

1. Domestic Abuse Policy

2. Reference Number 3.10.2

3. Statement of Intent

3.1 bdht believes that none of its customers should live in fear of abuse from a spouse, partner or another member of their household and will take steps to assist and support any person suffering from or threatened with domestic abuse. We recognise that domestic abuse exists primarily as part of violence against women and girls but is also experienced by men. Of domestic abuse crimes reported 75% are against women and 25% against men. We will offer appropriate support in all cases.

3.2 The definition of Domestic Abuse has been updated following the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and reads:

Behaviour of a person towards another person is domestic abuse if these persons are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other and the behaviour is abusive if it consists of (any of the following) physical or sexual abuse, violent or threatening behaviour, controlling or coercive behaviour, economic abuse, psychological, emotional or other abuse and it does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.

3.3 The Domestic Abuse Act has extended the controlling or coercive behaviour offence to cover any post separation abuse.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 has also introduced a new standalone offence of non-fatal strangulation and threats and to share intimate images is also now a criminal offence. It also extends to honour based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriages.

The Act also explicitly recognises children as survivors of Domestic Abuse if they see, hear or experience the effects of abuse.

3.4 This policy is intended to cover all such instances and to ensure that services provided by bdht meet the needs of the customer for a safety led approach.

3.5 bdht recognises that domestic abuse does not just affect only the survivor and their families but also the community in which it occurs, this policy supports our corporate objectives of creating sustainable communities and safe neighbourhoods.

4. Legal and Regulatory Requirements

- 4.1 The Neighbourhood and Community Standard
Housing Act 1996
Domestic Abuse Act 2021
The Care Act 2014
Claire's Law (Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme)
Protection from Harassment Act 1997
Crime and Disorder Act 1988
Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014
Human Rights Act 1988
Family Law Act 1996
Equality Act 2010
Data Protection Act 2018
Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

5. Policy Statement

- 5.1 This policy sets out bdht's approach in responding to and dealing with Domestic Abuse. Bdht will take reports or signs of Domestic Abuse seriously and will work with specialist and statutory external organisations to support our customers. The Policy also outlines what action bdht can take against perpetrators.
- 5.2 All customer facing staff will receive appropriate levels of domestic abuse awareness training to ensure they understand the important role they have in recognising, understanding and tackling domestic abuse.
- 5.3 bdht will take a victim centred and survivor led approach including enforcing tenancy conditions against perpetrators of abuse.
- 5.4 bdht will encourage survivors to report domestic abuse by sharing our process on our website and through our tenancy sign up process. We will work proactively with partner agencies to promote awareness, challenge attitudes and improve the response to domestic abuse.
- 5.5 In conjunction with other specialist agencies, bdht will provide temporary safehouses and provide support to survivors whilst they are in the safehouse.
- 5.6 bdht will continue to sign up for the Chartered Institute of Housing 'make a stand' pledge to show our commitment to supporting customers experiencing Domestic Abuse.

6. Types of Abuse

- 6.1 Domestic abuse can encompass but is not limited to the following types of abuse:

- Physical abuse
- Psychological and Emotional abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Coersive control
- Online abuse
- Economic abuse
- Female genital mutilation
- Honour based violence

7. Responding to reports of Domestic Abuse

- 7.1 Customers can report domestic abuse via phone, email, or in person and bdht will provide a sensitive and confidential response in line with our domestic abuse procedure, ensuring we respect the wishes of the survivor.
- 7.2 We will ensure that survivors receive the appropriate support that meets their needs and best interests taking into account age, gender, sexuality, disability, ethnicity, religion, social background or any other protected characteristics identified in the Equality Act. This will include linking in with 'by and for' services as appropriate and ensuring accessibility to our offices or other agreed meeting places.
- 7.3 bdht will ensure that we only refer to other agencies and share information with the consent of the person reporting the domestic abuse unless we are required to for the purposes of safeguarding children or vulnerable adults or by law as part of a criminal investigation.
- 7.4 All incidents of domestic abuse will be logged on our secure housing management system and reported to the safeguarding leads.
- 7.5 We will assist survivors to report domestic abuse to the appropriate agencies including the Police and local specialised domestic abuse agencies.
- 7.6 We will aim to ensure that survivors of domestic abuse are aware of the options and support available to them so that they can make informed decisions about the route they wish to take.
- 7.7 We will work in partnership with legal, statutory and voluntary services and attend local multi agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC) to ensure support is provided in a coordinated way. We will link in with 'by and for' services as appropriate and ensure accessibility to our offices.
- 7.8 Where it is safe to do so we will help the survivor to continue to live in their home but if rehousing is deemed the safer option, we will work closely with the Housing Options Team and other registered providers to offer a range of housing options.
- 7.9 We will assist with additional security measures as needed to our homes and act outside our normal repairing policy as necessary.

- 7.10 We will endeavour to assist perpetrators to access help to positively change their behaviour by completing referrals to DAPP and Drive.
- 7.11 We will use the appropriate legal tools and powers available to us to tackle perpetrators living in our homes, who do not wish to positively change their behaviour. This may include but is not limited to:
- assisting a survivor to terminate their tenancy and secure alternative accommodation.
 - support them to seek an occupation order to have a perpetrator removed from the tenancy and the property.
- 7.12 Staff Training and awareness
- We will ensure that we have domestic abuse champions who will provide additional guidance and advice whenever necessary to all of our staff.
 - We will provide information on domestic abuse and the help available as part of our staff induction programme.
 - We will provide appropriate and regular training for staff to recognise, report and deal with domestic abuse effectively.
 - We will work with partner agencies to promote awareness of domestic abuse both publicly and professionally, participate in appropriate campaigns and proactively review and improve our processes.
 - We will make information about national and local domestic abuse services available on our website and internal SharePoint so they are easily accessible for customers and staff.

8. Priorities

- 8.1 It is essential for the effectiveness of this policy, that all stages of this policy are given equal priority.

9. Policy Implementation

9.1 Staffing

- 9.1.1 Managers will ensure that targets and objectives are met by maintaining sufficient staff resources and through the prioritisation of casework.

9.2 Procedure

- 9.2.1 This links to the domestic abuse, homelessness and termination of tenancy procedures.
- 9.2.2 bdht will train staff to ensure that the service is delivered efficiently and effectively. bdht will ensure that staff members are aware of the implications of all relevant legislation and regulatory guidance.

9.3 Monitoring of the Policy

9.3.1 bdht will monitor and audit the management of domestic abuse casework through regular one to ones with staff.

10. Links to associated external Documents

10.1 This Policy is linked to the following external documents:

- Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- Regulator of Social Housing Regulatory standards, procedures and guidance
- Data Protection Act 2018

11. Link to associated internal Documents

11.1 This Policy is linked to the following internal documents:

- Service Standards
- Housing Needs and Access to Housing Policy
- Homelessness Procedure
- Domestic Abuse Procedure
- Safeguarding Policies
- Responsive Repairs Policy
- Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- Allocation and tenancy Policy
- Tenancy Agreement
- Equality & Diversity Policy
- Information Security Policy

12. Consultation arrangements

12.1 Customers were consulted and involved in the development of this policy through focus groups.

13. EMT Approval was gained

13.1 Approval of this Policy was gained on 19th October 2023, this policy has been reviewed and approved by EMT.

14. Review Date

14.1 This policy will be reviewed in 2026.

15. Responsibility for implementing the policy

- 15.1 The Director of Housing and Communities is responsible for the implementation of this policy.

16. Date Issued

- 16.1 August 2023.