



Domestic Abuse Policy

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Introduction

Empower Housing Association (EHA) is committed to working with other agencies to take a zero-tolerance approach to domestic abuse. We recognise that domestic abuse is a crime and has considerable impact on the victims physical and psychological well-being, and as such we will endeavour to help support them in living a life free of violence.

Policy Scope

This policy outlines our victim centred approach, which ensures that we create a culture when tenants who have experienced or witnessed domestic abuse feel supported when making a report.

We recognise the importance of supporting tenants whilst also ensuring that any action we take is done with their consent. We will work collaboratively with external partners when managing cases of domestic abuse.

This policy applies to all tenants, employees, Board Members, contractors, sub-contractors and agents working for EHA.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Safeguarding Policy and Antisocial Behaviour Policy.

Definitions

Domestic Abuse is “any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality”. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:

- Psychological
- Physical
- Sexual
- Financial
- Emotional

Controlling behaviour is range of acts to make a person subordinate and/or dependant by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape, and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is an act of a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten the victim.

The definition also includes so-called honour-based violence, forced marriage and elder abuse.

Abuse can include, but is not limited to:

- **Destructive criticism and verbal abuse:** shouting, mocking, accusing, name calling and verbally threatening.
- **Pressure tactics:** sulking, threatening to withhold money, disconnecting the phone and the internet, taking away or destroying your mobile, tablet or laptop, taking the car away, taking the children away; threatening to report you to the police, social services or mental health team unless you comply with their demands; threatening or attempting self-harm and suicide; withholding or pressuring you to use drugs or other substances; lying to your friends and family about you; telling you that you have no choice in any decisions.
- **Disrespect:** persistently putting you down in front of other people, not listening or responding to you when you talk; interrupting your telephone calls; taking money from your purse/wallet without asking; refusing to help with childcare or housework.
- **Breaking trust:** lying to you; withholding information from you; being jealous; having other relationships; breaking promises and shared agreements.
- **Isolation:** monitoring or blocking your phone calls, emails and social media accounts, telling you where you can and cannot go; preventing you from seeing friends and relatives; shutting you in your house.
- **Harassment:** following you; checking up on you; not allowing you any privacy (for example, opening your mail, going through your laptop, tablet or mobile), repeatedly checking to see who has phoned you; embarrassing you in public; accompanying you everywhere you go.
- **Threats:** making angry gestures, using physical size to intimidate; shouting you down; destroying your possessions; breaking things; punching walls; wielding a knife or a gun; threatening to kill or harm you and your children; threatening to kill or harm any family pets; threats of suicide.

- **Sexual violence:** using force, threats or intimidation to make you perform sexual acts; having sex with you when you do not want it; forcing you to look at pornographic material; constant pressure and harassment into having sex when you do not want to; forcing you to have sex with other people; any degrading treatment related to your sexuality.
- **Physical violence:** punching, slapping, hitting, biting, pinching, kicking, pushing, pulling hair out, shoving, burning, strangling; pinning you down, holding you by the neck, restraining you.
- **Denial:** saying the abuse does not happen; saying you caused the abuse; saying you wind them up; saying they cannot control their anger; being publicly gentle and patient; crying and begging for forgiveness; saying it will never be happy again.

Responding to a Report

EHA will respond to reports received from partners such as the police and to reports made by tenants/their representatives. Tenants/their representatives can make a report in different ways. We will instigate all reports of domestic abuse that we receive, including those made in confidence, and those made by individuals not directly involved such as neighbours and contractors.

Safety planning will be carried out to provide support for the person experiencing domestic abuse and their children (if applicable), unless another organisation has carried this out.

EHA will attempt to complete a risk assessment of anyone who identifies as a victim of domestic abuse, and where they are deemed as high risk will refer into MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences), as well as into the IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advisors) service for support. Where they are not deemed as high risk, EHA will signpost to other agencies that can offer support, whilst continuing to provide housing related issues they may have presented with. Should there be any Safeguarding issues raised, then EHA will follow their Safeguarding Policy.

EHA are always careful with issues of confidentiality. We understand that with domestic abuse, perpetrators can go to any length to find where their victim has gone to. As such, we will always ensure that when there is a query from another agency, including the

police, that we should take that person's details and call them back through their respective agencies telephone number, to ensure they are speaking to the correct person.

Actions against Perpetrators

EHA will take the appropriate action (where evidence is available) against anyone responsible for domestic abuse. This will only be done in cases where we can do so without compromising the safety of the victim. We will work closely with partner agencies and keep them informed of any action taken.

Should a tenant identify themselves as a perpetrator of domestic abuse, we will endeavour to signpost them to an agency that can offer them help and support. However, we will not tolerate such abuse, and as such to perpetrate such abuse could result in perpetrators losing their tenancy/home.

Information sharing and Record Keeping

EHA will take any disclosure of domestic abuse seriously. EHA are aware that it is good practice to discuss a MARAC referral with the victim/their representative if it is safe to do so. We will use professional judgement to decide whether it is safe to do so.

EHA will share information with relevant agencies as required by the individual case and MARAC requests in line with Data Protection Act. EHA will keep records of all disclosures of domestic abuse in a controlled environment to be used for internal reporting and reference only.

Legislation

The following legislation is relevant to this policy:

- Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Data Protection Act 2018
- The Housing Act 1996
- The Equality Act 2010