South Oxfordshire District Council
Listening Learning Leading

Vale of White Horse District Council

Housing Domestic Abuse Policy

1. Overview / Policy Statement

1.1 South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils (the councils) are committed to ensuring that tenants and the wider community can live safely in their homes. As such, this policy outlines the councils' approach to delivering an effective and victim centred approach to domestic abuse in council accommodation.

1.2 The councils will not tolerate domestic abuse and are determined to take effective action to prevent and challenge domestic abuse. All tenancy and licence to occupy agreements for council owned accommodation prohibit tenants or their guests from perpetuating, or threatening to perpetuate, domestic abuse.

1.3 The councils will take prompt and appropriate action to deliver a victim centred approach to domestic abuse in order to identify instances of domestic abuse and support victims and survivors of domestic abuse.

2. Objectives

2.1 The objectives are as follows:

- To work to make victims and survivors of domestic abuse safe in their accommodation
- To support victims and survivors of domestic abuse
- To promote effective inter-agency working in order to prevent and challenge domestic abuse.

3. Scope

3.1 This policy applies to all housing accommodation provided by the councils and can include hotels and bed and breakfasts. It addresses domestic abuse involving council accommodation users.

4. Roles and Responsibilities for Delivery

4.1 The roles and responsibilities for delivery are as follows:

- Director of Housing & Environment: Overall responsibility for policy implementation
- Housing Delivery Manager: Responsible for the operational implementation of the policy

- Housing Landlord Team Leader: Daily oversight of the operational implementation of the policy
- Community Safety Team Leader: Strategic coordination and advice
- Property and Tenancy Officers: Initial case response and recordkeeping
- All staff: Compliance with policy, recordkeeping and safeguarding responsibilities.

5. Relevant Legislation

5.1 The relevant legislation is as follows:

- Housing Act 1996 and 1985
- Protection from Eviction Act 1977
- Domestic Abuse Act 2021

6. Relevant Policy and Procedure

6.1 The relevant local authority policy and procedures are listed below:

- The councils' Domestic Abuse Policy
- The councils' Safeguarding Policy (children, young people, vulnerable adults)
- The councils' Corporate Equality Policy
- The councils' Data Protection policy

6.2 The relevant health and safety policy and codes for the councils will also apply to this policy. This includes, but is not restricted to:

- First Aid
- Violence and Aggression at Work
- Workplace Safety
- Incident Reporting and Investigation

7. Policy and Procedure

7.1 The councils do not tolerate domestic abuse in any form and will take prompt, proportionate and trauma-informed action to identify, respond to and support any person experiencing or threatened with domestic abuse. This policy outlines the steps the councils will take to prevent, recognise and challenge domestic abuse in the homes we provide, and to ensure victims and survivors are supported to achieve safety and stability.

7.2 The councils follow the central government's definition of domestic abuse. In the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, domestic abuse is defined as follows:

"Behaviour of a person ("A") towards another person ("B") is "domestic abuse" if:

a) A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and
b) the behaviour is abusive.

Behaviour is "abusive" if it consists of any of the following:

a) physical or sexual abuse;
b) violent or threatening behaviour;
c) controlling or coercive behaviour;
d) economic abuse
e) psychological, emotional or other abuse.

and it does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.

"Economic abuse" means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on B's ability to:

a) acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or
b) obtain goods or services.

A's behaviour may be behaviour "towards" B despite the fact that it consists of conduct directed at another person (for example, B's child)".

"As for the definition of a child Section 2 of the 2021 Act, for the purposes of the definition of "personally connected", defines a "child" as a person under the age of 18 years. This will include a person aged 16 or 17. Furthermore Section 3 provides that a child (a person under the age of 18 years), is for the purposes of the 2021 Act, recognised as a victim of domestic abuse if they see, hear, or experience the effects of the abuse, and is related to "A" or "B"."

Definition from: Domestic Abuse Act 2021. Minor edits have been made to phrasing for clarity.

7.3 The councils take all forms of domestic abuse seriously, including non-physical, hidden, and less immediately visible forms of harm. Information about domestic abuse, how to report it, and support resources are available on both councils' websites (South and Vale).

7.4 The councils aim to respond quickly and appropriately to any concerns raised regarding domestic abuse. Reports of domestic abuse relating to council owned accommodation will be acknowledged and triaged within one working day. Officers will prioritise safety, confidentiality and the expressed wishes of the victim or survivor when deciding next steps.

7.5 Where a victim or potential victim reports domestic abuse, officers will record the report sensitively and securely and will make further contact where it is safe to do so in order to understand how the individual wishes to proceed. All domestic abuse cases will be referred promptly to the community safety team, whose specialist advice officers will follow to ensure a victim centred and trauma-informed response.

7.6 Where a third party raises concerns about possible domestic abuse, the councils will log the report and, where safe, attempt to contact the potential victim to offer support and discuss options. The councils will take steps to protect the anonymity of the reporting party where possible. As with direct reports, the matter will be referred to the community safety team for specialist guidance.

7.7 If an officer suspects domestic abuse may be occurring, they must raise the concern with the community safety team and follow their professional advice. Officers will contact the potential victim only where it is safe and appropriate to do so. Safeguarding duties will always take precedence over tenancy management considerations.

7.8 In cases involving counter-allegations, the councils will take all reasonable steps to ensure the safety of all household members while the risks to all parties can be assessed.

7.9 All further steps following a report of potential domestic abuse will proceed on a case-by-case basis following the advice of the community safety team. Further steps may include completing a DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking, and 'Honour'-Based Violence) risk assessment where it is safe and appropriate. High risk cases will be referred to MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) in line with local safeguarding arrangements.

7.10 If the case required escalation the Housing Landlord Team Leader would make this decision and then arrange for it to be considered at the monthly Joint Tasking meeting which the team leader attends.

7.11 The councils recognise that children and young people who see, hear, or experience the effects of domestic abuse are victims in their own right., and appropriate safeguarding referrals will be made in line with statutory duties.

7.12 The councils recognise that in cases of domestic abuse, risk can escalate quickly. The councils will therefore consistently monitor cases involving, and suspected cases of, domestic abuse in their accommodation. The Property and Tenancy Officers would carry out risk assessments. The risk assessments will be reviewed at key points, including after further disclosures, changes in household composition, or breaches of protective measures.

7.13 While potential victims of domestic abuse are living with potential perpetrators of abuse, or where potential perpetrators have access to the household, officers will take all reasonable steps to avoid escalating the risk of domestic abuse. This includes refraining from sending communications such as letters that could alert potential perpetrators to reports of domestic abuse. Officers will instead attempt to agree safe methods of communication with victims and survivors.

7.14 Where possible, the councils will take strong action to ensure the safety of victims and survivors of domestic abuse. This includes working to place victims and survivors in accommodation away from perpetrators of abuse, including emergency moves where there is an immediate risk.

7.15 Where victims and survivors remain in accommodation known to perpetrators of abuse, the councils may work towards target hardening by taking steps like installing new locks or alarms.

7.16 All tenancy and licence-to-occupy agreements prohibit tenants or their visitors from perpetrating or threatening domestic abuse towards any member of the household. Where a tenant breaches these terms, the councils may take enforcement action, up to and including possession action. Any enforcement such action will always take into account the safety, needs and rights of victims or survivors, and all reasonable steps will be taken to avoid placing victims at increased risk. Perpetrators will not be treated as a single household with victims when considering tenancy management options.

7.17 For housing management purposes, an individual may be identified as a perpetrator based on professional judgement and available evidence, without requiring criminal proceedings.

7.18 Action to ensure the safety of victims and survivors of domestic abuse is not contingent on the criminal conviction of the perpetrator of domestic abuse. Where the councils have compelling evidence of the occurrence of domestic abuse, tenancy related enforcement action against the perpetrator of domestic abuse (up to and including possession action) may be pursued, regardless of whether a criminal conviction occurs.

7.19 Where appropriate, the councils will take a perpetrator focused approach to housing management, using tenancy enforcement, access restrictions and partnership working to manage risk and hold perpetrators accountable for their behaviour. Responsibility for stopping abuse will not be placed on victims or survivors.

7.20 The councils are committed to working closely with partner organisations to provide an effective, co-ordinated response to domestic abuse. This includes collaboration with Thames Valley Police, local specialist domestic abuse services, health and social care agencies, and other safeguarding partners. Officers will encourage victims and survivors to report abuse to the police where it is safe for them to do so and will provide clear signposting and referrals to specialist support services.

7.21 Information relating to domestic abuse will be shared lawfully, proportionately and on a need to know basis, in line with data protection legislation and safeguarding requirements. Where possible, information sharing will be discussed with victims and survivors, and consent sought unless there is a lawful basis to share without consent to prevent serious harm.

7.22 The councils recognise that accommodation users may have additional support needs that may be needed and these may intersect with their experience of domestic abuse to result in particular challenges and vulnerabilities that the

Housing Landlord is committed providing either directly or via an agency. These additional support needs include, but are not limited to:

- Physical disabilities
- Mental health issues
- Learning difficulties and/or intellectual disabilities
- Being elderly
- Being a former relevant child or qualifying care leaver
- Terminal illness
- Long-term health conditions and hospitalisation
- Substance misuse dependency

7.23 Across the councils' housing policies, experience of domestic abuse is recognised as a source of additional support needs. The councils are committed to working to ensure that victims and survivors are not disadvantaged in their housing as a result of abuse. The councils will therefore ensure that tenancy management is sensitive to experience of domestic abuse. For example, rent arrears arising from financial abuse will not be pursued by the councils, and property damage caused by perpetrators of domestic abuse will not be recharged to victims and survivors of abuse.

7.24 The councils aim to deliver a trauma-informed support offer to victims and survivors of domestic abuse. Trauma-informed practice means recognising the impact of trauma, avoiding re-traumatisation, and prioritising choice, control, consent and empowerment. In practice, this includes respectful communication, flexible responses, awareness of cultural and identity-related barriers, and working at the pace chosen by the victim or survivor. Property and Tenancy officers will seek out guidance from the community safety team when working with victims and survivors of domestic abuse to help to ensure that their support aligns with trauma-informed best practice.

7.25 The councils will ensure that Property and Tenancy Officers receive appropriate training to recognise domestic abuse, respond safely and sensitively to disclosures, and understand their safeguarding responsibilities. Training will be refreshed at regular intervals. Staff will be supported through access to specialist advice, supervision, and debriefing where required.

8. Communication and Contact Information

8.1 For further information about this policy, please contact the Housing team on email: tenants@southandvale.gov.uk or telephone 01235 422422.

9. Alternative Formats

9.1 Please do not hesitate to contact a member of the Housing team if you would like this policy in an alternative format, via email: tenants@southandvale.gov.uk or telephone 01235 422422.

10. Definitions

10.1 Definitions are as follows:

- DASH: Domestic Abuse, Stalking, and 'Honour'-Based Violence
- MARAC: Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference

11. Change Record

Change Record	
Policy title	Housing Domestic Abuse Policy
Version number	1
Owner(s)	Housing Landlord Team Leader
Author(s)	Housing Delivery Manager
Approved by	ICMD
Approved date	
Effective date	
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