



Policy title:	Domestic Abuse Policy		
Scope:	Housing Services		
Policy owner & job title:	Director of Communities		
Approver:	Executive Director of People		
Date:	February 2024	Review Due Date:	February 2027

1. POLICY SUMMARY

This policy sets out Aspire Housing’s approach to assisting and supporting customers living in our homes who are experiencing or being threatened with domestic abuse. It has been developed by cross referencing good practice and the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) principles and standards.

Domestic abuse is present in all communities regardless of age, gender, sexuality, disability, ethnicity, culture, and religion. It remains largely a hidden crime, and cases of domestic abuse are often not reported for many reasons which may include (but not limited to) confidence, lack of awareness of help, fear, lack of freedom, cultural and language barriers.

We recognise that as a housing provider, our staff are well placed to identify signs of domestic abuse and colleagues can be a supportive first point of contact for customers experiencing, or at risk of, domestic abuse.

We also recognise that staff members themselves may experience domestic abuse. We will ensure that information and support is easily accessible for anyone who is experiencing domestic abuse.

Aspire Housing is signed up to the Chartered Institute of Housing’s ‘Make a Stand’ pledge to demonstrate our commitment to supporting victims of domestic abuse.

This policy applies to all colleagues employed by Aspire Housing.

Regulation and Legislation

This policy considers the following legislation and guidance (but not limited to):

- The Housing Act 1996
- The Family Law Act 1996
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Human Rights Act 1998

- The Data Protection Act 2018
- The Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004
- The Equality Act 2010
- Protection of Freedoms Act 2012
- Anti Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014
- The Care Act 2014
- Clare’s Law, also known as Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS)

Associated Policies & Procedures:

- Lettings Policy & procedures
- Tenancy Policy
- ASB Policy & procedures
- Safeguarding Policy
- Equality & Diversity Policy
- Data Protection Policy

2. POLICY STATEMENT

We are committed to ‘Building Better Futures’ by contributing towards the safety, stability and sustainability of our communities. We believe that all customers have the right to live without the fear of violence or abuse from partners, family members, those who live with them or visit their homes.

We take a holistic approach to dealing with domestic abuse. We work with voluntary and statutory agencies to raise awareness of domestic abuse, identify domestic abuse within our local communities and help target interventions and services to encourage those experiencing domestic abuse to seek help. We will work collaboratively with our partner agencies: police, local authorities, social services and specialist support agencies to offer advice, guidance and support to victims who are experiencing domestic abuse or at risk of experiencing abuse. We will consider all tools and support available to help domestic abuse victims. We will work with victims in a sympathetic, non-judgemental way, discussing options available to help victims make positive changes.

We recognise that Domestic Abuse can have wider implications and affect a family in a range of ways. Family members and children are often exposed to physical and/or emotional abuse which can have lasting psychological effects. Domestic Abuse can lead to challenges around housing, financial matters and a deterioration in a person's mental health. In addition to referrals to partner agencies we will consider support available through Aspire: Money Advice, Tenancy Support and exploring assistance for Employment and Skills to help our customers access a safer and independent future.

In developing this policy we have sought the views of survivors of domestic abuse and our partner agencies to ensure its effectiveness.

3. DEFINITION OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

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, physical, sexual, financial, and emotional abuse. (Home Office 2013) This also includes honour-based abuse, forced marriage and female genital mutilation. It is recognised that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group.

Domestic Abuse can include, but is not limited to:

Physical Abuse: Being hit with a slap, punch, knee or foot, being burned, being struck with an object, being restrained.

Psychological and Emotional Abuse: Manipulation, control and coercion, criticism, shame and judging, sarcasm and twisting what you say, intimidation.

Sexual Abuse: Rape, forced sex, sexual acts on children, coerced sex, refusing to allow use of contraception, unwanted touching, unwanted sexual acts.

Financial abuse: Controlling someone's money or their bank accounts, causing a victim to fall into debt, forging their signature, stealing.

Discriminatory Abuse: Focuses on a difference or perceived difference which could include but is not limited to: age, mental ill health, disability, gender, appearance, race, religion, sexual orientation, culture.

Coercive control: Recognised as the behaviour that underpins domestic abuse, it is a sustained pattern of behaviour which seeks to take away the victim's sense of self, minimising their freedom of action and violating their human rights. These behaviours reinforce the threat or reality of physical abuse. This behaviour can inflict extreme psychological and emotional abuse.

Family and inter-generational abuse: Not seen as domestic abuse in the traditional sense as it involves other family members which could include adult children, siblings, grandchildren who are at risk of making forced decisions, doing something against their will or at risk of harm from choices made.

Elder Abuse: A single or repeated act, or a lack of appropriate action, occurring in any relationship where there is an expectation of trust. This includes wilful neglect of providing for someone's needs, for example, access to food, medical treatments, mobility aids, providing socialisation, which results in harm and/or distress to the victim.

4. EQUALITY , DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Aspire Housing is committed to the principles of equality and diversity, this policy has been developed in line with our Equality and Diversity Policy. In relation to domestic abuse we aim to:

- Consider the needs and choices of victims from all backgrounds taking into account age, sex, gender reassignment, disability, sexual orientation, marital status including civil partnerships, pregnancy and maternity, race, religious and cultural beliefs.
- Consider other characteristics which could lead to discrimination or exclusion, such as health, socio-economic background, literacy, caregiving responsibilities etc.
- Understand the cultural implications and barriers to reporting domestic abuse.
- Ensure customers from all backgrounds, regardless of their circumstances, have equal access to our service, this includes providing information in different formats if needed.

Ensure customers are treated as individuals and with fairness and respect.

We recognise that people of all genders can be victims of domestic abuse and we understand that some may be more reluctant than others to acknowledge that they are experiencing domestic abuse due to the stigma attached. Domestic abuse can occur in any gender, same sex relationships and anyone can be a preparator of domestic abuse.

The Care Act 2014 specifies that freedom from abuse and neglect is a key part of a person's wellbeing and we are committed to ensuring that we take a proactive and supportive role in achieving freedom of abuse for our customers.

How we respond to Domestic Abuse

Aspire Housing is committed to raising awareness of domestic abuse and to supporting victims who are experiencing domestic abuse or at risk of experiencing abuse. To facilitate this, we will ensure:

- Our frontline colleagues are equipped with the knowledge and confidence to identify potential indicators of domestic abuse and colleagues are aware of the importance of acting on these concerns.
- Information is easily available detailing specialist domestic abuse services to encourage victims to seek help, this includes raising awareness of these services via our website and social media channels to help victims reach out for help.
- We work with voluntary and statutory agencies to support victims and take action against perpetrators where it is safe and appropriate to do so.
- Recognise that some victims of domestic abuse may be reluctant to be open and honest about their experiences, we will work with customers at their pace whilst ensuring all support options are discussed and considered.
- Give customers experiencing domestic abuse the option to have a male or female officer dealing with their case if this is their preference.
- Agree with customers experiencing domestic abuse the method of contact they wish to use, which includes meeting away from their home.
- Work with partner agencies to provide improved security to customers' homes where required.
- Ensure that children and young persons who are affected by domestic abuse also have access to appropriate support services.
- Offer customers who express a wish to leave an abusive relationship advice regarding their legal rights and responsibilities in relation to their tenancy and discuss their options with them to help them make informed decisions.
- Consider additional security measures for the home of victims experiencing domestic abuse, and/or at risk of harm.
- Assist a victim to move home to help keep them safe from harm, if it is their choice to do so. If we are in a position to offer a new home, this will be on an assured tenancy, we would support the victim to consider appropriate options to move out of the local community away from the current home and the perpetrator but we understand this may not always be practical and in the best interest of the victim.

To assist alleged perpetrators of domestic abuse:

- We will ensure new and existing customers are aware that committing domestic abuse is a breach of the terms of their tenancy agreement.
- We will give advice on support options available to alleged perpetrators of domestic abuse who accept their behaviour is unacceptable and express a desire to make positive changes.
- We recognise that children can engage in the abuse of adults in personal relationships, we will give advice on support options available and signpost to appropriate partner agencies.

Acting against alleged perpetrators: Aspire Housing has strong links with partner agencies, we will work with police, specialist domestic abuse support services, and other partner agencies to use the tools available to support victims and put protection in place against perpetrators when appropriate to do so.

Legislation: We will consider using legal powers and other options available to social landlords to support victims and take action against perpetrators. The action we take will depend on individual circumstances. We will work with victims to ensure that the most appropriate intervention is used to protect them, their family members and the local community who may also be affected by the situation.

Safeguarding : Where Aspire Housing receives information related to incidents of Domestic Abuse, the necessary links to Safeguarding will be made. We are aware that Domestic Abuse can create additional concerns around Adult and Children's safeguarding. Often, they will overlap or present alongside one another. We will make a referral to the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) where information can be shared, and appropriate support can be further explored.

Data Protection and Information Sharing: Aspire Housing has a duty to share information with relevant agencies, this will be done in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and any information sharing protocols we have in place.

Confidentiality Aspire Housing will only involve other agencies and share information with the consent of the victim unless the information is necessary to protect the safety of the victim/s including children or it is required by law ie. Police criminal investigation.

Staff Training: We are committed to providing regular training to our colleagues who provide front line services to our customers. This will ensure colleagues have the knowledge and professional curiosity to help them spot signs of potential domestic abuse, have an awareness of support available to enable them to respond confidently and appropriately.

5. RESPONSIBILITIES OF EMPLOYEE

Front-line employees have a duty to report any concerns of suspected domestic abuse in our homes to the appropriate team or partner agency, ensuring our safeguarding procedures are followed.

Colleagues in our Locality Teams will follow our Domestic Abuse procedure when investigating concerns raised about abuse occurring in our homes.

Our agreed safeguarding procedures will be followed when we receive a disclosure of domestic abuse.

Colleagues working with customers experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, domestic abuse will follow our Lone Working Procedure at all times.

Performance Monitoring and Review: Incidents of domestic abuse which are reported directly to us, and those which are referred via the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC), will be recorded on our CAS case management system and are kept confidential to our Locality Teams. We will ensure that domestic abuse cases are monitored effectively through a number of tools, including trend analysis, to ensure strategies can be implemented to reduce incidents where possible.

Case review audits will take place to make sure colleagues are providing a supportive and collaborative response to concerns relating to domestic abuse.

6. RESPONSIBILITY OF ASPIRE

Monitoring this policy: Our Domestic Abuse Policy will be reviewed every 3 years or in response to changes in regulation and/or legislation. Appropriate training and guidance will be provided to employees as a result of any changes.

Complaints: Victims of domestic abuse who are unhappy about the service they have received in response to their request for help can pursue this through our complaints' procedure.