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Domestic Abuse Policy

Policy Title:	Domestic Abuse Policy
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Date of Approval:	29/08/2023
Date for Next Scheduled Review:	August 2026
Review Body:	Board
Equality Impact Assessment Complete:	No
Policy Published on Web:	Yes, on approval
Scottish Social Housing Charter Standard	Outcomes 1, 7, 8, 9



Vision

By providing aspirational homes and high-quality services we will transform communities to enhance the quality of life of our customers.

Values

- ***Customer and Community Focused***
- ***Treating our customers with respect***
- ***Accountable***
- ***Making a difference***
- ***Innovative***
- ***Equal access to services and opportunities for all***

Strategic Objectives

- ***Deliver first class customer services***
- ***Provide quality homes, communities and sustainable tenancies***
- ***Achieve robust financial management and governance excellence***
- ***Empower, develop and engage our staff***
- ***Build strong collaborative relationships locally and nationally***

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This policy sets out how Ardenglen Housing Association (AHA) views domestic abuse, and how we will respond to and seek to deal with any reports of such abuse affecting tenants or members of their households. The term 'abuse' covers violence as well as verbal or other forms of abuse.
- 1.2 AHA believes that domestic abuse presents one of the highest risks to personal safety and is unacceptable. AHA will therefore take the strongest action possible against perpetrators of domestic abuse where it has the power to do so and with the consent of the victim.
- 1.3 AHA will deal with all reports of domestic abuse as an emergency and respond to them as a matter of urgency. Applying a 'survivor centred' approach we will assist the victim to reach a decision which they feel best secures their safety by:
 - reviewing their accommodation,
 - enabling the level of assistance they want, and
 - taking action against the perpetrator which the victim and we feel is most appropriate.

2.0 Definition

- 2.1 AHA will use the Scottish Government definition of domestic abuse, which is:

Domestic abuse (as gender-based abuse), can be perpetrated by partners or ex-partners and can include physical abuse (assault and physical attack involving a range of behaviour), sexual abuse (acts which degrade and humiliate women and are perpetrated against their will, including rape) and mental and emotional abuse (such as threats, verbal abuse, racial abuse, withholding money and other types of controlling behaviour such as isolation from family or friends)

Source: National Strategy to Address Domestic Abuse in Scotland, Scottish Partnership on Domestic Abuse, Edinburgh, November 2000

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 pattern of acts of assaults, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish or frighten the victim. Financial abuse is also an aspect of 'coercive control' – a pattern of controlling, threatening and degrading behaviour that restricts a victims' freedom

2.2 Domestic violence and abuse can manifest itself through the actions of immediate and extended family members via unlawful activities, such as forced marriage, 'honour based abuse' and female genital mutilation. Extended family members may condone or even share in the pattern of abuse. Any such actions are not acceptable, whatever form they take.

3.0 Aim of the policy

3.1 By adopting this policy, AHA aims to:

- improve overall safety and wellbeing by recognising that domestic abuse is a serious crime which has an adverse impact on the health of individuals, families and communities;
- increase awareness and understanding of this issue amongst residents and employees;
- encourage residents and employees to report domestic abuse;
- facilitate early identification of domestic abuse and offer supportive and effective intervention to reduce the risk of harm;
- improve the safety and welfare of adults and children affected by domestic abuse and prevent further incidents by responding rapidly, effectively and consistently to all reports;
- empower victims by providing information on the options available to them;
- improve the response to victims through effective engagement of appropriate external enforcement and support agencies;
- create a consistent approach for recording and monitoring incidents of domestic abuse;
- inform colleagues of best practice when responding to domestic abuse;

4.0 Equality and diversity

4.1 AHA will ensure that any action taken under this policy complies with our Equality & Diversity policy.

5.0 Responsibilities

5.1 Board of Management

- To ensure that AHA has approved and implemented a policy on domestic violence and abuse that complies with current regulations and guidance.

5.2 Management

- Chief Executive: To ensure all employees and Board Members are aware of the policy and their responsibilities under it.
- Line Managers: To ensure that relevant employees are fully aware of their responsibilities under the policy, in particular of the importance of reporting any incidents or pattern they become aware of.

5.3 Employees

- **Corporate Team:** To co-ordinate the provision of any training required to enable employees to recognise and respond to incidents of domestic violence or abuse.

- **Customer Services staff:** To ensure that domestic abuse helpline and support services are advertised in the reception area and public toilet. Regular feature to be included in Ardenglen news promoting this policy to customers

6.0 Our approach

6.1 AHA encourages all tenants and household members to report domestic abuse to AHA, whether they are victims of, or witnesses to, such incidents. We will deal with all reports of domestic abuse with sensitivity and as an emergency by responding within 24 hours.

6.2 As part of our arrangements to prevent domestic abuse we will:

- At tenancy sign up we will make all new tenants aware that domestic abuse constitutes a breach of tenancy and if convicted could result in legal proceedings to recover the tenancy
- Promote AHA policies relating to rehousing, relationship breakdown and where applicable the implications of joint tenancies;
- publicise this domestic abuse policy to all tenants and employees, highlighting the consequences for perpetrators;
- provide advice and information privately within AHA office.
- Developing customer service systems that do not require women to disclose or discuss the reason for their visit in public areas (“ask for Ani” code phrase has been adopted)
- Offering the option of seeing a female or male member of staff
- Developing secure information-sharing and confidentiality protocols

6.3 AHA will adopt a ‘survivor-centred’ approach in dealing with domestic abuse, i.e. if a person feels they are experiencing domestic abuse we will deal with it under this policy.

6.4 AHA will deal with all reports in a non-judgemental manner and in confidence. We will not require victims to take legal action or to contact the Police before we provide assistance.

6.5 AHA will only take action with the victim’s consent. The exception to this general rule is where we consider a child is at risk in any situation or if there is a high risk of serious harm to anyone involved. Where a person is identified as the victim of domestic abuse, any interaction with them will be guided by best practice guidelines.

7.0 Confidentiality

7.1 Victims will be encouraged to allow AHA to share information with other agencies, including the Police and local authority departments, to ensure that the full range of civil and criminal action can be pursued and appropriate assistance provided. However all information provided by the victim will be treated with the utmost confidence and only passed to external agencies with their proper, informed consent.

7.2 The exceptions to this will be:

- where we consider a child is at risk in any situation, or
- if there is a high risk of serious harm to anyone involved, or
- if we are obliged by law to disclose information.

7.3 Where required information will be shared with work colleagues in confidence. We will adhere to all current data protection requirements.

8.0 Options for action

8.1 AHA Ltd. recognises that every reported case of domestic abuse will be different. Our response will therefore be tailored to the individual circumstances and needs of the victim. When a tenant or household member reports domestic abuse all available options will be discussed and considered with them, including:

- making arrangements for their immediate personal safety;
- Support victims to transfer tenancies into their names, if they wish to remain in the home
- reviewing and where possible improving the safety and security of their existing accommodation, to enable them to remain there safely;
- helping them to access support from local Women's Aid Services;
- helping them to access legal advice
- Seek assistance from other landlords to source a planned move to avoid homelessness where possible
- referral to Glasgow City Council Homeless Services;
- reporting incidents to the Police, which may result in criminal action against the perpetrator;
- where appropriate, legal action against the perpetrator by AHA.

8.2 The safety of the victim and their dependents will be our priority. An Action Plan setting out further actions will be agreed with the victim, and we will regularly contact the victim and keep them updated with progress.

Remaining in the property

8.3 AHA will advise victims who wish to remain in their own homes of any local 'sanctuary' schemes (i.e. funds available to improve the security of their existing accommodation). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sanctuary-schemes-for-households-at-risk-of-domestic-violence-guide-for-agencies>. We will also consider funding such improvements where there are no local authority sanctuary schemes in place.

8.4 AHA will offer assistance to those experiencing domestic abuse by not recharging them for lock changes and damages due to the domestic abuse. Where appropriate we will charge such costs to the perpetrator.

Emergency rehousing

8.5 Where a resident reporting domestic abuse needs emergency accommodation AHA will provide advice and assistance on accessing such accommodation provided by Glasgow City Council or by other external agencies.

Permanent rehousing

8.6 Where an AHA tenant or household member reporting domestic abuse requests permanent rehousing, AHA will consider their application and award 'harassment' points or if required

manage as an 'emergency case' within our allocations policy. In such cases the suspension policy will not be applicable and we will review and determine the action to be taken on a case by case basis. There will normally be a limit on the number of occasions we will offer a move under 'emergency case', typically it will only be offered once. However, this will be reviewed on a case by case basis with the safety of the victim being paramount.

- 8.7 Where there is no suitable AHA housing available, or the re-housing requires to be out of the area we will work with Glasgow City Council to access alternative accommodation.

Multi-agency approach

- 8.8 AHA will adopt a multi-agency approach in dealing with victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse, to ensure the safety of the victims, meet their needs, co-ordinate available resources, access specialist services, take action against perpetrators and share best practice.

Action against perpetrators

- 8.9 AHA will work with the Police and other external agencies in dealing with perpetrators of domestic abuse. Action against perpetrators will depend upon individual circumstances. This may include legal action for recovery of possession against a perpetrator as per section 6.3 of the tenancy agreement (convicted of a criminal offence). AHA staff may discuss housing options with the perpetrator if appropriate.
- 8.10 Subject to data protection requirements, we will share information with other relevant agencies so that serial perpetrators are identified and dealt with appropriately.

9.0 GDPR

- 9.1 We will treat all personal data in line with our obligations under the current data protection regulations and our Privacy Policy. Information regarding how all data will be used and the basis for processing your data is provided in our fair processing notice which you can find on our website.

10.0 Review

- 10.1 The director of customer services will ensure that this policy is reviewed-by the board every 3 years or sooner if legislative changes need to be taken into account.