

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. We adopt a believing, non-judgemental and survivor-led approach. Survivors are the experts in their own lives, and their voice will shape all decisions relating to their safety, housing and support.
- 1.4. This policy primarily applies to current Stonewater customers but may also apply where Stonewater has a legal, safeguarding or housing-related duty to respond, including in relation to applicants or prospective customers. 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

- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 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. Our approach is trauma-informed and safety-led, recognising the impact of domestic abuse and ensuring responses are sensitive, empowering and avoid re-traumatisation.
- 2.6 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.
- 2.7 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
 - Regulator of Social Housing's Consumer Standards 2024

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
- Access to Housing Policy
- Lone working Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Tenure Policy

- Tenancy Changes Policy
- Repairs Policy
- Recharge Policy

5. Roles and Responsibilities

The Board and Customer Operations Group (COG) provide oversight and assurance on Stonewater's response to domestic abuse.

Senior leaders are responsible for ensuring effective implementation of this policy and that appropriate resources, training and governance arrangements are in place.

Operational teams, including specialist domestic abuse services, are responsible for delivering a consistent, safe and survivor-led response in line with this policy and associated procedures.

All colleagues and contractors have a responsibility to recognise and respond appropriately to domestic abuse and escalate concerns in line with safeguarding requirements.

6. Policy Details

6.1. 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

6.2. Raising awareness and Accessing Support

Customers affected by domestic abuse can request support from the specialist trained Domestic Abuse Intervention 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. Survivors can also email the resolution team directly via DAIteam@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.

Stonewater recognises the impact of domestic abuse work on colleagues and provides appropriate support, including training, supervision and wellbeing support.

6.3 Responding to Disclosures

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. Support will be ongoing and responsive to changing risk and needs, with regular review of risk, safety planning and support arrangements.

We are committed to working as part of a Coordinated Community Response (CCR), ensuring that housing plays an active role within wider multi-agency systems including local authorities, police, health and specialist domestic abuse services.

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). A distinct, specialist and safeguarding-led response will always be applied.

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

We will always agree safe methods of communication with survivors, including consideration of safe times, contact methods and where appropriate the use of code words or alternative arrangements to maintain safety.

Response times and contact will be proportionate to risk, with proactive and repeated attempts made to safely engage with the survivor where required. We employ front line staff and management who are specially trained to deal with reports of domestic abuse. The Head of Specialist Services oversees our overall response to domestic abuse.

The specialist team agree the preferred method of communication and will work with survivors 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. Decisions and actions will be clearly recorded, evidence-based and explained to survivors to support informed choice and understanding. Risk will be assessed and managed proportionately, with clear escalation routes in place for high-risk cases, including safeguarding and multi-agency processes where

required. 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 survivors fear for their immediate safety, we'll work in partnership with the relevant local authority and partners to consider 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 survivors need to move home, we'll work with them to identify areas that will minimise the risk of future abuse. We'll also continue to take action against the perpetrator where relevant.

6.4 Partnership Working and Safeguarding

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 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.

6.5 Housing Options and Tenancy Management

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 customers to identify areas that will minimise the risk of future abuse and also continue to take action against the perpetrator where relevant. Early conversations will take place regarding housing options and move-on pathways, enabling survivors to make informed choices about their future accommodation.

We will support survivors to remain safely in their homes where this is their choice and it is safe to do so, including through the use of target hardening and sanctuary measures.

Where remaining in the home is not safe or not the survivor's preference, we will work proactively with local authorities and partners to support access to safe accommodation, including management moves, emergency transfers and nominations, and will challenge barriers where these prevent timely access to safety.

Customers experiencing domestic abuse will not be disadvantaged in relation to their tenancy because of abuse experienced. We will take steps to ensure a proportionate and trauma informed approach to ensure survivors are not penalised through rent arrears, tenancy enforcement or housing decisions where these arise because of domestic abuse.

6.6 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.

6.7 Perpetrators

Stonewater takes a clear and robust approach to perpetrators of domestic abuse. We will take appropriate action to address abusive behaviour and ensure that perpetrators are held accountable, while prioritising the safety and wellbeing of survivors.

Where the perpetrator is a Stonewater tenant, we will consider all available housing and tenancy management options, including enforcement action where appropriate. This may include action in relation to tenancy breaches, anti-social behaviour, or legal remedies, always ensuring that any action taken does not place the survivor at further risk.

In cases involving joint tenancies, careful consideration will be given to the rights of both parties, alongside the need to protect the survivor. We will work with survivors to explore options such as maintaining or transferring tenancies, and will ensure that information is managed safely to avoid increasing risk.

We will support survivors to access legal protections and will work in partnership with relevant agencies to take action against perpetrators where required.

While maintaining a clear focus on accountability, we recognise that perpetrators may also have support needs. Where appropriate, we will signpost or refer to specialist perpetrator programmes or support services, provided this does not compromise the safety of the survivor.

All decisions relating to perpetrators will be risk-assessed, proportionate, and informed by a survivor-led approach.

7. 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.

Information will be recorded and managed in a way that does not increase risk, particularly in situations involving joint tenancies or shared households.

Where information needs to be shared without consent, we will be open and transparent with survivors wherever it is safe to do so, explaining why this is necessary and what will happen next.

8. 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.

9. 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.

10. Equality and Diversity

- 10.1 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.
- 10.2 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.
- 10.3 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.
- 10.4 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.

11. Recording, reporting and monitoring

- 11.1 Full details on recording and reporting allegations of abuse are provided in the Domestic Abuse Reporting and Responding Procedure.
- 11.2 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.

- 11.3 When managing any domestic abuse case it is essential that information is recorded accurately and in a timely manner. Where domestic abuse is identified, appropriate system flags and internal markers will be applied to support safe and informed responses across services. 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.
- 11.4 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.
- 11.5 The lead worker will be responsible, along with their manager for monitoring the progress of MARAC / safeguarding referrals made to the Local Authority.
- 11.6 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.
- 11.7 The Head of Specialist Services 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.

12. Contractors and agents

- 12.1 Contractors working on behalf of Stonewater and visiting homes are expected to recognise, respond to and report domestic abuse concerns in line with this policy and safeguarding requirements. They 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.

13. Customer Voice

- 13.1 We are committed to ensuring our policies are customer friendly and ensure a positive customer experience.
- 13.2 We will proactively aim to get feedback from customers about how we managed their case when it is appropriate for us to do so.

14. Complaints

- 14.1 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.
- 14.2 Customers will be able to raise concerns or complaints in a way that feels safe, and processes will be managed sensitively to ensure they do not increase risk.

15. 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 ensure that learning from case reviews, audits and feedback is embedded into practice, policy and training to continuously improve our response to domestic abuse.

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