

Scope of Policy

Purpose

Soha Housing is committed to providing vibrant, sustainable and resilient communities and we recognise that domestic abuse is a serious issue that can have a devastating impact on its victims, and those around them.

This policy is aimed at our residents, the wider community, and our agency partners.

Scope

This policy outlines our approach to assisting and supporting any person experiencing domestic abuse and Soha acknowledges that anyone can be a victim of domestic abuse regardless of age, gender, religion, ethnicity and sexuality.

We also recognise that our own employees may be experiencing domestic abuse and are committed to supporting them in any way that we can. This is addressed in our Employee Domestic Abuse Policy and Procedure.

This policy should be considered in conjunction with our procedures which support our approach.

Policy Statement

We are committed to supporting any person who is experiencing domestic abuse and will work closely with our partner agencies to ensure that the appropriate safeguards are put in place and that the victim's rights and wishes are respected.

We recognise that the safety of the victim(s) and their family is paramount, and we will do all we can to ensure that they are protected.

Aims

We believe that our residents should not live in fear of violence, abuse or harassment from a partner, former partner, or any member of their household or family.

Anyone reporting domestic abuse to us will be treated in a supportive and non-judgemental way. All disclosures of abuse will be taken seriously, and advice and support will be provided.

We will work with statutory and voluntary organisations to support victims and to take action against perpetrators (where this is safe and appropriate to do so).

Implementation

We will:

- Ensure that anyone experiencing domestic abuse can access appropriate support
- Ensure that our staff are trained to deal with disclosures of domestic abuse effectively
- Support people who are experiencing abuse, or have experienced abuse, by working in partnership with them and other support agencies
- Provide options to victims so that they are empowered to make their own decisions about what they would like to happen next, and can make informed choices
- Encourage victims to report domestic abuse and reassure them that they will be supported
- Consider the impact of domestic abuse on children and young people and ensure that they have access to services as soon as possible

- Signpost and support victims to access help with the use of civil and criminal laws, to offer them protection and to prevent further abuse.
- Make appropriate safeguarding referrals if we believe that a child is a victim, through seeing, hearing or directly experiencing any form of abuse.
- Signpost perpetrators of domestic abuse to agencies that can offer them support and interventions to try and prevent a reoccurrence of abuse.
- Support victims to make decisions around their housing needs, whether they wish to remain in their home or to move to a new home.
- Recognise that domestic abuse is a gendered crime and support the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) agenda.
- Support black and minoritised people and those with protected characteristics to access information and support.

Definition of ‘Domestic Abuse’

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 legally defines domestic abuse to include not just physical violence but also emotional, coercive, and economic abuse.

(1) This section defines ‘domestic abuse’ for the purposes of this Act.

(2) 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.

(3) 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.

(4) ‘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.

(5) For the purposes of this Act, 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).

(6) References in this Act to being abusive towards another person are to be read in accordance with this section.

Section 2: Definition of ‘personally connected’

(1) Two people are ‘personally connected’ to each other if any of the following applies:

- (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

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1) (f) a person has a parental relationship in relation to a child if:

- (a) the person is a parent of the child, or
- (b) the person has parental responsibility for the child.

(3) In this section:

‘child’ means a person under the age of 18 years

‘civil partnership agreement’ has the meaning given by section 73 of the Civil Partnership Act 2004

‘parental responsibility’ has the same meaning as in the Children Act 1989

‘relative’ has the meaning given by section 63 (1) of the Family Law Act 1996.

Section 3: Children as victims of domestic abuse

This section applies where behaviour of a person (‘A’) towards another person (‘B’) is domestic abuse.

Any reference in this Act to a victim of domestic abuse includes a reference to a child who:

- (a) sees or hears, or experiences the effect of, the abuse, and
- (b) is related to A or B

A child is related to a person for the purposes of subsection (2) if:

- (a) the person is a parent of, or has parental responsibility for, the child, or
- (b) the child and the person are relatives

In this section:

‘child’ means person under the age of 18 years

‘parental responsibility’ has the same meaning as in the Children Act 1989 (see section 3 of that Act)

‘relative’ has the meaning given by section 63 (1) of the Family Law Act 1996.

Definitions of abuse (See Appendix A for definition examples)

Domestic abuse can take many forms and includes, but is not limited to:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Technological abuse
- Emotional or psychological abuse
- Family and intergenerational abuse
- Economic abuse
- Coercive and controlling behaviour
- So-called honour-based violence and abuse

Housing Needs for Victims

A person experiencing domestic abuse may be able to remain in their own home if it is safe to do so. However, there may be occasions where temporary accommodation is required while safety measures are being put in place.

Soha aims to support victims by:

- providing short-term temporary use of accommodation, such as a guest room or vacant bedsits, where available, for those needing a 'place of safety'.
- providing a specific "urgent" classification on Soha's management transfer scheme for those at high risk of abuse or violence.
- Support (in South & Vale areas) to achieve Band 1 automatically when Soha applies an Urgent classification.
- We will check the tenancy status of the victim and perpetrator to identify whether tenancies are held jointly or solely. Independent legal advice may be required where victims and perpetrators hold a joint tenancy, or where a tenancy is held in a perpetrator's sole name.
- We will consider all options where the need for a temporary or permanent move is required and will liaise with the local authority if accommodation cannot be secured straight away within Soha housing's own stock.

Target Hardening

- Soha operates a 'Sanctuary' scheme by working with partner agencies to improve the security and safety at a property to support the victim to remain in their home.

Action against Domestic Abuse

Every case of domestic abuse is different and will be handled differently according to the wishes and needs of the victim, the severity of abuse and any additional criminality.

Domestic abuse is a breach of Soha Housing's Tenancy agreement and we will make use of the relevant and proportionate tools and powers available to us to sanction perpetrators of domestic abuse, including the use of injunctions, Notice of seeking possession and possession proceedings.

We will also work closely with partner agencies and where possible, support those agencies to obtain orders to reduce domestic abuse.

It is important to remember that not every victim will want to end the relationship they have with the perpetrator, or want us to take enforcement action. Where this is the case, our focus will be to help manage risk and provide victims with information on the options and support available to them when they are ready to take it.

Perpetrator Management

As part of our involvement with the Community Safety Partnership, and our holistic approach to domestic abuse, Soha will work to promote perpetrator programmes to prevent further abuse.

Training, awareness and support

Soha staff receive regular, job specific training on domestic abuse and safeguarding, including how to identify the signs of abuse and how to appropriately deal with a disclosure.

We have incorporated triggers into our processes to ensure that the Community Neighbourhood team are notified when suspicion of abuse arises from a call, home visit, repair or noise complaint.

We aim to offer victim's a single point of contact and the ability to have a 'safe word' on their account following a disclosure of domestic abuse.

We will also support any member of staff who has been adversely affected by dealing with any incidents of domestic abuse as part of our approach to staff wellbeing.

Domestic Abuse Champions

Soha has staff who have been trained as Domestic Abuse Champions and who are part of a network of people who have received specialist training to recognise and support people experiencing domestic abuse to safety, and provide guidance and support to colleagues concerned

about domestic abuse among residents.

CIH Domestic Abuse Pledge

Soha are signed up to the Chartered Institute of Housing' "Make a Stand" pledge which aims to tackle domestic abuse.

The pledge:

By signing up to the Make a Stand pledge you are committing to make sure your organisation does the following:

1. Put in place and embed a policy to support residents who are affected by domestic abuse.
2. Make information about national and local domestic abuse support services available on your website and in other appropriate places so that they are easily accessible for residents and staff.
3. Put in place a HR policy, or amend an existing policy, to support members of staff who may be experiencing domestic abuse.
4. Appoint a champion at a senior level in your organisation to own the activity you are doing to support people experiencing domestic abuse.

Partnerships

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)

Soha staff regularly attend MARAC, which is a confidential, multi-agency meeting where professionals from different organisations come together to discuss high risk cases of domestic abuse. The meeting is attended by police, housing, social services, health professionals, probation, domestic abuse specialists, and other relevant organisations. Each agency commits to specific actions to reduce risk and ensure that appropriate measures are in place to protect the victim.

Multi-Agency Tasking and Coordinating (MATAC)

Soha staff regularly attend MATAC meetings, which discusses couples and families, including repeat perpetrators or victims, who are deemed to be of medium risk. These are attended by multi-agencies such as police, housing, local authority and specialist support agencies. Dedicated officers carry out interventions and support all parties with the aim of breaking the cycle of abuse and the abusive behaviour.

Confidentiality

The Data Protection Act 2018 governs the sharing of personal and sensitive information with police, local authority and other partners. While Soha will respect privacy and confidentiality, preventing, and investigating domestic abuse requires the ability to exchange information with statutory and non-statutory agencies.

A disclosure of domestic abuse will be treated in strict confidence unless we have a duty to disclose information in order to protect the victim, prevent harm to another person, or prevent or detect a crime.

Resident Involvement

Soha is committed to involving and consulting residents and will provide opportunities for them to review the Domestic Abuse Policy. Soha will review this policy with Portfolio Holders and will report monitoring information to the Members Forum.

Responsibility

The Director of Housing & Communities is responsible for the implementation and review of this policy. The operational day to day delivery of this policy is the responsibility of the Head of Localities.

All Soha Housing employees are responsible for reading and familiarising themselves with this policy and the associated procedure.

Monitoring and review

The number of domestic abuse cases reported to Soha is monitored on a quarterly basis and specific cases are reviewed monthly as part of our case management review process.

Our Domestic Abuse Procedure provides staff with guidance on how to deal with reports or disclosures of domestic abuse.

This policy will be reviewed every three years, or more frequently in the event of a change in legislation.

Context

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following associated policies:

- SP19 Safeguarding Policy
- SP21 Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- Domestic Abuse Act 2021; The Crime & Disorder Act 1998;
- Serious Crime Act 2015
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Family Law Act 1996
- Children Act 1989
- Housing Act 1988, 1996
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Domestic Violence, Crime & Victims Act 2004
- Police & Justice Act 2006
- Equality Act 2010
- Protection of Freedoms Act 2012
- Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime & Policing Act 2014
- Clare's Law/Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS)
- Stalking Protection Act 2019

Members' Forum Approved	N/A	SLT Approved	19 February 2025
EIA Completed (date)	13 th February 2025	Review Due Date	By February 2028
DPIA Checklist Completed (date)			

APPENDIX A

Definition Examples

Physical abuse

Physical abuse can include: hitting, punching, kicking, slapping, hitting with objects, pulling hair, pushing or shoving, cutting or stabbing, restraining, strangulation, choking.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse can include: • rape and coerced sex • forcing a victim to take part in unwanted sexual acts • refusal to practice safe sex or use contraception • threatened or actual sexual abuse of children.

Technological abuse

Perpetrators can use technology or social media as a means of controlling or coercing victims. This could include: • using social media to harass the victim • controlling emails or social media accounts • use of spyware such as tracking apps or hidden cameras • using home assistants such as Alexa or Google Home to monitor someone's movements.

Economic abuse

Economic abuse can include: • controlling money and bank accounts • making a victim account for all of their expenditure • running up debts in the victim's name • allowing the victim, no say on how their monies are spent • refusing to allow them to work.

Psychological and emotional abuse

Psychological and emotional abuse can have a profound impact on victims. It can leave them with little confidence that they can do anything to change their situation, or that they are powerless to take any action to improve their lives, or the lives of their children. Examples include: • Isolating the victim – not allowing them to see their friends or family, or to go anywhere on their own • Using threats – threats to kill their family, children, friends, or pets, or to find them if they were ever to try and leave • Putting them down – humiliating, embarrassing or undermining them in front of others, telling them that they are stupid and that no one would believe them if they tried to tell people what was happening, or that they are a bad parent.

Family and intergenerational abuse

Domestic abuse approaches historically have had an emphasis on partner violence. More focus is now being given to family and intergenerational abuse, and the way in which it may be different from partner violence; for instance, if the perpetrator is the victim's (adult) sibling, child or grandchild. Abuse of an adult or a child may also be used by a perpetrator to exercise control over their victim.

Coercive and controlling behaviour

Controlling and coercive behaviour is defined by Section 77 of the Serious Crime Act 2015, as: • a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources 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 a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim. This could include: • Controlling who they see, or what they wear • Controlling their medication, or preventing them from seeing medical professionals such as doctors or dentists • Isolating them from friends, family or other means of support • emotional or psychological abuse • economic abuse.

So-called honour-based violence and abuse

So-called honour-based abuse includes offences that may have been committed to protect the perceived honour of a family or a community and can incorporate many of the types of abuse detailed above. It is often carried out by family members, but victims can also come under pressure from the wider community who will seek to support the family in their actions. So-called honour-based violence and abuse can also include: • forced marriage • female genital mutilation.

APPENDIX B

USEFUL CONTACTS

Police: If you, or someone you know is in danger, please call **999**. For non-emergency situations, you can contact the police at **101**. Remember, support is available, and you are not alone
thamesvalley.police.uk

National Domestic Abuse Helpline (Refuge): Provides confidential support and information to women experiencing domestic violence.

- Helpline: 0808 2000 247 (24/7)
- Website: www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk

Respect: Men's Advice Line - 0808 8010 327. Mon–Fri 10am-5pm

Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Services (ODAS): Offers emotional support and practical information for adults affected by domestic abuse.

- Helpline: 0800 731 0055 (Monday to Friday, 10:00 AM – 7:00 PM)

Reducing the Risk: Provides support for individuals at high risk of significant harm due to abuse.

- Website: reducingtherisk.org.uk:

Sanctuary Scheme (Oxford City Council): A free service enabling victims/survivors to safely remain in their own homes after their partner has left.

- Phone: 01865 252969
- Email: saferoxford@oxford.gov.uk
- Website: oxford.gov.uk

Women's Aid: Offers a directory of local, regional, and national services specializing in violence against women and girls, including domestic abuse.

- Website: womensaid.org.uk

National Centre for Domestic Violence: Provides free legal support for survivors of domestic abuse.

- Website: osab.co.uk

Victims First: Offers free emotional and practical support to anyone who has experienced domestic abuse, including children and young people who have witnessed abuse.

- Phone: 0300 1234 148
- Website:

LGBTQ+ Oxfordshire – Oxford Friend

- Provides support for LGBTQ+ people facing domestic abuse and other issues.
- Helpline: 01865 726 893
- Website: oxfordfriend.co.uk

GALOP: National LGBTQ+ Helpline - 0800 999 5428. Monday – Thursday, 9:30am – 8pm; Friday 9:30am – 4:30pm