



DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY

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Executive Summary:

Our Domestic Abuse Policy is designed to raise awareness about the definitions of abuse and to develop a culture of reporting and responding appropriately to concerns or disclosures. Our aim is to support customers suffering from domestic abuse. The policy details how we work with our partners to share information and those working in more specialised frontline roles will receive in-depth training. The policy looks at how we will support victims of domestic abuse. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 is also incorporated into the policy.

Policy Grouping/Directorate(s)	Customer and Communities	
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Notes:		

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This document sets out Rochdale Boroughwide Housing's ("RBH") policy relating to domestic abuse ("DA"). The policy outlines the society's commitment, aims and approach to addressing, tackling and preventing domestic abuse in homes and neighbourhoods where we work.
- 1.2 RBH recognises that all residents have the right to feel safe in their own home and understands the damaging effect which DA can have on individuals, families and the wider community.
- 1.3 This policy exists in the context of national legislation and local strategies and policies. The policy is designed and intended to assist RBH in meeting its duties and commitments, and to complement and support the relevant legislation, policies, strategies and RBH's tenancy agreement.

2 Context

- 2.1 The Office for National statistics reports that one in four women and one in six men will suffer some form of domestic abuse in their lifetime.
- 2.2 The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance cite housing as the number one barrier to women leaving abusive situations.
- 2.3 Figures from HM Inspectorate of Constabulary show that on average the police receive more than one hundred calls per hour in relation to domestic abuse.
- 2.4 Domestic abuse is often a hidden crime that is not reported to the police. Therefore, data held by the police can only provide a partial picture of the actual level of domestic abuse experienced. It is recognised that victims can experience multiple incidents of abuse before making a report to the police. It is therefore of paramount importance that a range of agencies, including housing providers, have an awareness of and a focus on identifying, reporting and providing help and support in cases of DA.
- 2.5 Domestic Abuse Statistical Data Trends 2023
 - The Crime Survey for England and Wales year ending March 2022 estimated that 5.0% of adults aged 16 years and over (2.4 million) experienced domestic abuse in the last year. (1.7 million women and 699,000 men)
 - Approximately 1 in 5 adults aged 16 years and over (10.4 million) had experienced domestic abuse since the age of 16 years.
 - 84% of victims of domestic abuse are female
 - 93% of defendants in domestic abuse cases were male.
 - The 2021 Census figures show that women aged 20-24 are most at risk of being victims, followed women aged 55-59 years old.
 - Domestic Abuse often begins or escalate during pregnancy. 1 in 3 pregnant women experience DA.

- The 2021 Census domestic abuse marital status figures in relation to victims showed that those most at risk were ‘separated,’ followed by ‘divorced/legally dissolved partnerships.’ The third most effected were single persons.
- The 2021 Census domestic abuse sexual orientation figures showed that victims who identified as ‘bisexual’ were the highest percentage followed by heterosexual.

2.6 RBH adopts the statutory definition of domestic abuse outlined in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. Any incident, or pattern of incidents, of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender and sexuality.

‘Abusive behaviour’ is defined in the act as any of the following:

- physical or sexual abuse
- violent or threatening behaviour
- controlling or coercive behaviour
- economic abuse
- psychological, emotional, or other abuse

For the definition to apply, both parties must be aged 16 or over and ‘personally connected’.

‘Personally connected’ is defined in the act as parties who:

- are married to each other
- are civil partners of each other
- have agreed to marry one another (whether the agreement has been terminated)
- have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether the agreement has been terminated)
- are or have been in an intimate personal relationship with each other
- have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child
- are relatives

This definition includes honour-based abuse, female genital mutilation and forced marriage, and is clear that victims are not confined to one gender, religion, or ethnic group.

2.7 What constitutes domestic abuse is commonly misunderstood, and it is important to remember that no single act defines it; there are a wide range of activities and behaviours that amount to domestic abuse which are often dangerous and can be life-threatening. Some examples of these are:

2.7.1 Controlling behaviour

This 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 and regulating their everyday behaviour.

2.7.2 Coercive behaviour

Coercive behaviour is an act or pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim. 4.6 Coercive and controlling behaviour is a sustained pattern of behaviour that stop short of serious physical violence but amounts to extreme psychological and emotional abuse. Victims of coercive control can have every aspect of life controlled by their partner, often being subjected to daily intimidation and humiliation. Coercive and controlling behaviour underpins domestic abuse. These behaviours are often used as the primary mechanisms for achieving power and control in an abusive relationship and these behaviours reinforce the threat or reality of physical abuse.

2.7.3 Harassment

This is a crime involving behaviour that takes place more than once, and the perpetrator's actions must have an unwanted effect on the victim. Under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, it is an offence for a person to pursue a course of conduct that amounts to harassment of another person, and that they know (or ought to know) what amounts to harassment. The Act defines harassment and states: "References to harassing a person include alarming the person or causing the person distress." A 'course of conduct' in the case of harassment of a single person must involve conduct on at least two occasions.

2.7.4 Stalking

There is no specific legal definition of stalking. However, it is helpful to know that in cases of stalking there is a pattern of unwanted, fixated and obsessive behaviour which is intrusive. It can include harassment that amounts to stalking or stalking that causes fear of violence or serious alarm or distress.

2.7.5 Physical Abuse

This can include hitting, punching, kicking, slapping, hitting with objects, pulling hair, pushing or shoving, cutting or stabbing, restraining, strangulation, choking.

2.7.6 Sexual Abuse

This can include rape and coerced sex, forcing a victim to take part in unwanted sexual acts, refusal to practice safe sex or use contraception, threatened or actual sexual abuse of children.

2.7.7 Financial Abuse

This can include controlling money and bank accounts, making a victim account for all their expenditure, running up debts in a victim's name, allowing no say on how monies are spent, refusing to allow them to study or work.

2.7.8 Psychological and Emotional Violence and Abuse

This has a profound impact upon victims and their children. It can leave a victim with little confidence that they can do anything to change the situation.

Examples include:

- Creating isolation e.g., not allowing them to see other people, preventing them from making their own friendships, not allowing them to go anywhere

on their own, causing them to be depressed and then using this against them.

- Use of threats e.g., threats to kill their family, children, friends, pets; to throw them out and keep the children; to find them if they ever leave; to have them locked up; to telling everyone they have enduring mental health conditions.
- Putting them down – humiliating and undermining them in front of others or in front of their children; telling them they are stupid, hopeless, unlovable, that no one would believe them, or that they are a bad parent.

“Gaslighting” which is a form of manipulation commonly seen in abusive relationships. It is a form of emotional abuse where the abuser bullies the victim about their judgment or perception of reality.

2.7.9 Discriminatory Abuse (with reference to Forced Marriage)

This may manifest itself as any of the other categories of abuse, however what makes discriminatory abuse distinctive is it is motivated by oppressive and discriminatory attitudes towards a person’s:

- Disability
- Physical appearance
- Learning disability
- Mental ill-health
- Sensory impairment
- Race
- Religion
- Gender/ gender identity
- Age
- Culture
- Sexual orientation
- Appearance

2.7.10 Family and Inter-generational Domestic abuse

Approaches have traditionally focused upon heterosexual partner abuse and more recently have been seen to address abuse in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender relationships.

More focus is required to address family and inter-generational abuse, and how it differs from partner abuse, for example if the perpetrator is the victim’s teenage or adult sibling, child or grandchild. Careful consideration is required when dealing with family and intergenerational abuse due to the complexities of family composition and safeguarding implications.

2.7.11 Elder Abuse

Elder abuse can be detrimental to a victim’s wellbeing due to problems with mobility, mental health and social isolation. Older people may have come to accept some aspects of domestic abuse as the ‘norm’ dependent upon their generation.

2.8 Wellbeing

The Care Act 2014 specifies that freedom from abuse and neglect is a key part of a person's wellbeing. The Care Act guidance outlines specific aims to stop abuse and neglect, prevent harm and address what has caused the abuse.

The guidance outlines that abuse takes many forms, and practitioners should not be constrained in their view of what constitutes abuse or neglect. It describes numerous types of abuse including Domestic violence

- Psychological abuse
- Financial and material abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Physical abuse

Whatever form DA takes it is rarely a one-off incident. Usually, it is a pattern of abusive and controlling behaviour through which the abuser seeks power and control over their victim. It may be accompanied by various types of intimidation such as degradation, mental and verbal abuse, humiliation, deprivation, systematic criticism and belittling.

3 Aims & Objectives

3.1 The aims of the policy are:

- To ensure all our colleagues are appropriately trained in recognising signs of domestic abuse and are clear about how to escalate their concerns.
- Ensure that those colleagues who deal with reports of domestic abuse are well trained to confidently support victims and their families to increase safety and reduce risk, in partnership with specialist agencies.
- When dealing with reports our colleagues must be led by the wishes of the person experiencing the abuse. Colleagues will need to consider risk, safeguarding and child protection concerns, and deal appropriately with those concerns. Where these concerns do not exist, the guiding principle should be that our response to domestic abuse is customer led.
- Ensure we have colleagues who are confident and competent in challenging perpetrators of domestic abuse using appropriate legal remedies.
- To make sure our customers know what our approach is when responding to reports of domestic abuse, and they know how they can access our services if they are experiencing domestic abuse. We will support victims to take appropriate legal measures to protect themselves and their families.
- Signpost victims to where they can access help with the use of civil and criminal laws, to offer them protection and to prevent further abuse.
- RBH is committed to raising awareness around domestic abuse through its customer contact, website, social media campaigns and work within our communities.
- Ensure our volunteers, engaged customers and contractors are made aware of this policy, and their responsibility to report any concerns they may have about potential domestic abuse, to RBH colleagues.

- To make sure our service response to domestic abuse is easily accessible to all customers who are experiencing domestic abuse. We recognise that some victims face additional barriers and discrimination when trying to access services and RBH recognise the need to work in a coordinated way with other specialist agencies to overcome these barriers.
- We will, where appropriate, complete Domestic Abuse Risk Assessments (DASH) and contribute to Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) and Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). We will include additional LGBTQ+ inclusive questions when completing DASH RIC assessments with victims from the LGBTQ+ community.

3.2 The policy fits with the Succeeding Together values of RBH:

Responsibility – RBH understands the impact that DA can have on individuals, households and families and will take responsibility for doing all that it can to support domestic abuse survivors and in working to prevent, address and resolve DA in our neighbourhoods.

Equity – RBH will carry out our work to support survivors of DA and tackle perpetrators in a way that is fair and unbiased and recognises that there is no typical abuser and no typical victim of DA.

Democracy – RBH will work with customers and residents in further developing our work in this area to support this policy and inform the way in which we work.

Pioneering – RBH will seek to find creative and effective ways of preventing and addressing DA.

Collaboration – RBH understands the need for strong partnership working to ensure the safety of our tenants and their families when tackling DA.

4 Policy Statement

4.1 As a landlord RBH prohibits DA in its tenancy agreement, Section 6 Nuisance and Anti-Social Behaviour states:

You, your friends and relatives and any other person living in or visiting the property (including children) must not:

(6.1(F)) Inflict domestic violence, threaten violence or use mental, emotional or sexual abuse against your partner, ex-partner or another member of your family or household.

4.2 RBH will incorporate the legislation laid out in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 within its processes where appropriate and support the police and the local authority in the roll out of their duties under the Act.

4.3 RBH will seek to enforce the tenancy agreement and/or will utilise the provisions made within the ASB Crime and Policing Act 2014. RBH will support victims throughout this process.

4.4 RBH will support survivors and their children as victims of DA as defined by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and make arrangements with the local authority to access safe accommodation.

- 4.5 RBH will adopt a victim centred approach in responding to reports of DA and will treat, with the strictest of confidence, all information provided. The exception to this is where disclosure is made of a safeguarding concern and RBH has a duty to report this to the appropriate agencies.
- 4.6 RBH will undertake a risk assessment with victims of DA, to assess the level of risk that individuals and families may be in. RBH will utilise the nationally recognised DASH form (Domestic Abuse, Stalking, Honour Based Violence) to facilitate this.
- 4.7 RBH will take a victim focused approach to supporting our customers who experience DAV. RBH use a harm reduction, person centred, trauma-informed approach to support all victims of DAV. RBH work within wider Community Safety Partnerships across Rochdale to ensure appropriate support is offered to all victims, whilst risks are identified, understood, and managed.
- 4.8 RBH will make consideration of and utilise national data and intelligence around specific groups of individuals who may be at greater risk to shape our service. For example, during a relationship breakdown, during pregnancy, within the LGBTQ+ community, or within communities where issues such as forced marriage, Female Genital Mutilation or honour-based violence is more prevalent. RBH recognise that seasonal and cultural holidays and events have an impact on wellbeing and combined with the cost of living this does have an impact on our communities and identify the need to ensure resource is in place to support fully.
- 4.9 RBH will aim to identify potential domestic abuse cases through recognition of established indicators (e.g., repeat repairs, loud music) and will undertake a review of these in line with local and national good practice.
- 4.10 RBH will provide support to victims of DA and will seek to signpost victims to other support organisations to provide further assistance and make information available on our website and portal so all who access for assistance are able to find support.
- 4.11 We will work with partner agencies in supporting victims of DA and, where appropriate, in pursuing legal remedies available to resolve cases i.e., Domestic Violence Protection Orders. Domestic violence protection notices (DVPN) are frequently issued by police when attending incidents of alleged domestic abuse. The effect of the DVPN is to force the perpetrators removal from the property for 48 hours; this will then be followed by an application to the magistrate's court for a domestic violence prevention order (DVPO) which can result in removal from the premises for a further 28 days.
- 4.12 RBH will aim, where we are requested and where legislation allows, to ensure that the victim is able to remain in their home. This includes consideration of reasonable and appropriate security improvements which may be required to their property.
- 4.13 Where a victim wishes to explore rehousing as an element of resolution to their situation, RBH will work with them in securing alternate accommodation with the society or will signpost to other providers.

- 4.14 RBH will work with partner agencies, including Greater Manchester Police, Rochdale Borough Council and Victim Support, in adopting a multi-agency approach, in order to safeguard our customers and residents, and their families, and to reduce the risk of homelessness caused by DA.
- 4.15 RBH will promote itself as an initial reporting centre for anyone suffering DA and we will encourage, support, and assist tenants and the wider community in reporting incidences of DA to other relevant authorities.
- 4.16 RBH will seek to engage perpetrators, where appropriate, and will assist them in accessing relevant and appropriate help.
- 4.17 RBH will participate in the Rochdale Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (“MARAC”) and will further develop our role across the borough as a key partner in this area of work.
- 4.18 As members of the Greater Manchester Housing Providers Crime and Disorder Group RBH will work with other landlords in the development of best practice around DA. The group is developing a Domestic Abuse Standard and RBH will adhere to the agreed principals in its work relating to DA.
- 4.19 The society will ensure that our policy and procedures comply with and complement Rochdale Borough Council’s (RBC) strategic objectives and in particular, will have regard to, and play a part in the continued Strategic and Domestic Abuse joint working group with other Registered Providers and continue the delivery of the RSCP’s Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy for the Borough.
- 4.20 RBH will seek to promote and provide educational literature and events relating to DA.
- 4.21 All RBH employees are expected to support the society’s commitment to dealing with DA and this will be promoted via safeguarding training and our Eyes Wide Open strategy.
- 4.22 RBH will provide training and support to frontline workers in order to ensure that tenants and the wider community are provided with a consistent and high-quality service by employees who are competent and confident in dealing with cases which are reported to them.
- 4.23 This policy shall be adhered to in conjunction with other relevant policies including our Anti-Social Behaviour and Safeguarding Policy.
- 4.24 RBH will maintain a centralised record of all DA reports which will be held securely and in line with relevant policies relating to confidentiality, data protection and document retention.
- 4.25 **Complaints**
- Any party involved in a domestic abuse case can make a complaint to RBH if they are not satisfied about how the case has been handled. When a complaint of this type is made RBH will follow the process set out in our complaints policy and process

5 Monitoring

- 5.1 The Safeguarding Lead will act as lead officer for the society and will take responsibility for.
- Ensuring the implementation of our policies and procedures relating to DA, including audit of case files with RBH Safeguarding coordinator
 - Producing a report detailing safeguarding alerts, including those relating to DA, for consideration and monitoring by the Executive Management Team
 - Periodic reviews of this policy and its related procedures
 - The monitoring of the relevance and effectiveness of the policy and procedures
 - Ensuring the society is represented on the MARAC and other relevant bodies and meetings.
 - Assisting in the training of other staff
 - Provide reporting internally to the Safeguarding Group
 - Provide updates to the Rochdale Borough Safeguarding Adults Board and Children's Partnership
- 5.2 RBH will monitor and review its DA service on a regular basis, through case and service area reviews, seeking to ensure continuous development and improvement and to ensure that it meets any legislative or regulatory changes. Monitoring of this policy will be undertaken annually.

6 Review

- 6.1 All RBH strategies, policies, service standards and procedures are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that they are 'fit for purpose' and comply with all relevant legislation and statutory regulations.
- 6.2 This policy will go through the full policy approval process every 3 years and will undergo a desktop review annually. This is to ensure that it is fit for purpose and complies with all relevant and statutory regulations.

7 Current legislation

- 7.1 This policy is informed by the following legislation and regulation:
- Domestic Abuse Act 2021
 - Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims (Amendment) Act 2012
 - Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004
 - Serious Crime Act 2015 • Crime and Security Act 2010
 - Family Law Act 1996
 - Civil Partnership Act 2004
 - The Sexual Offences Act 2003
 - Protection from Harassment Act 1997
 - The Equality Act 2010
 - The Housing Act 1996
 - The Data Protection Act 2018
 - Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003

- Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007
- Human Rights Act 1998
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) • Data Protection Act 2018
- Police and Justice Act 2006
- Protection of Freedoms Act 2012
- Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014
- The Policing and Crime Act 2017
- The Care Act 2014
- Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (Clare's Law)
- Children's Act 1989
- The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013

8 Links with Other RBH Documents

8.1 This policy links to the following policies and strategies:

- Safeguarding Policy
- Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- Equality & Diversity Policy
- Dignity & Safeguarding at Work Policy
- Eyes Wide Open Strategy
- RBH Lettings Policy
- RBC Allocations Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy

Rochdale Boroughwide Housing Limited is a charitable community benefit society.
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