



Domestic Abuse Policy

Policy

1.0 Introduction and Purpose

- 1.1 This policy sets out how Irwell Valley Homes (IVH) will assist and support any person experiencing or threatened with domestic abuse. It applies to all customers, including those living with our tenants, regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability or financial status.
- 1.2 Anyone can be affected by domestic abuse, it happens in all types of relationships and from all backgrounds, and the impact that it can have on survivors and their families is far reaching and can last throughout their lives.
- 1.3 The Crime Survey for England and Wales estimated that 5.0% of adults (6.9% women and 3.0% men) aged 16 years and over experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2022; this equates to an estimated 2.4 million adults (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.
- 1.4 Preventing and ending domestic abuse is everybody's responsibility and IVH recognises the critical role it can play in tackling this issue. As a housing provider IVH is well placed to recognise the signs of domestic abuse. As our front-line housing teams and contractors go in and out of our homes every day, they will come into contact with survivors and perpetrators and are uniquely placed to identify physical, financial and coercive abuse.
- 1.5 We recognise that IVH alone cannot tackle all of the issues relating to domestic abuse, and in line with guidance and good practice, we are committed to working collaboratively with agencies and partners through a coordinated approach in our response to reports of domestic abuse.
- 1.6 Due to the specific nature of domestic abuse, IVH has a separate domestic abuse policy and procedure, however they are closely linked with the IVH safeguarding vulnerable adults and children policy and procedure and the anti-social behaviour policy and procedure.
- 1.7 In line with standard organisational practice, we will seek to identify and prevent incidents of domestic abuse through close and careful tenancy management. This will include gathering appropriate information at the application and letting stage, introductory tenancy procedures, ongoing tenancy engagement and effective inter-agency working. Where it is in our power to do so we reserve the right to use enforcement action against perpetrators of domestic abuse to protect vulnerable customers, including the use of civil

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- injunctions and possession proceedings.
- 1.8 Our approach to dealing with domestic abuse is supported by our mission statement, “to enable people to live well in their home and community”, further supported by our corporate priorities, values and behaviours.

2 Policy Statement

- 2.1 IVH takes a zero-tolerance approach to domestic abuse.
- 2.2 We will raise awareness of domestic abuse with our customers and colleagues highlighting our approach.
- 2.3 We will support and be involved in local and national initiatives to raise awareness of domestic abuse.
- 2.4 We believe that all our customers and households should not live in fear of violence or abuse from any person, including their partner, their former partner, or any member of their household or extended family.
- 2.5 Any person experiencing domestic abuse will be treated in a supportive and sympathetic way, and their report will be taken seriously.
- 2.6 The victims disclosure alone will be sufficient information for IVH to act upon the report as a matter of priority and provide appropriate advice, assistance and support to the victim and their family. The support will be victim led and our approach will be victim focused and trauma informed at all times.
- 2.7 We understand the need to work with and engage with perpetrators to try and stop the cycle of domestic abuse and so, where appropriate, we will support perpetrators of domestic abuse in trying to change their behaviour and recognise the detrimental effect their behaviour can have on victims and others.
- 2.8 We will also robustly challenge perpetrators of domestic abuse and will take enforcement action where it is appropriate to do so, as well as support legal action being taken by partner agencies to protect victims of domestic abuse from further harmful behaviour.
- 2.9 IVH recognises that domestic abuse is a criminal act and as such those experiencing it are considered to be victims of crime.

3.0 Policy Scope

- 3.1 This Policy applies to all IVH customers living in properties owned and managed by IVH. For colleagues who may be experiencing domestic abuse or are perpetrators of domestic abuse, please refer to the appropriate policy relating to domestic abuse and colleagues.
- 3.2 This policy and any accompanying procedure sets out IVH’s approach and commitment to supporting customers who may be at risk of, or experiencing domestic abuse, as well as how we will deal with the perpetrators responsible for the domestic abuse.

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4.0 Definitions:

4.1 IVH adopts the statutory definition of domestic abuse outlined in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, which is based on the existing cross-government definition. This states: “Domestic abuse, or domestic violence, is defined across Government as any incident 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 their gender or sexuality.”

4.2 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

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

4.4 ‘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 or not the agreement has been terminated)
- have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not 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

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

4.6 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. Approaches have traditionally focused upon heterosexual partner abuse; more recently focus has been made to address abuse in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender relationships. Some examples of these are:

4.7 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

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personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

4.8 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.

4.9 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.

4.10 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.

4.11 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.

4.12 Physical Abuse

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

4.13 Sexual Abuse

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.

4.14 Financial abuse

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.

4.15 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:

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- 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 tell everyone they are mad
- 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.

4.16 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

4.17 Family and Inter-generational Domestic abuse

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.

4.18 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.

4.19 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

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

5.0 Safeguarding

- 5.1 A significant number of adults who need safeguarding are often experiencing domestic abuse in some form. Despite the overlap between supporting abuse victims and safeguarding adults the two have developed separate professional practices.
- 5.2 If domestic abuse is an isolated issue and there are no other safeguarding concerns then support can be sought via forums such as MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference).
- 5.3 If there is more than one safeguarding issue present, such as domestic abuse in addition to physical or mental health disabilities then a referral should be made to Safeguarding Adults so that services can be coordinated to deal with the potentially complex issues.
- 5.4 However, we will always encourage colleagues to make a Safeguarding Adults referral even if it is just for information so that agencies are mindful of our concerns, as there may be other issues we are not aware of.
- 5.5 Children exposed to an environment of domestic abuse are mentally and emotionally harmed by the abuse. Exposure to domestic abuse can cause both short and long term adverse psychological effects for the child, that can continue into adult life. This means that in domestic abuse cases where children are present practitioners have a duty to involve Children's Services to ensure any children are adequately safeguarded.

6.0 Our Commitments

- 6.1
- Supporting and assisting customers who are experiencing domestic abuse, including young people and children.
 - Delivering an effective and efficient service to victims of domestic abuse in line with legislation and IVH's current policy and procedures.
 - Raising awareness of domestic abuse, including the implications for the services that IVH provides within the community.
 - Preventing homelessness caused by customers suffering from domestic abuse. This may include providing support to enable victims to remain in their own homes, or providing alternative accommodation, where possible. If we cannot provide alternative accommodation or it is not safe to do so within our stock, we would support the customer to secure alternative accommodation in conjunction with the local authorities and other key statutory and voluntary agencies.
 - Working with our partners to minimise and manage risk to victims. Being flexible enough to respond to individual needs.
 - Making sure that the service provided is available to all sections of the community.
 - Raising awareness of the impact of domestic abuse and the role IVH colleagues play in responding to reports of domestic abuse.

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- We will consider best practice in developing our approach towards domestic abuse and we will be open to learning from others and share our experiences.
- We will adopt a multi-agency approach towards tackling domestic abuse and will seek the support of other agencies to assist us in developing the best possible solutions. This will include offering effective support and advice to victims.

7.0 Aims:

- 7.1 To ensure all our colleagues are appropriately trained in recognising signs of domestic abuse and are clear about how to escalate their concerns.
- 7.2 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
- 7.3 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.
- 7.4 Ensure we have colleagues who are confident and competent in challenging perpetrators of domestic abuse using appropriate legal remedies.
- 7.5 Identify those perpetrators who want to address their behaviour by making appropriate referrals and signposting to local and national organisations who deliver behaviour change programmes and offer support to perpetrators trying to break the cycle of their abusive behaviour.
- 7.6 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.
- 7.7 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.
- 7.8 IVH is committed to raising awareness around domestic abuse through its customer contact, website, social media campaigns and work within our communities.
- 7.9 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 IVH colleagues.
- 7.10 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 IVH recognise the need to work in a coordinated way with other specialist agencies to overcome these barriers.

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- 7.11 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).
- 7.12 We will include additional LGBTQ+ inclusive questions when completing DASH RIC assessments with victims from the LGBTQ+ community.
- 7.13 When dealing with domestic abuse full consideration will be given to our safeguarding responsibilities, including the reporting of criminal behaviour to the police, details of which are included in the safeguarding vulnerable adult and children policy and procedure and the anti-social behaviour policy and procedure.

8.0 How IVH Will Respond to Reports of Domestic Abuse

- 8.1 When a victim reports domestic abuse in person, we will ensure that they can be supported confidentially and discreetly by a trained colleague.
- 8.2 If they make a disclosure by other means, i.e. over the phone, they will be offered immediate domestic abuse support contact numbers and safety advice. We will plan to meet with them in a safe place of their choice if they require further support or assistance.
- 8.3 IVH recognises that victims and witnesses of domestic abuse need support and assurance from us if they are to retain confidence in our ability to successfully support them. To make this possible we will:
- Treat the report seriously and believe the victim
 - Record every report, considering sensitivity/confidentiality issues
 - Allocate a named case worker
 - Protect the identity of the victim/ witness, and only reveal it to perpetrators or their representatives with the persons permission
 - Work with other relevant agencies in a coordinated way in providing support and advice
 - Where possible we recommend the taking of swift and effective action against perpetrators to protect victims from further abuse
 - Keeping victims and witnesses informed at all stages of the case
 - We will agree an action plan with the victim/survivor and be led by them.
 - We will keep in close communication with them if it's safe for them to do so and review our actions and levels of support frequently as agreed through the action plan
 - We will offer improved security to a victim/survivor's home where a need is identified in the form of "target hardening". This may be in partnership with local support agencies
 - We will carry out appropriate repairs to our property if the damage was caused by the perpetrator.
 - We will assist those experiencing domestic abuse, access appropriate services as early as possible and provide advice to allow them to make choices about what to do next.
 - Ensure that where children and young people are affected by domestic abuse, they have access to services as early as possible.

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- Challenge perpetrators appropriately and make referrals to specialist agencies who provide support and offer advice to perpetrators.

9.0 Assess Risk

- 9.1 Where domestic abuse is identified, we will aim to carry out a risk assessment (using the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and “Honour”- based violence (DASH) Risk Identification Checklist) and work with specialist agencies to help with safety planning and support for the victim/survivor and their children.
- 9.2 We will share information with the local MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) where the risk rating threshold has been met.
- 9.3 We actively participate in MARACs, where information is shared between agencies involved in domestic abuse cases. We will ensure that any actions assigned to IVH through the MARAC process are completed.
- 9.4 In cases where the threshold is not met, with the agreement of the victim/survivor, we will make referrals to other relevant agencies, including adult safeguarding, to identify support mechanisms for the victim and the family.

10.0 Legal Action Against Perpetrators

- 10.1 We will make full use of our own civil legal tools, for example civil injunctions where it’s appropriate to do so to protect victims.
- 10.2 We will support and assist victims, where necessary, when making applications for Non-molestation Orders and Occupation Orders under the Family Law Act. IVH may consider funding such applications should the victim have no recourse to public funds.
- 10.3 If the perpetrator is an IVH tenant, and the victim is not living in the tenancy or has decided to leave the tenancy, IVH will consider taking possession of the perpetrators tenancy if we believe it is proportionate and reasonable in the circumstances to do so, and there is sufficient evidence to persuade the courts. We will always act in accordance with court orders and consider the household dynamic when enforcing tenancy conditions.
- 10.4 If the perpetrator recognises their abusive behaviour is not acceptable and is willing to access services specialising in perpetrator behaviour change programmes, IVH will signpost and provide advice on how to engage with these services.

11.0 Housing

- 11.1 We understand that many victims may not wish to move home in order to maintain local and family connections or avoid disruption to their children and their schooling. We aim to work with the victim to take action to manage the risks posed to them in remaining in their home. We will refer them to the NCDV (National Centre for Domestic Abuse) specialist support agency who can provide appropriate support and legal advice in relation to housing.

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- 11.2 If the victim is a joint tenant with the perpetrator, we will support the victim if s/he wishes to remain in the property. We will refer the victim to independent legal advisors who can provide the necessary advice:
- on seeking an occupation order,
 - or a court order to transfer the tenancy into their sole name,
 - or serving an NTQ to end the tenancy, and IVH will, where possible, take action against the perpetrator,
 - any other action required as a result of a court order where the victim is not the joint tenant or joint occupant (see 10.3)
- 11.3 In circumstances where the victim requires temporary accommodation in order to be safe, we will work with specialist agencies and the local authority to ensure the victim secures appropriate accommodation.
- 11.4 If the victim requires permanent rehousing we will support the victim in securing alternative accommodation. We will work with the appropriate support agencies and the local authority in finding alternative accommodation where the risk to the victim is able to be managed and where the victim will be safe.
- 11.5 In cases where the domestic abuse victim is offered IVH accommodation as a permanent solution to their housing problem, we will ensure that the tenure no less than the tenure they had originally.
- 11.6 If the victim secures private rented accommodation, IVH will signpost the victim where possible to the tenant bond scheme.

12.0 Safeguarding

- 12.1 We will follow our Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults and Children Policy and Procedure for protecting children and adults where we believe a child or adult is at risk due to an abusive relationship.

13.0 Training

- 13.1 Ensure all front-line colleagues receive regular appropriate training in relation to domestic abuse, how to spot the signs of potential domestic abuse and how to escalate their concerns.
- 13.2 We will train our staff who deal with rents and money advice, to spot the signs of economic and financial abuse, and how to support victims where this abuse has been identified.
- 13.3 Ensure that those officers dealing directly with domestic abuse victims are appropriately trained and resourced so that they can deal with reports confidently and competently. We will ensure that these colleagues also receive one to one support on a regular basis to ensure their wellbeing.

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- 13.4 Training provided to colleagues will be tailored to their roles and specialisms, or work settings, including the organisation's supported and independent living schemes.

14.0 Information Sharing

- 14.1 We will comply with GDPR regulations and ensure information remains confidential and is stored appropriately.
- 14.2 We will share information with other agencies like the Police, Children and Adult Services, Education, Health, through agreed data exchange protocols, in circumstances where it is necessary and proportionate to do so, and where exemptions under data protection rules allow us to do so. We will advise victims and perpetrators when we are sharing/ or have shared information with other agencies and why we believe it was appropriate to do so. There may be occasions where we have a duty to refer without consent in cases where there are safeguarding or criminality concerns.

15.0 Raising Awareness

- 15.1 Publicise our approach to raise awareness amongst colleagues and customers, with the aim of increasing reports of domestic abuse.
- 15.2 Be involved in local and national campaigns and initiatives to raise awareness of the issues and impact of domestic abuse.
- 15.3 Develop useful information in plain language for victims and witnesses for example leaflets, providing advice and signposting where they can get emergency support and how they can access appropriate services from IVH, e.g. victims who identify as LGBTQI+ will be given the choice if they would prefer to be referred to the LGBT IDVA and local LGBTQI+ support services.
- 15.4 Ensure appropriate information and publicity is available on our website and other social media platforms.

16.0 Reasonable Adjustments

- 16.1 IVH is strongly committed to fairness and making sure that everyone has the same opportunities to access our services. This policy meets the requirements set out by the Equality Act 2010 and aims to prevent unlawful discrimination; we recognise that domestic abuse can disproportionately impact those people with protected characteristics.
- 16.2 We will take additional steps in the application of this policy and make reasonable adjustments to ensure compliance with the Act.
- 16.3 We will be flexible in our approach to each individual and will work with them to arrive at an effective response to their report, taking into account the risks identified and what the victim is wanting to do.
- 16.4 We also recognise that domestic abuse complaints can often be very complex and can affect individuals and families in different ways. We will ensure that we take a trauma

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informed approach and obtain advice and work closely with specialist agencies to ensure victims receive all the support they need.

- 16.5 IVH understand the values of collaboration and co-operation in tackling domestic abuse and are committed to ensuring that customers and colleagues and key agencies are actively involved in the development and review of our policies and procedures.
- 16.6 We will ensure that we will record and monitor all reports of domestic abuse to assist in the planning and development of the service and to identify our key priorities in this area for the future.

17.0 Complaints

- 17.1 Any party involved in a domestic abuse case can make a complaint to IVH if they are not satisfied about how the case has been handled. When a complaint of this type is made IVH will follow the process set out in our complaints policy and process.

Responsibility

The Executive Director (Customers) is responsible for the effective implementation of this policy.

Performance Indicators/Targets/Standards

Internal standards dictate that domestic abuse and safeguarding case management information must be held on the Association's IT systems. In the instance of highly sensitive/confidential information, arrangements must be made to hold the information in a more secure environment.

This policy will be reviewed for effectiveness and policy/legislative change on a two-yearly basis by the author.

Current Legislation

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
- Sexual Offences Act 2003
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Equality Act 2010
- Housing Act 1996
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003
- Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007
- Human Rights Act 1998

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- 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
- Care Act 2014
- Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (Clare's Law)
- Children's Act 1989 and the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013

Equality and Diversity Implications

We are committed to treating people with honesty, dignity, respect & trust. This applies to colleagues, customers and Board Members. Central to this is a commitment to promote and advance equality of opportunity for everyone regardless of their social or economic circumstances, ethnic origin, gender, religion or belief, age, sexual orientation or whether or not they have a disability or are transgender.

Cross Reference Documents/Good Practice

- Domestic Abuse Procedure
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults and Children Policy and Procedure
- Anti-social Behaviour Policy and Procedure
- Access & Customer Care Strategy
- Neighbourhood Management Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Data Protection Policy and Procedure
- Recruitment and Selection of Colleagues Policy
- Employee Domestic Abuse Policy
- Allocations and Empty Homes Policy

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