

Domestic Abuse Policy (Customer)

1.0	SCOPE
	Purpose
1.1	This document sets out whg's policy towards supporting customers experiencing Domestic Abuse (DA).
1.2.	The aim of the Policy is to support customers experiencing DA and mitigate the risk of DA to all customers, to assist those who are affected by DA where appropriate.
1.3.	whg takes all forms of DA seriously and is committed to ensuring that customers experiencing DA are provided with a fair, sensitive, and confidential service.
1.4.	<p>whg adopts the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 definition of Domestic Abuse;</p> <p>Behaviour of a person ("A") towards another person ("B") is "domestic abuse" if—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and b) the behaviour is abusive. <p>Behaviour is "abusive" if it consists of any of the following—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) physical or sexual abuse; b) violent or threatening behaviour; c) controlling or coercive behaviour; d) economic abuse; e) psychological, emotional or other abuse; <p>and it does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.</p> <p>"Economic abuse" means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on B's ability to—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or b) obtain goods or services. <p>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).</p>

	<p>Two people are “personally connected” to each other if any of the following applies—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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.
1.5.	<p>Anyone under 16 is defined as a child or a young person. For the purpose of this policy, whg recognises any abuse of a person under 16 to be child abuse and will act in accordance with its Safeguarding Policy. This status and entitlement to services or protection is not changed even if a child or young person is 16 and is living independently.</p>
	Legal and regulatory framework
1.6.	<p>This Policy is designed to comply with whg’s legal and regulatory responsibilities. It aligns with the following legislation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic Abuse Act 2021 • Serious Crime Act 2015 • Protection from Harassment Act 1997 • Sexual Offences Act 2023 <p>whg’s regulatory responsibilities are under the Regulator of Social Housing’s Consumer Standards. The Neighbourhood and Community Standard states:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registered providers must work co-operatively with other agencies tackling DA and enable tenants to access appropriate support and advice. • Registered providers must have a policy for how they recognise and effectively respond to cases of DA. • Registered providers must co-operate with appropriate local authority departments to support the local authority in meeting its duty to develop a strategy and commission services for victims of DA and their children within safe accommodation.
1.7.	<p>whg recognises the benefits of Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy (IDVA) and will always look to signpost customers to their closest IDVA service where appropriate.</p>
2.0	POLICY STATEMENT
	Our Response

2.1	All reports or concerns regarding DA from any whg customer, regardless of tenure, will be managed by the Community Housing Team.
2.2.	whg's action is not dependent on evidence being provided in the form of a crime reference number. This is in accordance with best practice.
2.3.	whg may recognise signs of DA in different ways, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Damage to the property or the customer's belongings, in particular damage to doors and locks • Noise nuisance or anti-social behaviour reports from neighbours • Rent arrears, debt or other financial issues.
2.4.	Customers experiencing DA will receive a confidential and sensitive service. Colleagues will speak to them via telephone, email, via online methods or face to face dependent upon their preference and any potential risk. whg colleagues are willing, when it is safe to do so, to visit customers in their home, or to see them at our office which is open for customers – or any place of their choosing, where they feel safest.
2.5.	Customers will; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • receive advice • be signposted to any relevant partner that may be able to assist further • receive target hardening advice and support • where there is a high risk of further serious harm, be considered for re-housing.
2.6.	whg will work closely with partner agencies to respond to reports of DA, support victims and contribute to initiatives designed to prevent DA. Colleagues will be in regular contact with partners including Local Authorities, the NHS, the Police, the Fire Service and local DA charities and support groups, including any stakeholder providing Independent Domestic Abuse Advocacy services (IDVAs).
2.7.	All discussions with customers will be confidential, but any safeguarding concerns will be reported. whg may also report serious criminal matters and concerns regarding serious future risk (including adult safeguarding) to the Police.
	Target Hardening and Re-housing
2.8.	whg will support victims to remain in their homes, where it is appropriate to do so, by identifying target hardening measures.
2.9.	Target Hardening means reducing or mitigating particular risks of DA. This can involve providing advice to a customer about changing their daily routine, their online security or general crime prevention advice, or it could mean making physical changes to their home, for example adding additional locks, installing CCTV and/or

	window alarms. It can also include cutting back bushes and nearby shrubbery to improve visibility around the property and remove hiding places.
2.10.	The re-housing of victims will be carefully considered if they are at significant risk in their current home. In these cases whg will undertake an assessment of how the risk will be mitigated if re-housing is arranged and a special rehousing case may be granted in line with our Allocations Policy.
2.11.	If someone needs to leave their home because of DA, they can apply for assistance from their local authority under the homelessness provisions in <u>part 7 of the Housing Act 1996</u> ('the 1996 act'). Authorities must follow the definition of DA in section 1 of the <u>Domestic Abuse Act 2021</u> .
2.12.	Someone who is fleeing DA can apply for homelessness assistance to a local authority outside their area. <u>Chapter 21 of the statutory homelessness code of guidance</u> ('the code') says a local authority cannot refer an applicant to another area if the applicant or anyone in their household would be at risk of DA in that area.
2.13.	People who are homeless because of DA have an automatic priority need (section 189(1)(e) of the 1996 act), so local authorities must arrange suitable accommodation for them in certain circumstances, such as while their case is being assessed.
2.14.	In the event that rehousing is agreed, customers will be spoken to in detail about what will be required from whg and the customer in order for the rehousing to increase safety and mitigate the risk of further DA. Failure to follow the advice and guidance provided may result in the customer becoming at risk of DA again despite moving home.
2.15.	Customers who are due to be re-housed because of DA can expect to receive a single offer of rehousing which will ordinarily be a 'like for like' property, (for example, a customer leaving a two bedroom flat will receive an offer for another two bedroom flat).
2.16.	The location of the new property could be any whg property in any area that would adequately mitigate the risk of further DA.
	Partnership Working
2.17.	whg will actively participate in any DA Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) that feature whg customers.
	Perpetrators
2.18.	Known perpetrators of DA who meet the criteria of our Restricted Access Policy will be added to the Restricted Access List.

2.19	Perpetrators who express a desire to change their behaviour will be signposted to available services that are provided by our partners / other agencies. This will not prevent whg from taking any tenancy enforcement action that is deemed to be appropriate.
3.0	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
3.1	whg will securely keep records of all reported cases of DA and monitor the data to identify and record the risk. All records will be held in accordance with our data protection policy.
3.2.	whg will benchmark our performance on dealing with DA against other Registered Providers and implement learning and best practice.
3.3.	whg will periodically undertake compliance audits to check that practice reflects this Policy and relevant operational procedures. whg will implement any recommendations to ensure continued compliance. Training will be delivered to colleagues appropriate to their role.
3.4.	whg will undertake regular casework reviews to ensure we are delivering a consistent and effective approach to DA and customers receive a high quality service.
3.5.	whg will deal with complaints from customers about the quality of our handling of DA matters through our Customer Complaints Procedure.
4.0	EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY
4.1.	Protected characteristics such as disability will always be considered in relation to victims of DA especially with consideration to target hardening and rehousing. Through creating a consistent DA offer, we are not disadvantaging any customers.
5.0	TRAINING AND DISSEMINATION
5.1.	Specialist training is provided to all colleagues that deal with DA. DA awareness and reporting training is delivered to all customer facing colleagues in order to raise awareness of DA and help colleagues to identify signs that DA may be potentially taking place so that they can be investigated.
6.0	MONITOR AND REVIEW
6.1.	This Policy will be monitored by the Director of Housing and Customer Services, reviewed every three years by the Customer and Operations Panel and approved by the Customer Service Oversight Committee.
7.0	ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS, POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

7.1.	<p>Documents, policies and procedures associated with this Policy are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-Social Behaviour Policy • Allocations Policy • Data Protection policy • Safeguarding • Restricted Access Policy • Allocations Policy • Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 • Crime and Disorder Act 1998 • Crime and Policing Act 2014 • Protection from Harassment Act 1997 • Equality Act 2010 • Human Rights Act 1998 • Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (Housing Act 1985 amendment) • Vulnerability Policy

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Document owner	Director of Housing
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