



Domestic Abuse Policy Statement – Neighbourhoods and Housing

1. Policy Statement

- 1.1. This statement sets out Hull City Council's Neighbourhoods and Housing Service approach to dealing with domestic abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG).
- 1.2. This policy applies to all Hull City Council residents and household members.
- 1.3. Hull City Council Neighbourhoods and Housing Service recognise that domestic abuse is a serious issue that affects many tenants and residents in the city and is a major cause of homelessness. As a Community Leader, we have statutory duties to safeguard victims of domestic abuse. We will not condone or tolerate domestic abuse and will send clear messages to the community that action will be taken to support and protect victims/survivors. The authority will, where appropriate, use its powers to deal with perpetrators of this crime.
- 1.4. The Neighbourhoods and Housing Service have adopted the policy of carrying out "Routine Enquiry" where it is safe to do so with all female tenants at the start of their tenancy, and "Selective Enquiry" with both female and male tenants at other points where there is reason to believe that the customer may be experiencing domestic abuse.
- 1.5. The Neighbourhoods and Housing Service recognises the relationship between domestic abuse and safeguarding children and adults. We will keep the safety of victims at the forefront of our approach.
- 1.6. As one in four women and one in six men will experience domestic abuse in their lives, many tenants and residents will be victims of domestic abuse. As the largest employer in the area, many Council employees will also be experiencing domestic abuse in their day to day lives. In recognition of the prevalence of this crime, all employees must be consistent in their approach to domestic abuse.
- 1.7. Male victims may have different needs in relation to housing and support than female victims and the Council's approach is to offer appropriate services that take account of individual requirements.
- 1.8. The Neighbourhoods and Housing Service have adopted a multi-agency protocol that sets out the minimum expectations for staff when working with victims/survivors of domestic abuse. By adhering to these standards, we can

ensure that our customers always receive a supportive, appropriate and consistent response.

2. Key terms and definitions

2.1. The term Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) refers to the following range of serious crime types which are predominantly, but not exclusively, experienced by women and girls: Domestic Violence and Abuse; Sexual Offences; Stalking; Female Genital Mutilation (FGM); Crimes Said to be Committed in the Name of 'Honour'; Forced Marriage; Prostitution; and Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation. A full definition is provided here <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls-strategy/tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls-strategy>

2.2. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 has created (for the first time) a cross government statutory definition of domestic abuse to ensure that domestic abuse is properly understood, considered unacceptable and actively challenged across statutory agencies in public attitudes.

The definition is based on the existing cross government definition and is split into two parts.

'Behaviour of a person ('A') towards another person ('B') is 'domestic abuse' if –

- a. A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and
- b. The behaviour is abusive

Behaviour is 'abusive' if it consists of any of the following –

- a. Physical or sexual abuse
- b. Violent or threatening behaviour
- c. Controlling or coercive behaviour
- d. Economic abuse
- e. Psychological, emotional or other abuse

And it does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.

This includes a reference to a child who –

- a. Sees or hears, or experiences the effects of the abuse, and
- b. Is related to A or B

2.3. Controlling behaviour is a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent 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 regulating their everyday behaviour.

- 2.4. Coercive behaviour is an act or a pattern or acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish or frighten their victim.
- 2.5. Economic abuse means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on the victims ability to acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or obtain goods or services.
- 2.6. Personally connected captures different types of relationships, including ex-partners and family members. A full list:
- They are or have been married to each other
 - They are or have been civil partners of each other
 - They have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated)
 - They have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been terminated)
 - They are or have been in an intimate personal relationship with each other
 - They each have or there has been a time when they each have had a parental relationship in relation to the same child
 - They are relatives
- 2.7. A child means a person under the age of 18 years, a child is related to a person if the person is a parent of, or has parental responsibility for the child, or the child and the person are relatives.
- 2.8. Routine enquiry refers to asking all women about their experience of domestic abuse, regardless of whether or not there are any signs of abuse or whether abuse is suspected. The reason that this tool is used with women only is because domestic abuse is a gendered issue that disproportionately affects women. Also commonly known as 'screening', this approach particularly helps to increase the rates of identification within vulnerable groups and very much aligns to the principles of the early help and intervention model.

3. Our commitments, values and principles

- 3.1. Domestic abuse in all its forms is never tolerated and a zero balance stance will be adopted by all.
- 3.2. We will prioritise the safety of victims and their children in every aspect of decision making and intervention.
- 3.3. We understand that without effective intervention domestic abuse often escalates in severity. We will make every effort to reach adult and child victims earlier.
- 3.4. We will treat victims with respect and dignity. We will listen to them and believe their experience of abuse; take seriously their concerns and seek to understand and strengthen their safety strategies.

- 3.5. We will seek to gain informed consent where possible when there is an intention to share information.
- 3.6. We will respect confidentiality and with privacy wherever possible and understand the importance of information sharing in the context of domestic abuse.
- 3.7. We will respect confidentiality and with privacy wherever possible and understand the importance of information sharing in the context of domestic abuse.
- 3.8. We will maximise choices for domestic abuse victims and empower them to make informed decisions about their lives wherever possible.
- 3.9. We will actively work to develop competent services which are sensitive to the diverse range of individuals and communities.
- 3.10. We will send a clear message that perpetrators of domestic abuse are accountable for their behaviour and victims are never to blame.
- 3.11. We will work cooperatively with the range of services that victims need.
- 3.12. We will recognise the importance of specialist domestic abuse services in providing a voice to victims, children and young people (including those in abusive relationships) and guiding us on safe practice.
- 3.13. We will identify and share with partner agencies any gaps, challenges and unmet need within our agency.
- 3.14. While women and girls are disproportionately affected by all forms of VAWG, and some are gender specific such as FGM, we will support those individuals experiencing VAWG or domestic abuse irrespective of age, gender, sexuality, disability, ethnicity, religion, social background or any other protected characteristics identified in the Equality Act.

Values	
Integrity	The expectation is for housing providers such as Hull City Council to undertake DAHA accreditation because it is the right thing to do for our residents, tenants and staff. The intention is to increase victim/survivor safety and housing security and hold perpetrators to account for their harm. This should be reflected in all interactions with tenants, residents and staff, stakeholders and the public. It is the basis for all decision making regarding the support offered to individuals experiencing domestic abuse and those causing harm.
Collaboration	Internal and external collaboration is at the heart of our response. Specialist domestic abuse services are valued for their

	<p>independence, expertise and specialisms and recognised as partners and collaborators.</p> <p>Hull City Council demonstrates true collaboration with all agencies and professionals who have a role to play in the Co-ordinated Community Response to domestic abuse both at a strategic and operational level, and through multi-agency information sharing and co-ordination forums.</p> <p>The expectation is to demonstrate true collaboration with victims/survivors of domestic abuse, recognising them as the experts of their experiences and their needs to access support and housing security. Any interaction with residents/tenants and staff must demonstrate belief and actions must reflect that victims/survivors have been heard. Survivors/victims should be meaningfully included in the development, delivery and evaluation of your services.</p>
Empathy	<p>Empathy should be present in every decision that might impact the welfare of staff and residents/tenants experiencing domestic abuse. It is crucial to seek the full context of someone's situation in a safe and appropriate way that does not require them to repeat their story unreasonably and unnecessarily relive their experiences and risk re-traumatisation. The response should be flexible to meet their needs. Empathy enables staff to respond to tenants, residents and other staff with belief, non-judgement, and to offer person centred support.</p> <p>Empathy is built by being able to fully consider someone's experience of abuse and the barriers that they must overcome to seek support i.e an intersectional approach. To build this understanding, staff must regularly access training that allows them to understand the dynamics and impact of domestic abuse on victims/survivors, including the impact of trauma and how this effects victims/survivors support needs.</p> <p>Through a victim/survivor-led and needs led approach, that is flexible to meet the individual needs of each victim/survivor, Hull City Council will provide opportunities for empathy in practice that meets the intersecting needs of victims/survivors and those causing harm.</p>
Empowerment	<p>Our tenants, residents, and staff should know what they need and should always be listened to and empowered to feel safe to make decisions about their safety and housing security.</p> <p>All decisions and outcomes should be based on victims/survivors' needs and wishes and should be created in collaboration with victims/survivors rather than done to victims/survivors.</p> <p>Empowerment is not just about making decisions regarding their own support and safety, but to also have the power to influence</p>

	how services that impact victims/survivors are developed, delivered and evaluated.
Respect	We should have a culture of respect, both internally and externally, where people are free to express their needs. Respect is one of the foundational elements of a non-judgemental, believing and needs-led approach. Respect should be present in every contact with residents/tenants/staff, in case notes and referral language, and decisions regarding how to support victims/survivors of domestic abuse.
Accountability	<p>We must act with accountability and humility in our roles, both towards employees and residents/staff, and be transparent about the limitations of their knowledge and support. This includes being transparent about mistakes and gaps in service provision if future victims/survivors are to have more positive outcomes. It also means showing humility and taking accountability when gaps or mistakes lead to harm, demonstrating changes to prevent any future harm.</p> <p>Accountability also means we hold perpetrators of abuse to account for their behaviour, and to never blame the victim/survivor for the abuse they have endured. It also recognises that accountability lies with professionals and organisations to engage and support victims/survivors, and it is not the responsibility of victims/survivors to engage services and support.</p>

Principles	
Non-judgement & belief	We must create an enabling environment where victims/survivors know they will be believed, listened to and heard, based on a desire for people and families to thrive. This is achieved by creating an enabling environment where victims/survivors can disclose abuse without judgement, knowing they will be believed.
Being person centred	How you do the work is as important as what you do. We will develop a response that is reflective of the needs of individuals. Staff are provided with the knowledge, skills, confidence and support, to offer each person an individualised response that meets their unique needs and considers and confronts the structural inequalities and barriers that individuals must overcome to receive an equitable response.
Amplifying victim/survivor voice	Hull City Council demonstrates that we seek, value, and incorporate feedback from a diversity of survivor experiences. We seek to learn from victims/survivors, both staff and tenants, and amplify their voices to inform development, delivery and improvement of policies and practice.
Victim/survivor safety	Creating safe homes and communities where perpetrators are held to account for their behaviour. DAHA Members recognise that the safety of those who are experiencing domestic abuse is paramount and that safe intervention starts by talking to victims/survivors and asking them what they need and want to

	happen. Perpetrators will be held to account for their behaviour, with the safety of those who have experienced domestic abuse from them, a priority consideration in any intervention.
Working towards a Coordinated Community Response	No single agency or professional has a complete picture of the life of an individual or family living with domestic abuse, but many will have insights that are crucial to their safety. All agencies that have contact with families have a responsibility to consider our own response and how we work collaboratively in partnership with others in that community; how they promote and contribute to an effective Coordinated Community Response to domestic abuse including how they hold perpetrators of abuse to account.

4. Monitoring and continuous improvement

- 4.1. This policy will be reviewed every 3 years – unless legislation, business or sector developments require otherwise – to ensure that it continues to meet the stated commitments and take account of good practice developments.