

Plus Dane Housing

Domestic Abuse Policy

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1. Policy Statement

Domestic abuse is a criminal offence and a breach of our tenancy agreement. Often taking place in the home, domestic abuse impacts the safety of individual customers, members of their household, and can affect our wider communities. This policy sets out how we will deal with cases, the action we can take against perpetrators, and how we support customers and members of their household who experience domestic abuse. Through the policy, and associated procedure, we define those impacted as victims. This policy also outlines how we will deliver our strategic objective to meet our regulatory requirements. We use the definition of Domestic Abuse as set out in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. This and other definitions are detailed in our Domestic Abuse Procedure.

Our approach is that we will:

- Not tolerate domestic abuse.
- Always offer support to victims.
- Treat any report as a priority.
- Be sensitive and listen.
- Not put victims at further risk.
- Treat anything reported confidentially.
- Deliver the service outcomes in relation to the Regulator of Social Housing Consumer Standards Code of Practice on Domestic Abuse.

2. Policy Aims

The aims and objectives of this policy are to:

- Provide colleagues with adequate guidance and skills to ensure we support and protect, inform, and empower victims of domestic abuse, ensuring reports of domestic abuse are dealt with as a priority.
- Work collaboratively with partner agencies to reduce risk and enhance the safety of the victims.
- Work with those experiencing domestic abuse irrespective of age, gender, sexuality, disability, ethnicity, religion, social background, or any other characteristics identified in the Equality Act 2010.
- Seek to improve our response to dealing with domestic abuse through feedback from customers and other agencies.
- Support the relevant local authority in meeting its duty in respect of domestic abuse.

3. Definitions

The following definitions are used within this policy:

- **Victim:** A customer with lived experience of domestic abuse who is still experiencing or recovering from the harm that has come to them.

- **Survivor:** A customer with lived experience of domestic abuse who has gone through the recovery process.
- **Perpetrator:** The abuser.

3.1 What is Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse can take various forms and is rarely a one-off incident. It can consist of but is not limited to:

- **Murder/Domestic homicide**
- **Physical abuse**
- **Psychological and emotional abuse:** Any behaviour that elicits fear or neglect, such as threats of harm, abandonment, humiliation, ridicule, verbal or racial abuse.
- **Sexual abuse:** Inappropriate or unwanted touching, rape, incest, or forcing people to watch or do things they do not want to; pornography, prostitution, or trafficking.
- **Economic and financial abuse:** Controlling or preventing reasonable access to finances, misuse and/or withholding income or possessions, dowry-related abuse.
- **Honour-based violence (including forced marriages):** Committed to protect or defend the honour of a family and/or community where an abuser believes that a relative has shamed the family/community by breaking an honour code.
- **Coercive behaviour:** Patterns of acts of assaults, threats, humiliation, and intimidation used to harm or punish a person.
- **Controlling behaviour:** Acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from support or depriving them of independence.
- **Neglect:** Denying access to support agencies, medication, food, dignity and privacy, inadequate heating, or light.
- **Adolescent to Parent Abuse:** Carried out by a young person to control and dominate their parent, aiming to cause fear and intimidation.

4. Key Legislation

The relevant legislation relating to this policy includes:

- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Equality Act 2010
- Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014
- Care Act 2014
- Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) 2014 (also known as Clare's Law)
- Serious Crime Act 2015
- General Data Protection Regulation 2018

- Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- Family Law Act 1996

5. Related Policies

The relevant Plus Dane policies that relate to this policy include:

- Lettings Policy
- Safeguarding Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- ASB Policy
- Complaints Policy
- Repairs and Maintenance Policy
- Tenancy Management Procedure

6. Links to Corporate Plan

Strategic Objective of Customer Experience - This policy will help create, with current and future customers, an experience where customers feel they are listened to, empowered, and treated fairly through good quality communication.

7. Our Approach

Dealing with Reports of Domestic Abuse

We will attempt to respond to a report of domestic abuse within one working day.

- We will listen to the victim and show empathy.
- We will provide additional property security measures in discussion with the victim.
- It is not expected that colleagues will fulfil the counselling role of specialist agencies but will be able to offer sympathetic advice and assistance and where necessary signpost to specialist services.

8. Assessing Risk

Effective prevention of further domestic abuse often requires successful multi-agency partnership working (e.g., with the police or social services and Domestic Abuse services). Where this is the case, we will risk assess the reported abuse and then work with specialist external agencies to find a solution for the person.

9. Joint Tenancies

When supporting those in a joint tenancy, we will provide accurate and clear advice to both parties, where appropriate, and we will comply with legislation around GDPR (see 17. Confidentiality).

10. Support for Colleagues Reporting Domestic Abuse

There may be circumstances where we become aware of Plus Dane colleagues being the victims of domestic abuse. We will support colleagues confidentially through our People Team, signposting to services as appropriate. While we may consult with our Community Safety Team in terms of knowledge, we will deal with cases anonymously in every instance.

11. Reporting Incidents to Partner Agencies

We will encourage victims of domestic abuse to allow us to share information with other agencies to reduce risk and where appropriate.

12. Working in Partnership

We recognise that we cannot work in isolation, and we will therefore seek to work in partnership with other agencies to ensure that the best possible individual and family support is developed, delivered, and evaluated. Some partners that we work with include but are not limited to:

Police: We will share information with the Police to assist with risk assessing victims. When appropriate, we will work with Police who have the powers to obtain:

- Domestic Violence Protection Notices
- Domestic Violence Protection Orders
- Criminal proceedings and bail conditions

MARAC: We will participate in the multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) process to formulate action plans to provide an effective response for the victim.

MAPPA: We will liaise with the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangement (MAPPA) where the local referral requirements are met, where we have serious concerns, or if MAPPA informs us about the matter.

In addition, we work with the voluntary and third sector, including:

- Community Safety Partnerships
- Cheshire Whole Housing Approach Standing Together
- Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA)
- Social Services
- Schools
- Victim Support
- Women's Aid
- Worst Kept Secret
- Mankind
- LGBT Foundation

13. Managing Cases

Our primary concern is the safety of the victim and any other household members affected by abuse. In England and Wales, the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 recognises children as victims of domestic abuse if they “see, hear or otherwise experience the effects of abuse.” Where there are statutory safeguarding concerns, we will make a referral to the Local Authority in line with Plus Dane’s Safeguarding Policy and Procedure. Where the Community Safety Team receives case updates from MARAC or an IDVA, we will open a case for auditing and monitoring purposes. We will work with the victim to offer tenancy advice and target hardening security measures in all cases.

14. Action We Can Take

14.1 Security Measures

Where it is practical and safe for the customer to remain in their home, we will put in place additional security measures to reduce risk. This will be assessed on a case-by-case basis and is dependent on the circumstances and needs of the victim and can include:

- Window and door alarms
- Video doorbells
- Letterbox covers or thumb locks
- External lights
- Lock changes

14.2 Remedies Available

We will consider legal action or remedies (both civil and criminal) available to us to deal with perpetrators of domestic abuse. We will seek to understand what action is being taken by statutory agencies to ensure we are working together.

14.3 Repairs to the Property

Where there is damage to our property because of domestic abuse, we will carry out repairs as a matter of urgency, and the victim will not be recharged. While we encourage victims to report the matter to the police and provide a crime reference number, we recognise that this may not always be possible. In circumstances where victims do not want to report an incident to the police, we will not recharge; however, the victim should be made aware that the case will be assessed by the Designated Safeguarding Officer to understand if appropriate risk reduction is in place.

14.4 Safeguarding Vulnerable Customers

We will make a referral to the relevant Local Authority under our Safeguarding Policy where there is a statutory safeguarding concern for vulnerable individuals or children.

14.5 Re-Housing Victims of Domestic Abuse

In line with our Lettings Policy, we will support a victim who requests to be rehoused. This will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

15. Closing Cases

We will ensure that we monitor the closed cases over time, where survivors of domestic abuse may have a reduced vulnerability and a reduced requirement for target hardening measures. We will be mindful that there may be circumstances where relationships may have been rekindled or the survivor still lives with the perpetrator, and that revisiting the case may create unintended consequences.

16. Modern Day Slavery

Plus Dane has a zero-tolerance approach to human trafficking and modern slavery. As part of our commitment to the Modern Slavery Act, when we visit and interact with our tenants, we will consider signs of modern slavery and human trafficking, as well as any other welfare concerns which tenants or members of their household may have. Where we have concerns, we will raise these through our wider safeguarding approach. We will refer our concerns to the Police and Social Services where we suspect that the nature of the domestic abuse suggests that modern slavery may be occurring. An example of modern slavery in relation to resident domestic abuse is financial exploitation, often used as a way of controlling someone. This may become modern slavery if the person is coerced or forced to hand over control of their money for the purpose of criminal exploitation. This could include:

- Forced prostitution
- Sexual exploitation
- Allowing the property to be used for illegal purposes without consent.

17. Confidentiality

We will comply with our obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018 when dealing with domestic abuse cases. This includes sharing information with statutory agencies and complying with MARAC information sharing arrangements and MARAC operating protocols. We will share information in line with the Safer Partnership Information Sharing Protocols and Section 115 of the Crime & Disorder Act 1998, which allows Housing Plus and partners to share information for the purposes of preventing and detecting crime and disorder, including domestic abuse. In doing so, we will adhere to relevant data protection legislation. We have information sharing agreements in place with partners, including the Police and Local Authorities, which allow us to share information for the purpose of safeguarding the health and safety of individuals and/or preventing crime and/or disorder. We will report potential criminal acts to the Police.

18. Raising Awareness

As part of our commitment to dealing with domestic abuse, we will provide information to assist victims of domestic abuse on our website via the ASB Tool Kit.

19. Training

We will provide clear guidance and training for all relevant colleagues on how to recognise the signs of domestic abuse and how to report their concerns. Similarly, our contractors and agents are required to recognise the symptoms and signs of domestic abuse.

20. Assurance

Customer Standards

The following standards are in place:

- We aim to acknowledge reports of Domestic Abuse within one working day.
- We will provide training to colleagues to ensure that staff exercise professional curiosity when visiting customers and that reports are dealt with in a consistent way.
- We will provide advice and information to customers on what support is available.
- Where appropriate, we will take action against a perpetrator who is our tenant.

21. Equality Impact Assessment

An Equality Impact Assessment undertaken on this Policy has indicated there are no negative impacts arising from this Policy based on a customer's race, religion, disability, gender or gender identity, sexual orientation, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy, or age. It is, however, recognised that individuals who experience domestic abuse may have different needs arising from certain protected characteristics such as race, disability, or sexual orientation, and we will ensure that all cases are dealt with in accordance with the needs of the victim.