

Your guide to our Domestic Abuse Policy

WHA is opposed to all forms of domestic abuse and we will positively support residents who are victims of domestic abuse. WHA will take the strongest action possible against perpetrators of domestic abuse where we have the power

Definition of Domestic Abuse – WHA defines domestic abuse as:

“Any physical, sexual, emotional, psychological or economic abuse that takes place in the home between two individuals.”

A perpetrator can be anyone within the home or can be someone outside of the victim’s home.

WHA acknowledges that whilst men will sometimes be the victims and women the perpetrators of domestic abuse, in the main abuse is mainly perpetrated by men towards women. This policy also covers abuse between gay and lesbian partners as well as heterosexual partners.

WHA will accept an incident as “domestic abuse” if anyone for example the victim, the police, a witness or a housing officer perceives the incident to be domestic abuse. In these instances, an incident of domestic abuse should be recorded and dealt with as such.

We recognise that evidence of domestic abuse may not always be readily available, investigators will, in the first place, accept the incident, without formal evidence, until further investigations prove otherwise. This does not mean that the alleged perpetrator is immediately assumed to be guilty. Investigators will listen, support and, wherever possible, do what the victim wants to be done.

Confidentiality – Victims will be encouraged to allow us to share information with other agencies, including the police and local authority departments, to ensure that the full range of civil and criminal remedies can be pursued. All information however provided by the victim will be treated with confidence, and will only be passed to external agencies with prior consent. There may be exceptions to this is where we consider a child is at risk in any situation or if there is a high risk of serious harm to anyone.

The Head of Housing Management & Customer Service will approve any disclosure without the victim’s consent.

We will, at all times, adhere to our ‘data protection and confidentiality policy’.

Support for victims – WHA staff will offer support to its residents who are victims of domestic abuse. This support may be direct through WHA staff, or through other local agencies that are able to give appropriate support. We can also arrange for counseling through local victim support groups.

The safety of the victim is of extreme importance and where it is practicable for the victim to remain in their home, every effort will be made to provide additional security and support as appropriate. This may include:

- installation of a panic alarm in the home.
- provision of security equipment, such as a safe letterbox, additional door and window security to safeguard the victim and their home; and
- replacement of broken windows, have rubbish removed or carry out any other emergency repair to the home as a result of a domestic abuse incident without delay (generally within 24 hours).

Generally, victims of domestic abuse will not be charged for these security measures or clean-up operations.

Where it is considered that the victim would be in acute danger if they remained in the home, we will aim to provide either temporary or permanent alternative accommodation, in accordance with WHA's transfer policy. (Where urgent re-housing is necessary and WHA does not have a dwelling available, we will liaise with the appropriate local authority homeless person unit and other specialist refuges in an attempt to provide temporary accommodation).

Where we provide alternative accommodation, whether temporary or permanent, we will provide as necessary any additional security measures as listed above.

We will discuss and involve the victim in deciding our course of action and we will regularly communicate with them to ensure that they are kept informed about developments.

Action against perpetrators – WHA will adopt a multi-agency approach in dealing with perpetrators of domestic abuse against its residents. This will include working with the police and appropriate local authority departments but may involve other organisations and agencies. Our multi-agency approach is intended to make sure that the full range of civil and criminal remedies can be pursued. We will where appropriate encourage victims to use restraining orders or injunctions to prevent domestic abuse or remove the violent person from the household.

The action taken against perpetrators will depend upon the individual circumstances. This may include possession action against a perpetrator where other members of the household have left the home due to domestic abuse. Dependent upon the circumstances, this would

provide an opportunity for the victim and children to either return to the home, or to provide the victim and children with an alternative permanent home and re-let the original home to another family.

Generally, WHA staff will not be involved in interviewing alleged perpetrators. Such interviews will only be undertaken if:

- It is considered appropriate by the investigating officer and their manager.
- the victim is in agreement with such a proposal; and
- it is considered safe to do so.

Closure of cases – A case will be closed when:

- it has been successfully resolved by whatever means; or
- the perpetrator of the domestic abuse has been evicted or sent to jail; or
- there is no further action which can be taken.

A clear conclusion is important to all concerned,

i.e. the victim, the alleged perpetrator and WHA. Ideally, the victim should be satisfied with the result, but some cases will have to be closed even though the victim is not satisfied. This may be due to insufficient evidence to support the action, whether legal or otherwise.

Officers should never raise a complainant's expectations falsely and clarity is essential. If there is no rational basis for the complaint, or rigorous investigation cannot verify the problem, the complainant must be advised that the case is closed unless further evidence is available.

A decision to close a case should always be discussed, and ideally agreed, with the victim in a formal review meeting before confirmation in writing.

Formal closure of a case must be in writing to both the complainant and alleged perpetrators, clearly explaining the reasons. The HSD will evaluate the effectiveness of every closed case.

Who to contact within WHA – Your housing officer is the first point of contact when reporting domestic abuse. The housing officer will be appropriately trained to deal with such incidents and will be supported by other staff and external agencies.

Appeals – Where a victim or alleged perpetrator is dissatisfied with the investigation or the decision, they may appeal against the way an investigation has been handled or the decision reached and request a review of the case. The HSD will conduct this review.

Monitoring and reporting – The Head of Housing Management & Customer Service (HoHMCS) will monitor each case of domestic abuse and provide appropriate advice and support to

officers dealing with the case. The HoHMCS will make sure that all cases are appropriately recorded and dealt with in line with detailed operating procedures.

The HoHMCS will report all incidents to the Board with the anti-social behaviour incidents.

Policy review – This policy and associated procedure will be reviewed annually.

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