless, unlovable, that no one would believe them, or that they are a bad parent.

### **Coercion and Control**

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.

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 regulating their everyday behaviour.

**Discriminatory Abuse** may manifest itself as any of the other categories of abuse, however what makes discriminatory abuse distinctive is it is motivated by oppressive and discriminatory attitudes towards a person's:

- Disability
- Physical appearance
- Learning disability
- Mental ill-health
- Sensory impairment
- Race
- Religion
- Gender/ gender identity
- Age
- Culture
- Sexual orientation
- Appearance
- Sex
- Marriage or civil partnership

The definition of domestic abuse also includes:

### **Honour-Based Abuse**

A type of abuse which is perpetrated in order to protect the family's honour. For example, rape, murder, physical or emotional violence but also includes:

- **Forced Marriage** (marriage arranged by parents using physical threat/violence or emotional pressure to enforce the marriage)
- **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)** (partial or total removal of female genitals with the aim of ensuring premarital virginity and marital fidelity)

### **Family and Inter-Generational Abuse**

Domestic abuse does not only happen within heterosexual or same sex relationships. The perpetrator can sometimes be a parent, sibling, child or grandchild.

Intergenerational abuse is when ill-treatment experienced during childhood is repeated by a child as they get older within their own adult family. This could result in the victimisation of one's own children, their spouse, or even a sibling.

### **Abuse of older people**

Older people can be more at risk of domestic abuse due to problems with mobility, mental health and social isolation. Older people may see some aspects of domestic abuse as the 'norm' as they may have been experiencing this for many years. Previously, domestic abuse may not have been openly discussed within families and communities. Gender relationships have changed over time, for example, in the past the male of the relationship may have been the only one to work and was traditionally seen as the 'breadwinner' and thus have control of their finances and limit their partners' access to money. We now consider this could be financial abuse.

### **Online Abuse**

Online platforms are increasingly used to perpetrate domestic abuse. Online domestic abuse can include behaviours such as monitoring of social media profiles or emails, abuse over social media, sharing intimate photos or videos without your consent and using GPS locators or spyware.

Whilst this policy relates to domestic abuse, any concerns about safeguarding risks to adults at risk, children and young people must be reported using the relevant processes. Guidance can be located in our **Adult and Child Safeguarding Policies and Procedures**.

## **4 Victim Centered Approach**

### **4.1 Our Customers**

We will publicise our approach to tackling and raising awareness about domestic abuse and its effects through a range of communication methods and platforms, considering accessibility and ease as we do so.

Our colleagues will listen and believe. Many people have difficulty reporting domestic abuse because of fear of the perpetrator, stigma attached to domestic abuse, shame and fear of not being believed. MTVH colleagues will always begin by accepting what they are told by the victim reporting abuse.

Our colleagues will not judge. Leaving an abusive partner can take a long time and many victims choose to return before leaving for good. We recognise that victims of domestic abuse might not want to engage with support services. We will continue to provide support in line with the victims' own pace.

MTVH recognises that domestic abuse can take place in same sex partnerships and that males can also be victims of domestic abuse.

We will co-operate and share information appropriately with local authorities and our partners with statutory responsibilities where they have concerns that relate to our customers.

Where a case is investigated by other organisations, we agree a process based on best practice, joint working and current information-sharing principles.

#### **4.2 Working with the Perpetrator**

Whilst we will always try to support anyone who identifies themselves to us as a survivor of domestic abuse, we will also endeavour to support customers who are perpetrators.

In an attempt to support a perpetrator to change their behaviour, we will signpost them to access specialist services if they are willing to engage with us.

We will assess each situation carefully in order to make decisions about ending tenancies, ensuring that our intervention is balanced and fair.

#### **4.3 Prevention and Early Intervention Approach**

MTVH aims to reduce the risk of domestic abuse occurring and create a culture where all colleagues have the skills to recognise and identify signs of domestic abuse. To support this, we will:

- Support all colleagues, in line with their roles and responsibilities, to be pro-active in looking for indicators of domestic abuse, i.e., exercising professional curiosity, so that it is identified at the earliest possible opportunity in every case.
- Seek to complete a comprehensive risk assessment (using the Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment Checklist, DASH-RIC) every time we identify the potential for domestic abuse
- Provide comprehensive training in domestic abuse to all relevant colleagues to include signs/indicators of domestic abuse

MTVH will collate and analyse data in order to:

- Increase our understanding of who is experiencing domestic abuse
- Tailor our services according to the needs of our customers
- Identify issues and trends and make improvements where needed

#### **4.4 Domestic Abuse and our Tenancies**

Our aim is that survivors of domestic abuse suffer no detriment to their housing tenure as a consequence of their experience and are given the choice to live safely in their current home or relocate. If it is not safe for the survivor to remain in the property and alternative accommodation is needed urgently, we will offer to support them to liaise with their local authority who has the relevant duty, where applicable, to provide this.

Our capacity to offer a transfer (permanent move to a different property) is limited due to the low availability of properties. If we are able to offer suitable alternative accommodation to survivors of

domestic abuse, we will seek to do this through the relevant procedures and in line with the **Transfer Policy**.

If the survivor would like to remain in the property, we will work alongside police and other agencies to make the property safe. We can support the survivor with security equipment to be put in place, such as CCTV.

Perpetrators of domestic abuse will, by default, be seen as breaching their tenancy and we will consider appropriate legal action where this is required.

We will support customers to remove joint tenants where they are perpetrators of domestic abuse. This may include, the survivor applying to the court for a court order to remove the joint tenant (if applicable) or an injunction to prevent the perpetrator making contact. When reviewing requests for 'joint to sole' changes, we will seek to explore whether there has been any coercion, by the perpetrator, to remove the survivor from the joint tenancy. If there are any suspicions this is the case, the joint to sole request will be refused. The Assessment and Support Team will be notified if any concerns are raised regarding changes to the tenancy.

MTVH does not allow additional tenants to be added to an existing tenancy.

#### **4.5 Domestic Abuse and our Colleagues**

We recognise domestic abuse can affect anyone, including our colleagues. And it can have a serious impact on the morale, health, wellbeing, safety and the self-confidence of our colleague and the workplace.

We provide clear and practical guidance for colleagues and managers to follow, focusing on the safety of MTVH colleagues. These include signposting to specialist support services, flexibility we can offer in relation to their role, access to internal and external assistance.

If an employee chooses to identify themselves as a perpetrator, they will be offered advice and information about the specialist support services available to them. However, we will consider the possible risk posed whilst working for MTVH, our primary aim is the safety of our customers and colleagues, and this will be considered in any formal action taken by the organisation. In such situations the Head of HR should be alerted, and the advice sought from the Head of Strategy & Support and/or Safeguarding Support Manager.

#### **4.6 Working Together in Partnership**

We are committed to working in partnership with domestic abuse specialist support services to help victims to break the cycle of abuse. We will work with Specialist Domestic Abuse Services, the Police, Social Care teams, Health and Local Safeguarding Children or Adult Boards (LSCB and SAB) or their equivalent Strategic Partnership Boards, thresholds and information-sharing protocols. This includes working with services to support Domestic Homicide Reviews. We will seek to attend MARAC meetings where cases are heard which involve our customers.

#### **4.7 Confidentiality**

Maintaining strict confidentiality is central to our handling of reports of domestic abuse. We understand that residents must feel assured that an abuser will not become aware of their whereabouts if they decide to leave the relationship, or that they have been obtaining advice and support if they are still living with an abuser.

We have policies and procedure in place which ensure that we are compliant with GDPR regulations regarding the information we hold about our customers. This includes reports of Domestic Abuse. We

will not disclose any information about domestic abuse to a third party without the customers' written consent; or where we are required to do so via a Court Order, to protect someone who might be at risk, or where there is another clear and lawful rationale for doing so.

#### 4.8 Third Party Organisations

We have several third-party contract arrangements with landlords, support providers, contractors and suppliers. Where appropriate, our contract specifications will require our partners to comply with this policy and accompanying procedures and for this to be reflected in their own policies and procedures.

#### 4.9 Quality assurance and monitoring

Our Assessment and Support team track and monitor cases where there are reports of domestic abuse. This is to provide assurance that the correct referrals have been made. Outcomes are reviewed and reported on regarding successful interventions and areas for improvement.

### 5 Background legislation

- The Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- The Care Act 2014
- The Children Act 2004
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018
- Landlord & Tenant Act 1985

### 6 Our commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

In implementing this policy MTVH colleagues will understand the impact of domestic abuse upon someone who is a victim due to their race or ethnicity, ensuring customers of all ethnic backgrounds are supported equally. The policy recognises domestic abuse occurs in both marriages and civil partnerships. Discriminatory abuse is recognised within the policy and describes how this is motivated by oppressive and discriminatory attitudes.

Colleagues must also understand the impact of 'honour based' abuse and the importance of dealing with these cases sensitively, in order to achieve the best outcomes for the customer. The Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) completed for this policy identifies positive or neutral impact upon the nine protected characteristic groups and others described.

### 7 Key Policy Information

Policy Owner	Operational Risk and Development Directorate
Author	Safeguarding Support Manager
Approved by	Customer Services SLT
Effective from	March 2023
Approach to review	This Policy & associated Procedures will be reviewed as required by the owner for changes in legislation, regulation, and operational need. Any amendments will be appropriately consulted on and signed off before being clearly communicated to customers and colleagues. Next expected review is 5 years from the 'Effective date' of this document.





# MTVH

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