
Domestic Violence Policy

Department: Housing Services

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1. INTRODUCTION

One Housing Group (OHG) believes that everyone has a right to a home which is free from violence and abuse; but we recognise that some people may be subjected to abuse and violence within the home. We will do all we can to positively assist and support residents suffering domestic violence, but as a landlord, our assistance can only cover the housing aspect. We will take the strongest possible action against perpetrators of domestic violence where we have the power to do so. All other issues will be dealt with by referral to the local authority and/or other specialist agencies. This policy must be considered in conjunction with the OHG **Domestic Violence Procedure**.

OHG encourages residents and staff to report domestic abuse whether they are the victims or witnesses to such incidents. We will do all that we can to help and we will not contact a perpetrator without obtaining permission from the victim (see point 4).

Due to the especially sensitive nature of domestic violence, OHG has a separate domestic violence policy and procedure. However, internally they are closely linked with the OHG **Anti-Social Behaviour Policy** and **Anti-Social Behaviour Procedure**, therefore cross reference is required.

This Policy applies to and is for reference by all residents, stakeholders and staff of OHG. It also concerns all our partners, formal agencies and the wider community within the geographic areas within which we operate our services.

1.1 Definition

Incidents are recorded as domestic violence if there is or has been a personal relationship between the parties involved, such as:

- married couple
- partners, same or different sex
- family members.

The nature of the abuse may be physical (actual or threatened) or mental, and the abuse may take place either inside or outside the home. Examples of domestic violence include:

- actual physical violence or threat of violence
- verbal abuse or intimidation
- constant ridiculing or criticism
- threats of taking the children away
- threats of preventing contact with friends and family
- 'honour based violence'
- forced marriage
- genital mutilation
- financial abuse (withholding access to finances)

If the above incidents occur between unrelated parties they will be treated as harassment and will be managed in line with the OHG **Harassment and Hate Crime Policy**.

Domestic violence has been defined by the charity Refuge as:

the abuse of one partner within an intimate or family relationship. It is the repeated, random and habitual use of intimidation to control a partner. The abuse can be physical, emotional,

psychological, financial or sexual. Anyone forced to alter their behaviour because they are frightened of their partner's reaction is being abused (www.refuge.org.uk).

The Government defines domestic violence as:

any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality (www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk).

2. AIMS & OBJECTIVES

Aims:

- to ensure that residents experiencing domestic violence can approach OHG in confidence knowing that staff will be sympathetic and supportive
- to establish close working relationships with local authorities and external support agencies

Objectives:

- to treat all reports of domestic violence seriously and as a matter of high priority
- to put residents in contact with appropriate agencies that can help them by providing specialist advice and support
- to maintain a clear and concise policy and procedure, outlining the assistance OHG can offer residents affected by domestic violence.

3. POLICY STATEMENT

Domestic violence is an abuse of human rights, and in cases of physical and sexual abuse, it can be a criminal offence. It often escalates over time in frequency and severity and affects the victim's mental, emotional and physical well being. OHG will treat all incidents of domestic violence reported to us as high priority. We will work with victims and respect their wishes at all times and take action where we have the power to do so.

OHG will always adopt a client centred approach when responding to reports of domestic violence. Many people have difficulty reporting domestic violence because of the fear they are living with, because of the stigma attached to it, or the fear of not being believed. OHG staff will always begin by accepting as accurate what they are told by the victim reporting abuse.

Leaving an abusive partner can take a long time, and many victims will leave and return on several occasions before leaving for good. Our Housing Officers will be non-judgmental if a victim decides to return to an abusive partner, and they will be aware that leaving can be a very hard thing to do.

3.1 Temporary Accommodation / Possession action

The general policy guideline is that OHG can not create two tenancies out of one. It may be necessary in cases of domestic violence to house the person fleeing violence and then take action against the perpetrator to regain possession of the joint home. Such action must be agreed by the Regional Housing Manager.

If a resident wants to leave their home due to the abuse, OHG will consider them as being homeless. We will work with the local authority and specialist agencies (see point 3.2), to organise emergency accommodation if they do not want to return to the property because of fear for their own safety. A victim living in temporary accommodation will not lose any priority which has been awarded for domestic violence.

Please refer to the OHG **Domestic Violence Procedure** for details of the action that OHG can consider with regards to possession action and re-housing.

3.2 Multi Agency Approach

Managing reports of domestic violence requires a multi-agency approach. OHG will ensure that victims of domestic violence are placed in contact with appropriate agencies for specialist advice and support with their consent. The following list of relevant agencies is not exhaustive:

- Refuge: www.refuge.org.uk
- Woman's aid: www.womensaid.org.uk
- **Free 24 hour National Domestic Violence helpline: 0808 2000 247**
- Local Authority Homeless Persons Unit
- The Police
- Social Services
- Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs).

Please see Appendix 2 at the end of this policy for the contact details of these agencies and many of other specialist agencies.

One Housing Group's Customer Contact Centre: 0300 123 99 66

Staff can enquire with the relevant local authority to see if there is a MARACs where a range of local service providers, authorities and advice agencies exchange information to assist in planning support packages for the victims of domestic violence.

3.3 Victim centred approach

Every effort will be made to ensure that those subjected to domestic abuse are dealt with in a sensitive and sympathetic manner by officers taking a non-judgemental approach. Key considerations include:

- the option to be interviewed by someone of the same sex
- to be interviewed in the location of their choice (subject to satisfying any concerns about staff safety)
- not to be interviewed in the presence of their children (if necessary another staff member can supervise children)
- translation service being available
- they may have a friend or advocate present at the interview in they wish.

3.4 Staff Awareness

OHG recognises that a resident's housing association may be their first point of contact regarding domestic violence; with this in mind, we will work to ensure that Housing Officers have the skills and knowledge to effectively manage reports of domestic violence and to

recognise signs suggesting that a resident may be suffering from domestic violence. Staff must consider the possibility that cases of reported noise nuisance or other forms of anti-social behaviour could be due to the existence of domestic violence. Support agencies advise that many cases initially recorded as noise nuisance or other anti-social behaviour have turned out to be cases of domestic violence.

4. CONFIDENTIALITY

Maintaining strict confidentiality is central to our handling of reports of domestic violence. We understand that residents must feel assured that an abuser will not become aware of their whereabouts if they decide to leave the relationship, or that they have been obtaining advice and support if they are still living with an abuser. To this end, we will not give out information about anyone to a third party without their written consent, and we will not contact the victim to follow up contact made with us, unless they give us permission to do so.

No contact will be made with the perpetrator unless the victim has given us consent to do so. If contact has been agreed, the victim must be informed of OHG's intention to make contact before doing so on every occasion. The victim must agree with the date/time that any contact is to take place including when any letters are going to be sent or telephone calls made.

Under the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Human Rights Act 1998, all personal and sensitive organisational information, however received, is treated as confidential. This includes:

- anything of a personal nature that is not a matter of public record about a resident, client, applicant, staff or committee member
- sensitive organisational information

Officers will ensure that they only involve other agencies and share information with the consent of the resident concerned, unless:

- the information is necessary for the protection of children
- OHG is required to by law, for example OHG cannot withhold information if being questioned by the Police during a criminal investigation.

In the case of joint tenancies, the perpetrator may have the right to access the contents of the tenancy file. Staff must ensure that it is not possible for confidential information from the victim to be seen by the perpetrator.

Any file notes or letters that are confidential must be clearly labelled or held separately in a confidential section of the file. Information will be shared on a "need to know" basis.

5. LEGISLATION REGULATION & GUIDANCE

- The Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004
- The Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- The Family Law Act 1996
- The Data Protection Act 1998
- Human Rights Act 1998

- Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003
- The Crime & Disorder Act 1998
- The Housing Act 1996

The above documents are available on the website of the Office of Public Sector Information: www.opsi.gov.uk

6. EQUALITY & DIVERSITY

OHG recognises the needs of a diverse population and always acts within the scope of its **Equality and Diversity Policy**, the Human Rights Act, The Disability Discrimination Act, and Race Relations Act.

OHG acknowledges that the traditional perception holds that the majority of domestic violence is perpetrated by men against women and this is reflected in supporting agencies available. However, the policy and procedure applies equally to men who have been subjected to domestic violence, and to people in same sex relationships, as well as other household members not in a partner relationship.

We understand that people from all communities experience domestic violence. People from every class, age, sexuality, race and religion are abused, as are disabled people. We will use professional interpreters where necessary, and provide publicity about domestic violence in other community languages and formats on request.

7. HEALTH & SAFETY

Officers will follow OHG's **Health and Safety Policy** and **Loan Working Policy**, at all times when managing reports of domestic violence. They will also consider the health and safety of all parties involved in any one case and the wider community.

Please see overleaf for:

- Appendix 1: Safety Planning Checklist
- Appendix 2: Advice and Support Organisations

APPENDIX 1: SAFETY PLANNING CHECKLIST

In any domestic violence case there may be repeat victimisation. One of the most practical things a resident can do is put together a safety plan to deal with emergencies and threats. The checklist below can help residents put such a plan in place.

If you are living with an abusive partner:

- Think about whom you can contact in an emergency – this could be a friend, family member or neighbour you trust. Discuss the situation with them, and ask if you can call them in an emergency. Make sure you know their number. Consider having a code word you can use to let them know there is a problem without your partner knowing.
- Find somewhere you can safely use a phone in an emergency.
- Put away some money in case you need it for taxi or bus fares etc
- Keep a packed bag in a safe place or give it to your trusted person for safe keeping in case you need it. Put important documents in the bag such as your passport, immigration papers, birth certificate, and driving license as well as a change of clothes for yourself and your children, toys, medication and spare keys for the house and car.
- If you choose to leave always try to take your children with you.
- If your children are old enough, teach them how to call the police on 999.
- Leave when it is safe to do so.
- You can request the police to escort you to return to the property if you have left behind anything essential
- Call 999 in an emergency

If you have separated from your abusive partner:

- Ensure that the locks are changed and the doors and windows are secure.
- Change your telephone numbers (landline and mobile). Make sure your new numbers are ex directory and have “number withheld” calls barred.
- Don't let in unexpected visitors without checking their ID.
- Keep copies of any injunctions with powers of arrest easily accessible.
- If possible, change your routines such as using different routes and shops.
- Change your children's school if possible.
- Make sure your children understand that they should not let anyone in to the house without you saying so – even their parent if they are the perpetrator.
- Tell the school who can collect children from school – inform the school of any injunctions or bail conditions in place.
- Ask family members, friends and acquaintances not to pass on your new phone number/address to anyone without your permission. Only give your new number to people who you trust not to pass it on.
- Keep an incident diary listing all events concerning the perpetrator and any harassment with details of what happened, what was said, date, time, place and any witness(es).
- Call 999 in an emergency.

APPENDIX 2: ADVICE AND SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS

National Agencies

Emergency Help

Telephone 999 and ask for Police

National Domestic Violence Helpline

A 24 hour helpline run in partnership between Refuge and Women's Aid
0808 2000 247

Refuge

Finds refuge space and/or offers advice and support. Includes refuges for Black and Asian women and women with learning disabilities.
www.refuge.org.uk

Women's Aid Federation of England

Provides advice and support and finds refuge spaces across the UK, and a national 24 hour helpline.
www.womensaid.org.uk

Rape Crisis Line

Some boroughs have a Rape Crisis Line. Individual contact numbers can be found on the central website:
www.rapecrisis.org.uk

Samaritans

Provides 24 hour confidential emotional support
Tel: 08457 90 90 90

Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants

Provides legal advice to women whose immigration status may be affected by a change in their marital status.
115 Old Street
London EC1V 9JR
Tel: 020 7251 8706
info@jcwj.org.uk

London Agencies

Apna Ghar Asian Women's Domestic Violence Project

Provides services to Asian women experiencing DV, including access to safe accommodation, advice on welfare benefits and housing, liaison with solicitors, courts, Police, GP, benefit agencies, housing and refuges. Also has counselling and support groups. Languages: Punjabi, Gujarati, Urdu, Hindi, Bengali
c/o Community Links
105 Barking Road
Canning town E16 4HQ
Tel: 0207474 1547 (24 hours Helpline)

Asian Deaf Women's Association

Support for Asian deaf women, providing British sign language interpreting, relay interpreting and sign supported English

Tel: 020 8221 0581 Voice/minicom
020 8555 9680 minicom only
020 8221 0582 fax

Beverley Lewis House

Provides safe temporary accommodation for women with learning disabilities without children.

PO Box 7312
London E15 4TS
Tel: 020 8522 0675

Community Safety Unit

Specialist police units offering support to anyone experiencing domestic violence.

Tel: 020 7275 5889 (Mon/Fri: 8am – 8pm; Sat & Sun: 8am – 4pm)
Tel: 020 8217 3865 (Bethnal Green)
020 7275 4266 (Isle of Dogs)
020 7275 4757 (Tower Hamlets)

Dogs Trust – Freedom Project

The Trust provides a free fostering service for dogs and cats of victims in the Greater London Area who are escaping domestic violence.

Tel: 0800 298 9199

East London Black Women Organisation (ELBWO)

Provides advice and support, and access to emergency and safe accommodation for women fleeing DV. Primarily for African Caribbean women but all ethnic backgrounds can be assisted.

Languages: French and Spanish
Forest Gate
E7 OHD
Tel: 0208 534 7545 (Mon/Fri: 9.30am – 5.30pm)
Out of hours pager: 07654 553340

Newham Action Against Domestic Violence

Provides advice and support and help finding safe accommodation for anyone experiencing domestic violence.

Evening appointments can be made.
Languages: Bengali/Sylheti, Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu, Gujarati.
Tel: 020 7473 30 47 (Mon/Fri: 9.30am – 1pm, 2pm – 5pm)
Minicom: 0207 5111 949

Newham Social Services Domestic Violence Team

Support and advice on legal issues, housing, welfare rights and children. Advisors can support and accompany client to appointments as advocate or friend, and help complete forms, write letters etc.

Languages: Urdu, Hindi and English.

Gable House

27a Romford Road E15 4LL

Tel: 0208 430 2000 - Extn 301 35/36/39/41 (Mon/Fri: 9am – 5pm)

Newham Homeless Persons Unit

Pragel Street

Plaistow E13 9HB

Tel: 020 8430 2000 (Mon/Tue/Thu/Fri: 9am – 4.30am, Wed 1pm – 4.30pm only)

Tower Hamlets Forced Marriage Unit

Tel: 020 7008 0135 / 0230 / 8706

Tower Hamlets Homeless and Housing Advice Centre

Block B, 3 Millharbour

London E14 9XP

Tel: 020 7364 7230

Out of hours: 020 7364 7000

Tower Hamlets Victim Support

Monday to Friday: 10am – 5pm

3 Merchant Street

Bow E3 4UJ

Tel: 020 8983 5454 (24 hours)

Tower Hamlets Women's Aid

Provides information and support to women living or working in Tower Hamlets.

Languages – Bengali / Sylheti & Somali speakers.

Tel: 07000 782 539 (Mon/Fri: 10am – 3pm)

Tower Hamlets 24 Hour Helpline

Tel: 0870 5995 443

Berkshire Agencies

Berkshire Women's Aid

Based in Reading, but working throughout Reading, Bracknell, Wokingham and Newbury. They provide advice and support and help finding safe accommodation, and have a helpline:

Tel 0118 950 4003 (Mon/Fri: 10am – 5pm, with link to a worker for emergencies)

Email: bwa@ukonline.co.uk

Website: www.berkshireromansaid.org.uk

Crossing Bridges

A walk in centre or by appointment co-ordinated by Berkshire Women's Aid. Provides legal advice, benefits and health advice
5 Queen's Walk
Reading (1st floor above the Federation of tenants Associations)
Tel: 0118 959 7333

East Berkshire Women's Aid

Tel: 01753 693472 (24 hours)
Email: support@ebwomensaid.org.uk

Victim Support Bracknell & District

(includes part of Wokingham)
The Court House
Town Square
Bracknell RG12 1AD
Tel: 01344 411 411
Out of hours helpline: 0845 303 0900

Bracknell Domestic Violence Unit (Police)

Tel: 01344 823 480
Email: dvubracknell@thamesvalley.pnn.police.uk

Agencies for men

Men Cry Too

For male victims of domestic violence
Tel: 0121 569 7980
Website: www.mencrytoo.homestead.com

Victim Support Male Helpline

Tel: 0800 328 3623 (12noon – 2pm Mon – Fri)

Mankind Lifeline Project

Provides advice and support to men who experience domestic violence and their children
Tel: 0870 794 4124 (7.30pm – 9.30 pm only)

Agencies for same sex couples

Broken Rainbow

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Domestic Violence Service UK
Tel: 07812 644 914 (Hotline)
020 7837 1600 (Tower Hamlets)
Mobile: 07729 253129
Email: info@lgbt-dv.org
Website: www.lgbt-dv.org

Gay and Lesbian Switch Board

PO Box 7324, London N1, Tel: 020 7837 7324