

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & ABUSE POLICY

OVERALL PURPOSE

To support people and their families who have suffered or are experiencing domestic violence or abuse, by providing a more effective response to their needs by effective partnership working and an increased employee awareness of the damaging effects of this crime.

INTRODUCTION

West North West homes Leeds will ensure that:

- People experiencing domestic violence or abuse access appropriate services as early as possible
- Victims of domestic violence or abuse are given appropriate advice to allow them to make choices about what to do next
- We support survivors to rebuild their lives by working in partnership with them and other support agencies
- Where children and young people are affected by domestic violence or abuse, they too have access to services as early as possible
- We work in partnership with the Police and other agencies to make use of Civil Laws to offer maximum protection to all victims to stop the abuse reoccurring
- We will seek appropriate support solutions for perpetrators of domestic violence or abuse to prevent abuse recurring by affective partnership working
- We will follow the relevant child protection procedures if we believe a child is at risk due to an abusive relationship
- We will provide support and guidance to employees experiencing domestic violence or abuse.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

We will measure our Performance by:

- % of cases actioned within 5 days
- Number of new Domestic Violence cases reported
- Number of new Domestic Violence cases reported by category

- Number of actions taken to manage Domestic Violence
- Number of live, resolved and closed Domestic Violence cases
- Number of resolved and closed Domestic Violence cases by category
- Number of resolved Domestic Violence cases by last action taken
- % satisfied with how Domestic Violence complaints are dealt with
- % satisfied with the outcome of Domestic Violence complaints
- 100% of all Domestic Violence complaints first actioned within 5 days
- 80% satisfaction with how Domestic Violence complaints are dealt with (Incremental satisfaction level to reach target by December 2010)
- Number of staff receiving Domestic Violence Training
- We will monitor older and vulnerable people, disabled people and black and minority ethnic groups taking into account race, disability, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age and religious belief who are victims of domestic violence
- We will measure the number of properties referred and taken up by the Sanctuary Scheme

Domestic Violence & Abuse Policy

1.0 Statement of Intent

- 1.1 West North West homes regard domestic violence or abuse as totally unacceptable and firmly believe that no one should live in fear of violence or harassment from a spouse, partner, other member of their household or visitor, and will take positive steps to assist and support any person suffering from or threatened with domestic violence or abuse.
- 1.2 West North West homes will take the strongest action possible against perpetrators of domestic violence or abuse where it has power to do so and will work closely with community safety partners providing support services to ensure support and assistance is offered to victims in order to reduce incidents of repeat offending.
- 1.3 West North West homes encourages its customers to report domestic violence or abuse, whether that domestic violence or abuse is systematic and repeated or a single incident, and whether they are victims of, or witnesses to such incidents.
- 1.4 West North West homes will also be an active member of the Leeds Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) for those who are experiencing domestic violence or abuse and are deemed to be high risk. THE MARAC will meet regularly to plan actions of support between different agencies to prevent repeat offending of domestic violence or abuse in cases that are referred, and

will work together towards providing a more holistic and efficient response to victims' needs.

- 1.5 West North West homes will increase the awareness of the effects of domestic violence or abuse amongst its employees to ensure they are aware of the pressures and levels of intimidation that victims can face and also to understand West North West homes' policies and procedures for domestic violence or abuse.

2.0 Outline of Service

- 2.1 West North West Homes Leeds' definition of domestic violence or abuse is:

**“Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence and abuse (psychological, physical sexual, financial or emotional) between people who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality”
(Home Office 2004)**

- 2.2 Although domestic violence or abuse is most commonly perpetrated by men, this policy is intended to cover all instances and where the victim may be male, or the relationship is either heterosexual or of the same sex.
- 2.3 Section 2.24 of our tenancy agreement states that you (or anyone living with you or anyone visiting the property) must not inflict domestic violence or threaten violence against any other person (living with you or elsewhere). You (or anyone living with you or visiting the property) must not harass or use mental, emotional, racist or sexual abuse to make anyone who lives with you leave the property. The council may still take action for domestic violence even if a case does not go to court.
- 2.4 We will accept an incident as domestic violence or abuse if anyone, for example, the victim, a witness, or a member of staff perceives the incident to be domestic violence or abuse. In these circumstances a report of domestic violence or abuse should be recorded and dealt with by WNWhL as such.
- 2.5 West North West homes will work to prevent domestic violence or abuse and reduce the risk of homelessness where domestic violence or abuse occurs, whilst ensuring the safety of the victim and their family.
- 2.6 West North West Homes will adopt a victim centred approach in dealing with domestic violence or abuse and will ensure that confidentiality is maintained at all times
- 2.7 West North West Homes will endeavour to provide staff of the same sex as the victim, if this is requested, when working on cases of domestic violence or abuse.
- 2.8 West North West Homes staff can offer support to victims of domestic violence or abuse either directly or through sharing case information at the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) and with our partners.

- 2.9 West North West Homes will also tap into other service providers to support victims of domestic violence or abuse e.g. HALT, Leeds Women's Aid, Dosti.
- 2.10 The Leeds City Council's (LCC) Sanctuary Project is a victim centred initiative, which aims to make it possible for victims of domestic violence or abuse to remain safely in their homes. As part of our management agreement with LCC, West North West homes can also access this initiative for our victims.
- 2.11 The safety of the victim and their family is of paramount importance. Where it is practicable for the victim to remain in their home, every effort will be made to provide additional security and support in consultation with the Sanctuary Project and through our Community Safety Partnership working arrangements.

This may include:

- Installation of a panic alarm in the home

West North West homes will support the use of Home Office approved alarms as directed by the Police as an interim measure to protect the health and safety of a victim.

- Provision of security equipment, such as a safe letterbox, additional door and window security to safeguard the victim and their home.
 - Replacement of broken windows, have rubbish removed or carry out any other emergency repair to the home as a result of domestic violence or abuse without delay, generally within 24 hours
- 2.12 Where it is considered that the victim would be in acute danger if they remained in the home, we aim to provide either temporary or permanent alternative accommodation, in accordance with Leeds City Council's Lettings Policy
- 2.13 Where urgent rehousing is necessary and West North West homes Leeds does not have a dwelling available, we will liaise with other agencies through the MARAC arrangements in an attempt to provide temporary accommodation
- 2.14 Where it is identified either through MARAC or through Leeds Interagency Project for Leeds, the rehousing within West North West homes to a different area will have a positive effect in reducing the likelihood of repeat offending and improve the welfare of the family, then assistance will be offered to the victim through our lettings process. This may involve a direct let of West North West homes property to the victim.
- 2.15 We will discuss and involve the victim, and any person who is advocating on their behalf, in deciding the course of action that needs to be taken, and we will regularly communicate with them to ensure that they are kept well informed of progress made.
- 2.16 When dealing with perpetrators of domestic violence or abuse West North West homes will work closely with the Police and other agencies to ensure that the full range of civil and criminal remedies are considered and pursued where appropriate. We will also signpost victims to relevant legal advice.

- 2.17 The Tenancy Support Team will also facilitate the flow of intelligence information from our staff through to the Police and appropriate partners, though the Leeds Information Sharing Protocol, where there are concerns over the welfare of the victim and whereabouts of the perpetrator
- 2.18 The action taken against perpetrators will depend upon individual circumstances. For this, West North West homes may include possession action against a perpetrator where other members of the household have left home due to the domestic violence or abuse. This will be achieved by our Tenancy Support Team working closely with our Tenancy Enforcement Team.
- 2.19 Dependant upon circumstances, this would provide an opportunity for the victim and their family to either return home, or to help provide them with alternative accommodation.
- 2.20 West North West homes recognises the importance of ensuring front line staff and especially those responsible for visiting customers in their own home are aware of the effects of emotional and physical suffering caused to victims and their families through domestic violence or abuse.
- 2.21 The Tenancy Support Team will work closely with our Repairs Team to make staff aware of any repairs that may be as a result of domestic violence or abuse. This awareness will be used to identify any under reporting of domestic violence or abuse, and make the appropriate staff aware of any potential victims of domestic violence or abuse and to look at providing support mechanisms.
- 2.22 West North West homes will arrange for staff awareness sessions to be held on a regular basis, facilitated by both the Cohesion and Diversity Team and leading practitioners, where appropriate, with experienced in this area of work. It will be compulsory for West North West homes staff, delivering training on domestic violence or abuse, to have attended the course delivered by the Leeds Interagency Project on "Train the Trainer" for Domestic Violence.
- 2.23 The Cohesion and Diversity Team will also provide awareness training to our contractors who deliver our repairs service.
- 2.24 The overall purpose of such sessions will be to provide the opportunity for staff to increase understanding of victims and families experiencing domestic violence or abuse and the impact of the decisions that they make at that time, whilst carrying out their housing management function.

West North West homes will continue to offer support to victims of domestic violence or abuse, until they feel confident in their home and within the community, this will include working with other support agencies such as:

- HALT
- Behind Closed Doors
- Leeds Women's Aid
- Sahara

3.0 Specific Needs

- 3.1 West North West Homes Leeds will take into account the specific needs, which may arise, of older and vulnerable people, disabled people and black and minority ethnic groups, in a manner that promotes equality and inclusiveness ensuring all customers are treated equally and fairly taking into account race, disability, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age and religious belief.
- 3.2 We will ensure that we adopt a flexible approach to domestic violence or abuse as victims can find it very difficult to report perpetrators.
- 3.3 If the victim feels more comfortable to meet in another environment rather than their home or at one of our offices then we will offer this service.
- 3.4 We will consider the cultural barriers that various community groups face when they are victims of domestic violence or abuse.
- 3.6 We will work closely with gay and lesbian agencies to gain a better understanding of the needs of victims from same sex relationships.
- 3.5 Details of our approach to meeting specific customer needs can be found in our Vulnerability Strategy and Policy.

4.0 Consultation

- 4.1 West North West homes will seek the views of customers on this policy at least annually in a variety of different ways through our Customer Involvement mechanisms.

5.0 Implementation

- 5.1 It is the responsibility of all West North West homes Leeds managers and staff to ensure that their work is carried out in line with this policy and procedures relating to it.
- 5.2 Members of West North West homes Leeds Board, the Chief Executive and Heads of Services are responsible for developing this policy and ensuring that this policy is implemented and monitored effectively.
- 5.3 All our staff will be briefed at induction and training will be provided at regular intervals on domestic violence or abuse to ensure they are aware of the requirements of this policy and to provide them with the necessary knowledge and skills to implement this policy.

6.0 Monitoring

- 6.1 Our customer's views are fundamental to our policy. We will engage in customer research, asking for feedback on standards and costs. Through this, we will feed ideas forward and achieve continuous improvement and Value for Money.

- 6.2 West North West homes will monitor the effectiveness of this policy by reviewing our performance against our Domestic Violence performance framework which is monitored quarterly by the Diversity KLOE Board.
- 6.3 We will also review our performance annually by assessing customer satisfaction on domestic violence or abuse.
- 6.4 West North West homes will publish the results of this monitoring and use the results to identify, and act on, areas for improvement.

7.0 Review

- 7.1 This policy will be reviewed at least annually or whenever there are any relevant changes to legislation, good practice that would impact on this policy, and in the light of comments received from customers.
- 7.2 The Head of Customer Service will be responsible for ensuring that reviews of this policy are carried out.

8.0 Legislation

- 8.1 Housing Act 2004
Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003
Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000
Disability Discrimination Act 1995 & amendments 2005
Sex Discrimination Act 1975
Human Rights Act 1998
Domestic Violence – Crime & Victims Act 2004
The Family Law Act 1996

9.0 Review Date

August 2010