



Wythenshawe Community Housing Group (WCHG) Domestic Abuse Policy

Policy Name:	Domestic Abuse Policy
Status:	Version 3
Approved by:	
Drafted by:	Simon Melloy, Senior Housing Manager
Date approved:	12 th September 2019
Date effective from:	September 2019
E&D impact assessed:	July 2019
Customer consultation:	July 2019 – LPP and Housing Panel consultation group. August 2019 – Tenant Committee
Next Review Date:	September 2022

1. Statement and Background

- 1.1 Wythenshawe Community Housing Group (WCHG) endorses the right of members of our community to be treated with respect and dignity and takes a zero tolerance approach to domestic abuse.
- 1.2 WCHG is committed to contributing towards the safety, stability and sustainability of our community by treating domestic abuse as a crime which is not acceptable and is detrimental to the physical and mental wellbeing of victims, their families and communities.
- 1.3 WCHG also recognises that not all cases of domestic abuse are reported and that there are a number of reasons for this. We will work with other partner agencies to ensure all sections of the community feel confident in reporting issues to us

2. Scope

- 2.1 This policy sets out how WCHG works in partnership with other agencies to deal with issues of domestic abuse and applies to all Assured and Assured Shorthold tenants of WCHG.

3. Definition

- 3.1 WCHG adopts the Home Office definition of domestic violence and abuse which 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 trans status¹. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to, psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional abuse”

- 3.2 Controlling behaviour is a range of acts 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.
- 3.3 Coercive behaviour is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish or frighten the victim. This is not a legal definition.
- 3.4 The definition also includes so-called honour-based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage.
- 3.5 Examples of domestic abuse can include but are not limited to:
 - Physical abuse – punching, slapping, hitting, stabbing and attempted murder

- Verbal abuse – name calling, humiliation, degradation, accusing, verbally threatening
- Sexual violence – using force, threats or intimidation to make a victim perform sexual acts, rape and non consensual acts of sex
- Financial abuse – controlling money and bank accounts, running up debts in a victim’s name, allowing no say on how money is spent
- Psychological and emotional abuse – creating isolation, checking up on people, using physical size to intimidate, humiliating and undermining behaviour

3.6 In accordance with this policy, WCHG acknowledge that:

- Whilst men will sometimes be the victims of domestic abuse, in the majority of cases, men against women and children perpetrate violence.
- Violence can take place in same sex partnerships and includes lesbians and gay men within the scope of this policy.
- Domestic abuse can be perpetrated in different types of relationship e.g. elderly relatives.
- Direct and indirect harm is suffered by the children connected to relationships where domestic abuse occurs.
- Child and adult child to parent violence and abuse is a form of domestic abuse.
- Due to the high prevalence of domestic abuse across society, it is inevitable that some staff members will experience domestic abuse.
- Domestic abuse includes “Honour Based” violence, which is a crime or incident that has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of the family and/or community.
- “Honour based” violence can include forced marriages, where a marriage is conducted without the valid consent of one or both parties and where duress is a factor.
- Domestic abuse occurs in all ages, classes and communities and that some victims face additional barriers and discrimination when trying to access services such as:
 - Women with children;
 - Women with disabilities or mothers of children with disabilities;
 - Lesbians;
 - Women who are black or from other minority groups;
 - Women;
 - People undergoing gender transition;
 - People with insecure immigration status.

4. Policy Statement

- 4.1 WCHG recognises the serious and widespread nature of domestic abuse and will use a flexible approach in responding to incidents of domestic abuse to take into account the varying circumstances of victims of domestic abuse and the different courses of action that may be available and appropriate.
- 4.2 WCHG will use the available legal remedies and work with the police and other statutory agencies to support those who are experiencing domestic abuse and work towards achieving a satisfactory outcome for victims and their families.
- 4.3 WCHG places great emphasis on multi agency and partnership working and agrees to participate in Information Sharing Protocols with other agencies. The welfare and safety of victims and any children involved will form the basis of the action taken by WCHG and any action taken must and will have the consent of the victim

5. Policy

- 5.1 WCHG will adopt a victim centred approach and treat victims sensitively and respectfully at all times.
- 5.2 We will do this by:
- Offering a wide range of measures to support victims which include out of hours support, victim and witness support, home-link alarms, target hardening and CCTV cameras.
 - Fitting a sanctuary room to a property, where appropriate, to protect victims and make them feel safe in their own home.
 - Sign posting and referring victims to support services such as the GP based IRIS project, Wythenshawe Safespots, Women's Aid and Manchester City Councils, Independent Domestic Violence Advisory Service (IDVA).
 - Using without notice applications for injunctions to protect victims and witnesses in every situation where threats of violence are made by identifiable perpetrators.
 - Supporting and assisting victims where necessary when making applications for Occupation Orders and Non-molestation Orders under the Family Law Act 1996. WCHG will also consider funding such applications should the victim have no recourse to public funding.
 - Fully supporting victims who wish to be re-housed away from the property and/or require temporary accommodation. We will only support a move 3 miles away from the victim's current property.

- Providing resettlement and support packages to victims forced to leave their home. This will include where appropriate white goods, furniture packages, and carpets.
- Referring high-risk cases into and attending Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC). WCHG will play an active part in the MARAC process and complete any actions assigned to it by the MARAC.
- Following the relevant child protection/safeguarding procedures if we believe a child is at risk due to an abusive relationship
- Following the relevant adult safeguarding procedures if we believe an adult is at risk due to an abusive relationship
- Sharing information about domestic abuse with the police and other agencies through its data exchange protocol in order to identify perpetrators, offer support and assistance and monitor incidents.
- Encouraging the reporting of domestic abuse by publicising the support available to victims and the actions WCHG will take against perpetrators.
- Supporting perpetrators who want to change their behaviour and who have demonstrated self-awareness and insight into what they have done. We will give them the opportunity to explore and change their behaviour.
- Continuing to work with other Registered Providers, Manchester City Council and other partner agencies across the City in the “Domestic Abuse Forum” in order to share experiences and develop good practice.
- Offering victims of domestic abuse an interview in a safe place of their choice, with a same sex member of staff and/or the use of a Language Line interpreter where necessary
- Keeping all information confidential and only passing it on to other agencies with the permission of the victim or where required to by law or where necessary for the protection of children and vulnerable adults.
- Ensuring staff are trained, resourced and supported to enable them to identify and respond to acts of domestic abuse. The training will be ongoing and will take into account best practice and changes in legislation
- Raising awareness of domestic abuse amongst our managers and staff to create a working environment that fully supports those staff members experiencing domestic abuse.
- Developing new types of public campaigns with our communities and partners to target all those groups of people affected by domestic abuse and promote access to services.

- Ensuring tenants and residents are kept fully informed about action taken to tackle domestic abuse and publicise successful outcomes.

6. Confidentiality Issues

- 6.1 Information will only be shared with other agencies and for taking enforcement action against the perpetrator with the permission of the victim. Where there are safeguarding concerns regarding children or vulnerable adults and a crime has been committed, WCHG will provide relevant information to the appropriate agencies.
- 6.2 Domestic abuse cases are particularly sensitive and confidentiality is important, officers should be aware at all times that, perpetrators may try to impersonate people in authority or from agencies to try to obtain information about the victim.
- 6.3 All information received is recorded on a secure Case Management IT system, and sensitive information is restricted to relevant staff.

7. Service Standards – Local Offer

- 7.1 In line with the local offer document, we will:
- Investigate all reported cases of domestic abuse within our agreed timescales. Advise complainants of the steps we can take and what they can expect to happen next;
 - Meet with anyone subjected to domestic abuse within 24 hours;
 - Treat all information in confidence unless you agree otherwise;
 - Provide an out of hours' service for emergency incidents;
 - Use a variety of different methods to tackle domestic abuse including legal actions and preventive measures depending on what is required;
 - Offer confidential non-judgemental support and advice for victims of domestic abuse.

8. Responsibility

- 8.1 The Executive Director of Housing shall be responsible for the implementation and review of this policy.

9. Consultation, Monitoring and Review

- 9.1 WCHG will consult with all the relevant key stakeholders, including tenants, staff and other residents and key partners on all our policies to improve their effectiveness.
- 9.2 WCHG will seek feedback from customers and carry out regular monitoring and reviews of all reported cases of domestic abuse, including the numbers, progress and outcomes of cases.
- 9.3 The Domestic Abuse Policy will be reviewed every three years by Board.

10. Statutory and Legislative Framework

10.1 WCHG recognises its duty to comply with current legislation and will operate this policy in accordance with the current statutory framework.

10.2 Legislation relating to this policy is:

- Housing Act 1996
- The Family Law Act 1996
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Domestic Violence, Crime & Victims Act 2004
- Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007
- The Care Act 2014
- Anti-social behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014
- Equality Act 2010
- Data Protection Act 2018

11. Equality & Diversity

11.1 WCHG will ensure that the Domestic Abuse Policy and procedure is accessible to its diverse customers and will take into account the different needs of our customers when considering action.

11.2 WCHG recognises that customers of all races, ages, religions, gender, sexual orientation, literacy levels and disability should be treated equally and fairly.

11.3 WCHG recognises that domestic abuse cases may be complicated by virtue of a person's individual need and that we will provide a tailored response to reports of domestic abuse according to individual circumstances.

11.4 WCHG will provide support to residents who have difficulty in managing their tenancy due to mental health issues, learning disabilities, physical disabilities, special needs or old age.

11.5 WCHG will also provide support to vulnerable groups like young people, ex-offenders and those using drugs and/or alcohol.

11.6 WCHG will provide information in languages other than English, in Braille, Large Print and Audiotape. Our receptions and interview rooms are fitted with a hearing loop system.

12. Associated Policies

- Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- Safeguarding Policy
- Equality & Diversity Policy
- Allocations Policy
- Data Protection Policy