

Domestic Abuse Policy

Lead Manager:	Neighbourhoods Manager
Responsible Senior Manager:	Assistant Director of Housing
Approved By:	Customer Committee
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1. Introduction

- 1.1. Shropshire Towns and Rural Housing (STAR) is an Arms' Length Management Organisation; (ALMO) and manages the stock on behalf of Shropshire Council. It is responsible for the Council's housing stock including the letting, maintenance, and management of its properties and estates.
- 1.2. This policy sets out how Shropshire Towns and Rural Housing (STAR) will take steps to assist and support any person either experiencing or threatened with domestic abuse; it will apply to all our customers including occupants living with our tenants.
- 1.3. We recognise that our staff and employees can experience or be threatened with domestic abuse. This is not addressed in this policy, and a separate policy exists for how we respond to disclosures of domestic abuse within our staff.
- 1.4. Domestic abuse remains a largely hidden crime and measuring its true scale is complex. Domestic abuse can happen in all communities regardless of gender, age, disability, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy, or maternity.
- 1.5. However, we are aware that domestic abuse disproportionately affects women and is mainly perpetrated by men and is twice as likely to happen to women with disabilities. There is also evidence that men's experiences of domestic abuse are significantly underreported.
- 1.6. As a social housing provider, we can recognise the signs of domestic abuse and it is therefore essential that we take all reports of domestic abuse seriously and work positively and pro-actively with the survivor and our partners to offer support.

2. Definitions

2.1. Domestic Abuse

For the first time, Section 1 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 introduces a statutory definition of domestic abuse. This recognises a wide range of abusive, coercive or controlling behaviours beyond the use of physical violence. It builds on the expansive approach formulated by Lady Hale in *Yemshaw v Hounslow LBC* [2011] UKSC 3.

The behaviour of a person ("A") toward another person ("B") will now be "domestic abuse" if:

- A's behaviour toward B is "*abusive*"; and

- A and B are both over the age of 16 and are “*personally connected*” to each other.

2.2. Abusive behaviour

A person’s behaviour is defined as ‘abusive’ if it consists of:

- Physical or sexual abuse;
- Violent or threatening behaviour;
- Controlling or coercive behaviour;
- Economic abuse, defined by s.1 (4) as behaviour that has a “*substantial adverse effect on B’s ability to ... acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or [to] obtain goods or services*”;
- Psychological, emotional, or other abuse.
- ‘Abusive’ behaviour can consist of a single incident or a course of conduct.
Furthermore, behaviour can be abusive towards B even if it consists of conduct directed towards another person, such as B’s child).

Whilst there is no statutory definition of ‘controlling or coercive’ behaviour or ‘psychological abuse’ paragraph 12 of the DAA’s Explanatory Notes suggest that:

- “*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.*”

As a social housing provider, we are committed to providing safe homes for all our customers and customers experiencing domestic abuse will be believed, treated in a sympathetic, supportive and non-judgemental way. A survivor’s disclosure alone is sufficient for them to be given advice and assistance as a matter of priority by staff.

3. Policy Statement

- 3.1. We are committed to dealing with any disclosures or identified incidents of domestic abuse swiftly and effectively and will do this through the following approach.
- 3.2. **Getting our response right first time** by ensuring victims / survivors can contact us quickly and easily to report abuse. All staff have the knowledge to respond correctly to victims/survivors of domestic abuse and be able to signpost to specialist services.

- 3.3. **Taking a survivor-centred approach** in responding to and encouraging those experiencing domestic abuse, to report it and be confident that complaints will be treated seriously, sympathetically and in confidence.
- 3.4. **Referring to and working with both our in house and specialist support services to ensure:**
- 3.5. Any individual that has a protected characteristic can access specialist support. LGBT individuals can speak to a support officer of the same sexual orientation, and signpost to other support agencies /organisations.
- 3.6. Victims of all ages, especially adolescents and older survivors can access support.
- 3.7. People with disabilities receive specialist support.
- 3.8. **Adopting a proactive multi-agency approach** with all relevant agencies, working together to ensure the safety of those suffering from domestic abuse.
- 3.9. **Attending** MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) we will continue to attend, support, and contribute to MARAC when invited and carry out any target hardening safety works to the properties we manage where identified by West Mercia Police. We will also support the victim by signposting to Shropshire Council Housing Options Team, to seek alternative accommodation where appropriate.
- 3.10. **Being flexible in our approach** in responding to incidents of domestic abuse, considering the varying circumstances of victims / survivors and the differing courses of action available and appropriate that they may wish to take to end the abuse. We will consider any vulnerabilities in line with our Vulnerable Customer Policy
- 3.11. **Holding perpetrators accountable for their abusive behaviour** where possible and appropriate we will work with perpetrators of domestic abuse who want to change their behaviour. If necessary, we will take action to stop perpetrators continuing to abuse and ensure that they are held accountable through the courts. We will ask the police to prosecute for criminal damage and take action to evict the perpetrator of domestic abuse using the powers available under the Housing Acts. When making decisions on prosecution we will always take into consideration the wishes of the victim/survivor and their future housing needs.
- 3.12. **Keeping consistent, accurate and relevant records**, to ensure that the abused person does not have to constantly repeat the same information. This may need to be agreed with other agencies.

- 3.13. **Assisting and guide victims to obtain support**, providing advice to victims /survivors, and working with stakeholders to ensure consistent and ongoing support.
- 3.14. **Safeguarding**; our approach is to prevent and reduce the risk of harm to adults and children who are experiencing or are at risk from abuse or neglect by completing safeguarding referrals that have recognised links to domestic abuse acting in line with our safeguarding policies and procedures.
- 3.15. **Ensuring safe at home** where the victim/survivor wishes to remain in their home and maintain their local support networks we will use the STAR budget for extra locks and / or security lighting. This may also include using legal tools to remove the perpetrator from the property or signposting to the police for panic alarms.
- 3.16. **Assisting victim/survivors to find alternative accommodation**, if it is not possible for the victims/survivors to stay safe at home, we will support their decision to move and where appropriate utilise our direct let process in consultation with Shropshire Council Housing Options Team, Domestic Abuse support organisations, and West Mercia Police. We may also liaise with other housing providers to ensure the survivor moves as quickly as possible to a safe property with the same security of tenure.
- 3.17. **Supporting victims/survivors to fulfil their aspirations** by ensuring that housing support is provided for them to continue to live well, and referrals are made to specialist services, when the need is identified.
- 3.18. **Publicising and promoting** we will ensure that clear messages are publicised through our website, social media, and organisational publications and information displayed in communal areas that we will not tolerate domestic abuse and try to reach out to victim/survivors who experience barriers to reporting or accessing services.
- 3.19. **Ensuring that all staff** undertake training to understand domestic abuse, enable them to respond appropriately and if they see or feel that something is not quite right, they will feel empowered to report this to an appropriate person.
- 3.20. **Nominate a STAR Domestic Abuse Lead / Champion** who will have the knowledge to lead and oversee our response to domestic abuse.

4. GDPR

- 4.1. All information gathered as part of our approach to managing cases of domestic abuse will be stored on our systems securely. However, we may have to share information with agencies including the Police or Social Services when a child or

adult is at potential risk of harm. For children this includes emotional harm and neglect.

- 4.2. For cases which meet the MARAC risk threshold or if we have child protection concerns, we have a legal duty to share this with agencies. In cases where the threshold is not met, with the agreement of the victim/survivor, we will make referrals to our own Housing Support Team and / or other relevant support agencies.

5. Case Management and Timescales

- 5.1. We will aim to contact any residents where we receive concerns or disclosures of domestic abuse within 24 working hours of the abuse being reported. We will agree any requests for a case to be managed by a staff member of the same gender as the victim/survivor.
- 5.2. Where a property has been damaged and the safety of the occupant(s) is at risk we will carry out emergency repairs within 24 hours, including locks (if permitted).
- 5.3. All domestic abuse cases will be recorded on our systems and survivors will be flagged as vulnerable, and perpetrators for any potential risk.

6. Consultation

- 6.1. Shropshire Towns and Rural Housing has consulted with staff, external agencies, customers and our Customer Committee to promote continuous improvement and develop good practice in the use of this policy.

7. Review

- 7.1. STAR will review this Policy on a 3-yearly basis unless changes require an earlier review.

8. Training

- 8.1. Shropshire Towns and Rural Housing provides continuous development and training for its staff who are responsible for implementing this policy.

9. Roles and Responsibilities

All employees	General overview of Policy
Neighbourhood Housing Officers	Implementation of Policy
Senior Neighbourhood Officers	Line Management Responsibility of neighbourhood officers in the implementation of this policy
Neighbourhood Manager	Overall responsibility for the operational day to day implementation of this policy. Monitoring performance indicators and management information and day to day oversight of the quality of service and outcome
Assistant Director of Housing	Accountable for the implementation of this policy and for reporting performance to key stakeholders including Senior Management Teams, Executive Team and Customer Sub-Committee

10. Equality and Diversity

We will ensure that this policy is applied fairly and consistently to all our customers. We will not directly or indirectly discriminate against any person or group of people because of their race, religion, age, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, or any other grounds set out in our Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion policy.

When applying this policy, we will:

- Act sensitively towards the diverse needs of individuals and communities.
- Take the necessary positive action to reduce discrimination and harassment in local communities.

This policy and any other related publications of Shropshire Towns and Rural Housing are available on request in other formats (e.g., in an alternative language, in Braille, on tape, in large type).