

Customer Domestic Abuse Policy

1. Policy summary

- 1.1. We believe that no one should live in fear of violence or abuse. This policy and accompanying procedure sets out our commitment to take efficient and effective action to deal with all reports of incidents of domestic abuse. It explains how we respond to customers affected by domestic abuse and the tailored support packages that we put into place.
- 1.2. We take all reports of domestic abuse seriously and employ staff trained to deal with reports of domestic abuse. We will always treat people experiencing domestic abuse in a sympathetic, supportive and non-judgemental way.
- 1.3. This policy applies to all current Stonewater residents only.
- 1.4. For colleagues who may be experiencing domestic abuse, please refer to the Colleague Domestic Abuse Policy.

2. Policy scope and objectives

- 2.1 The aim of the domestic abuse policy is to ensure the safety of Stonewater customers who may be affected by domestic abuse and ensure that staff, volunteers and contractors are able to respond to customer needs in relation to domestic abuse.
- 2.2 Stonewater have 20+ years' experience delivering refuge, safe accommodation and community based domestic abuse services. We deliver specialist services which remove barriers to accessing vital support for all survivors of domestic abuse. Our model and approach ensures equal access for all, and our expertise as a provider of specialist services transfers to our approach across Stonewater.
- 2.3 Stonewater uses the DA Act 2021 recognised definition of Domestic Abuse; Domestic abuse describes abusive behaviours that take place between two people aged over 16 who are personally connected to each other. This includes people who are, or have previously been married, in civil partnerships or in relationships; or have a child together; or are relatives, including abuse of adult parents or adult children.
- 2.4 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 states that abuse can be a single incident, but is often a pattern of behaviours that can take many forms including:
 - physical or sexual abuse
 - violent or threatening behaviour
 - controlling or coercive behaviour
 - economic or financial abuse
 - online abuse
 - psychological and emotional abuse

It also includes stalking and so called 'honour' based violence such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage. The law also defines children as

being victims of domestic abuse if they see, hear or experience the effects of the abuse.

- 2.4 Domestic abuse is a widespread problem that must not be ignored. Stonewater believes such abuse is unacceptable and will promote the understanding that everyone has a right to live free from abuse. We are committed to developing a response for all customers affected by domestic abuse that ensures their home is a place of safety.
- 2.5 Domestic abuse is most commonly perpetrated by men against women, however Stonewater recognises that abusive behaviour can affect people in all communities regardless of gender, age, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, immigration status, socio-economic background or tenure and we recognise that survivors' experiences of domestic abuse may in part be defined by these.
- 2.6 When dealing with the reports of domestic abuse, Stonewater colleagues must be led by the wishes of the person experiencing the abuse. Colleagues need to consider the risk, safeguarding and child protection concerns but the guiding principle should be that our response to domestic abuse should be customer led.

3. Regulatory and legal considerations

- 3.1 The Domestic Abuse Policy takes into account the following legislation, and colleagues are encouraged to refer to this legislation where cases require:
 - The Domestic Abuse Act 2021
 - Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004
 - Protection from Harassment Act 1997
 - The Family Law Act 1996
 - Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014
 - Serious Crime Act 2015
 - Human Rights Act 1998
 - The Data Protection Act 1998 and General Data Protection Policy
 - The Housing Act 1996
 - The Equality Act 2010
 - The Care Act 2014

4. Related policies

This policy is closely connected to and should be read in conjunction with:

- Safeguarding Adults and Safeguarding Children Policies
- Vulnerable Customers Policy
- Allocations Policy
- Lone working policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Tenure Policy
- Tenancy Changes Policy
- Repairs Policy

5. Policy details

- 5.1. This policy and accompanying procedure details the principles to be adopted when dealing with:
- Raising awareness around domestic abuse
 - Responding to reports of domestic abuse affecting Stonewater customers
 - Communications, support and advice
 - Housing
 - Repairs and Security

5.2. Raising awareness around domestic abuse

Customers affected by domestic abuse can request support from the specialist trained Customer Partners, based within the Resolution team through any point of contact they may have at Stonewater, including the Customer Service Centre either through the My Home app, Stonewater website or by telephone 01202 319119. You can also email the resolution team directly to request someone to contact you via resolution@stonewater.org

Stonewater will widely publicise information to raise awareness about domestic abuse, telling our customers how to get help if they need it and the type of response they can expect from us. We will do this through our customer contact, website, social media campaigns, wider national campaigns and our work within communities.

We will carry out a rolling programme of Stonewater colleague and contractor training to make sure domestic abuse is always at the forefront of our minds. Our colleagues are trained to spot and respond to the signs of domestic abuse when working in homes or having interactions with customers.

Our specialist workers will also receive additional, in depth training to ensure that they are able to recognise, respond to and support all survivors of domestic abuse in the most appropriate and accessible way possible.

5.3 Responding to reports of domestic abuse affecting Stonewater customers, communication, support and advice

We take all reports of domestic abuse seriously and provide support tailored to the needs of the individual, working in partnership with specialised agencies to provide a coordinated response.

We take a zero-tolerance approach to domestic abuse, will hold perpetrators to account for their action, and be clear that domestic abuse is never the fault of the survivor.

We ensure that colleagues are clear that domestic abuse is not anti-social behaviour (ASB), they are aware of the differences, approaches and considerations to be taken into account.

Our approach is survivor-centred and will take into account your views, wishes and ongoing safety when deciding the most appropriate course of action.

If you report a case of domestic abuse, we'll respond within one working day to liaise with you about the next steps.

We employ front line staff and management within the Resolution Team who are specially trained to deal with reports of domestic abuse. The Head of Domestic Abuse Support oversees our overall response to domestic abuse.

The specialist team agree the preferred method of communication and will work with you to explore the options that are available. They will use a full range of remedies as appropriate, taking into account the needs of each individual case, we will advise about possible course of action, both to respond to the immediate situation and to deal with it in the longer term.

We work in collaboration with relevant agencies and take account of each person's circumstances and the different courses of action that may be possible and appropriate.

We'll provide relevant advice and help, including information about alternative housing, additional security measures in the home and suitable support from specialist organisations.

Although Stonewater does not directly provide legal advice we will signpost to legal advice services regarding non-molestation orders, property adjustment orders and other required legal advice. We will provide advice around other processes available, and example of this is applying for a joint to sole tenancy in the case of jointly held tenancies.

We recognise that housing is one of the main factors why survivors don't leave abusive homes. If you fear for your immediate safety, we'll work in partnership with the relevant local authority and partners to consider your housing options. This could include temporary accommodation or a permanent transfer if there is no prospect of a safe return, in accordance with our Allocations Policy and Tenancy Policy.

If you need to move home, we'll work with you to identify areas that will minimise the risk of future abuse. We'll also continue to take action against the perpetrator where relevant.

A significant number of adults or children who experience domestic abuse will also require safeguarding. Employees are trained to be aware of this and to make safeguarding referrals as needed to make sure people are protected. This is in line with our Safeguarding Policies.

We will refer survivors to specialist services that ensure as full a support plan as possible, including welfare rights, legal and financial advice, substance misuse services and family support, and will keep all cases involving domestic abuse under review until the survivor is satisfied it's been resolved.

Whilst we are dealing with the case and after it's been resolved we will provide support for survivors, their families and witnesses to make sure they feel safe in their home and the community in which they live.

We will carry out a risk assessment using a Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour Based Violence Risk Identification Checklist (DASH 2009 risk model), which is a UK-wide accredited form used by us and partner organisations to plan how we'll support the survivor and any children. This will determine some of our action and referral options.

Stonewater colleagues will ensure they have good local knowledge within the communities they work in of specialist support providers around domestic abuse including IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy) services, MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference), MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hubs) co-ordinators and other specialist services.

We will work in partnership with appropriate agencies to support or signpost perpetrators of domestic abuse who recognise and want to change their behaviour.

We will also hold perpetrators to account, ensuring appropriate action is taken to address issues such as rent arrears, damage to property, tenancies, and alternative housing options. We will also support survivors to access information and support around legal protective options.

We will be an active member of relevant Local Partnership Boards and other strategic forums and use that to influence strategic decision-making regarding support services available in the communities where our customers live.

5.4 Housing

We recognise that housing is one of the main factors why survivors don't leave abusive homes. If a customer needs to move home immediately, we will work with the relevant specialist domestic abuse services, local authority partners and utilise our own processes and policies where appropriate to identify housing options.

We will continue to work with them to identify areas that will minimise the risk of future abuse and also continue to take action against the perpetrator where relevant.

Our lettings team work with local authorities to ensure that domestic abuse is taken into account when prioritising nominations and there is sensitivity around lettings when domestic abuse is disclosed.

5.6 Repairs and Security

Where additional security measures may be required for the safety of someone affected by domestic abuse we will explore these options with the customer. Stonewater can often provide these, as well as working closely with local organisations that can also provide these services.

Our contractors will carry out repairs which are required. Where practicable these works will be carried out as emergency works (within 24 hours). Where this is not practicable, they will be carried out as soon as possible afterwards

and this and time frames will be communicated to the customer. Survivors will not be charged for any repairs relating to Domestic Abuse.

6.0 Confidentiality and data protection

Stonewater recognises that cases of domestic abuse can be very sensitive and managing it must be done with care. Stonewater colleagues will only share information with our customer's permission with the exception of;

- raising safeguarding concerns about adults with care and support needs or child protection concerns
- referring high risk cases to MARAC
- where Stonewater is required by law, for example, if being questioned by police as part of a criminal investigation.

7.0 Health and safety

Stonewater staff will follow health and safety and lone working policies at all times when managing reports of domestic abuse. Colleagues will also consider the safety of all parties involved in a case and the wider community.

We will carry out the DASH risk assessment and ensure that our forms of communication are suited to the survivor and agree the safest options.

8.0 Safeguarding

Stonewater will meet our statutory safeguarding requirements in line with our existing policies and procedures where there are safeguarding concerns about a vulnerable customer. In cases of suspected child abuse colleagues will refer to Stonewater's Safeguarding Children policy. In all cases of domestic abuse, staff will refer to Stonewater's Safeguarding Adults and children policy.

9.0 Equality and Diversity

- 9.1 Actions taken in relation to domestic abuse, should always be appropriate to the adult at risk; they should not discriminate because of disability, age, gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, culture or lifestyle.
- 9.2 Colleagues will recognise intersectionality and understand that certain individuals may face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. Certain people may be disproportionately affected or particularly vulnerable and some groups are affected by specific forms of domestic abuse. We also understand there are cultural and other barriers to reporting domestic abuse.
- 9.3 We will make sure our services are accessible. This includes providing a variety of ways to report domestic abuse and arranging interpreters and translating information into other languages or formats as needed. We will ensure colleagues are trained to understand these issues and partner with our own specialist services as well as other local specialists to maintain and update our knowledge. This is to make sure that we do not create additional barriers and that everyone can access our service in the way they need.

9.4 Colleagues will be trained to understand the impacts and effects of domestic abuse and we will work with specialist providers to ensure the right support is offered.

10.0 Recording, reporting and monitoring

10.1 Full details on recording and reporting allegations of abuse are provided in the Domestic Abuse Reporting and Responding Procedure.

10.2 When working with other organisations we may need to share some information about the case and the individual. We will only share information with the survivor's permission, unless there is a risk to the safeguarding of children or a vulnerable adult and it is a duty of care. In addition, agencies such as the police may request personal data about our customers as part of their own ongoing investigation. In these cases, the Tenancy Sustainment Manager will assess the sharing of data on a case-by-case basis, in line with our Data Protection Policy.

10.2 When managing any domestic abuse case it is essential that information is recorded accurately and in a timely manner. In addition colleagues may also be called upon to complete relevant forms for the local authority, MARAC teams, local Safeguarding Team and/or the police.

10.3 Colleagues will be mindful of sensitivity when recording cases, particularly in the circumstances of a joint tenancy. Colleagues will also be aware that language must be fact based and not include any personal judgement or assessment.

10.4 The lead worker will be responsible, along with their manager for monitoring the progress of MARAC / safeguarding referrals made to the Local Authority.

10.5 Case management reviews between colleagues and their manager will look at case progress and handling and ensure quality assurance in how we manage domestic abuse cases.

10.6 The Head of Domestic Abuse Support will produce an Annual Safeguarding and Domestic Abuse report for the Board and provide an overview of safeguarding and domestic abuse activity in the year.

11.0 Contractors and agents

11.1 Contractors working on behalf of Stonewater and visiting homes may encounter evidence of domestic abuse within the property. Customers may also choose to disclose incidents, so awareness in sensitively preserving or taking evidence and handling reports will be necessary. Contractor organisations will be expected to ensure that they comply with Stonewater's Code of Conduct for Maintenance Contractors as further outlined in the Safeguarding Policy.

12.0 Customer voice

12.1 We are committed to ensuring our policies are customer friendly and ensure a positive customer experience.

12.2 We will proactively aim to get feedback from customers about how we managed their case when it is appropriate for us to do so.

13.0 Complaints

13.1 Customers that do not feel satisfied with our service in relation to domestic abuse may wish to make a formal complaint. Stonewater has a **Complaints Policy** providing information about how to complain about our services.

15.0 Quality assurance

15.1 We will ensure that cases are subject to a case management review and not dealt with in isolation where relevant.

15.2 Colleagues who require training will be required to do this as per the Stonewater Domestic Abuse Training Matrix.

15.3 We will use feedback from customers to better shape our responses and handling.

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