



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 anyone living in one of the homes we own and manage, 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 affects people from all backgrounds. The impact that it can have on survivors and their families is far reaching and can last throughout their lives.
- 1.3 The Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimates 3.8 million people (7.8%) aged 16+ in England and Wales experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2025. This includes 2.2 million women (9.1%) and 1.5 million men (6.5%).
- 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 customers' homes every day, they will come into contact with survivors and perpetrators and are uniquely placed to identify signs and warnings that physical, financial and coercive abuse may be taking place.
- 1.5 We recognise that IVH alone cannot tackle all the issues relating to domestic abuse, and in line with guidance and good practice, we work collaboratively with agencies and partners to respond 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 IVH's 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 look 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, customer check-ins and customer reviews, ongoing tenancy engagement and effective inter-agency working. Where it is in our power to do so we take enforcement action against perpetrators of domestic abuse to protect vulnerable customers, including the use of civil injunctions and possession proceedings.

2 Policy Statement

- 2.1 IVH takes a zero-tolerance approach to domestic abuse. IVH recognises domestic abuse is a criminal act and those experiencing it are victims of crime.
- 2.2 We raise awareness of domestic abuse with our customers and colleagues so they are

clear and informed on our approach.

- 2.3 We support and participate in local and national initiatives to raise awareness of domestic abuse.
- 2.4 We believe that no one should live in fear of violence or abuse from any person, including our customers, their partners, former partners, or any member of their household or extended family.
- 2.5 Any person experiencing domestic abuse is supported in a respectful and sympathetic and proportionate way.
- 2.6 The victim's disclosure alone is sufficient 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. Support is victim led and our approach is victim focused and trauma informed.
- 2.7 We engage with perpetrators to try and stop the cycle of domestic abuse and so, where appropriate, we 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 robustly challenge perpetrators of domestic abuse and take enforcement action where appropriate, as well as support legal action being taken by partner agencies to protect victims of domestic abuse from further harmful behaviour.

3.0 Policy Scope

- 3.1 This Policy applies to anyone 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 colleague policy relating to domestic abuse.
- 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.

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 No single act defines domestic abuse; 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 personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

4.8 **Coercive behaviour**

This 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**

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:

- 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 can 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**

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

5.0 **Safeguarding Adults**

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 will 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 is made to Safeguarding Adults so that services can be coordinated to deal with the potentially complex issues.

5.4 We always encourage colleagues to make a Safeguarding Adults referral if they have concerns so that agencies are aware and informed, as there may be other issues we are not aware of.

6.0 **Safeguarding Children:**

6.1 The definition of domestic abuse in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 makes clear that children are victims of domestic abuse in their own right if they have seen, heard or experienced the effect of the abuse.

6.2 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. In domestic abuse cases where children are present IVH involves Children's Services and contributes effectively to inter-agency working to ensure children are adequately safeguarded and supported.

7.0 **Our Aims and Commitments:**

7.1 Purpose and Service Offer:

We support and assist customers who are experiencing domestic abuse, including young people and children.

We deliver an effective and efficient service to victims of domestic abuse in line with legislation and IVH's current policy and procedures.

We ensure customers know what our approach is when responding to reports of domestic abuse, and how they can access our services if they are experiencing domestic abuse.

7.2 Accessibility and Inclusion

We make sure that the service provided is available to all sections of the community.

We ensure 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 will work in a coordinated way with specialist agencies to overcome these barriers.

We will include additional LGBTQ+ inclusive questions when completing DASH RIC assessments with victims from the LGBTQ+ community.

7.3 Prevention of Homelessness and Housing Support

We prevent homelessness caused by customers suffering from domestic abuse. This includes providing support to enable victims to remain in their own homes or providing alternative accommodation where possible.

Where alternative accommodation cannot be provided or it is not safe to do so within IVH stock, we support customers to secure accommodation in conjunction with local authorities and other key statutory and voluntary agencies.

7.4 Customer-Led, Safe and Trauma-Informed Practice

When dealing with reports, colleagues are led by the wishes of the person experiencing the abuse.

Colleagues will consider risk, safeguarding and child protection concerns and deal appropriately with those concerns.

We signpost victims to support with civil and criminal legal remedies to offer protection and prevent further abuse.

We support victims to take appropriate legal measures to protect themselves and their families.

7.5 Partnership and Multi-Agency Working

We work with partners to minimise and manage risk to victims, responding flexibly to individual needs.

We adopt a multi-agency approach to tackling domestic abuse and seek the support of other agencies to develop the best possible solutions. This includes offering effective specialist support and advice to victims.

7.6 Workforce Capability and Training

All colleagues are appropriately trained to recognise the signs of domestic abuse and understand how to escalate concerns.

All colleagues who deal with reports of domestic abuse are trained to confidently support victims and their families to increase safety and reduce risk, in partnership with specialist agencies.

We raise awareness among colleagues of the impact of domestic abuse and their role in responding to reports.

7.7 Work with Perpetrators

Colleagues are confident and competent in challenging perpetrators of domestic abuse using appropriate legal remedies.

We identify perpetrators who want to address their behaviour and make appropriate referrals and signposting to local and national organisations delivering behaviour change programmes and support to break the cycle of abuse.

7.8 Risk Assessment, Safeguarding and Accountability

We will, where appropriate, complete Domestic Abuse Risk Assessments (DASH).

We contribute to Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) and Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA).

Safeguarding responsibilities, including reporting criminal behaviour to the police, will be fully considered in line with safeguarding adults, children and anti-social behaviour policies and procedures.

7.9 Awareness, Communication and Continuous Improvement

We are committed to raising awareness of domestic abuse through customer contact, our website, social media campaigns and work within our communities.

We ensure volunteers, engaged customers and contractors are aware of this policy and their responsibility to report any concerns to IVH colleagues.

We consider best practice in developing our approach to domestic abuse, remain open to learning from others, and commit to sharing our experiences.

8.0 **How IVH responds to Reports of Domestic Abuse**

8.1 When a victim reports domestic abuse in person, we 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 are offered immediate domestic abuse support contact numbers and safety advice. We arrange 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:
- 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 person's permission.
 - Work with relevant agencies in a coordinated way in providing support and advice
 - Where possible we take swift and effective action against perpetrators to protect victims from further abuse
 - Keep victims and witnesses informed at all stages of the case.
 - Agree an action plan with the victim/survivor and be led by them.
 - Review our actions and levels of support frequently (as agreed through the action plan) and keep the victims and any agencies involved informed.
 - Improve security to a victim/survivor's home where needed. This may be in partnership with local support agencies
 - Carry out repairs and improvements to the victims/survivor's home if it has been damage or neglect by the perpetrator.
 - Help victims, 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.
 - Challenge the 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 share information with local MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) where the risk rating threshold has been met.
- 9.3 We participate in MARACs, where information is shared between agencies involved in domestic abuse cases. We ensure 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 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 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 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 may take possession of the perpetrators tenancy if we believe it is proportionate and reasonable, and there is sufficient evidence for the courts. We always act in accordance with court orders and consider the household dynamic when enforcing tenancy conditions.

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 work with the victim to take action to manage the risks posed to them in remaining in their home. In these cases we 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.
- 11.2 If the victim is a joint tenant with the perpetrator, we support the victim if s/he wishes to remain in the property. In these cases we 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 work with specialist agencies and the local authority to ensure the victim secures appropriate accommodation.
- 11.4 If the victim requires permanent rehousing we support the victim in securing alternative accommodation. In doing this we 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 ensure that the tenure is no less than the tenure they had originally.
- 11.6 If the victim secures private rented accommodation, IVH signpost the victim where possible to the tenant bond scheme.

12.0 Safeguarding

12.1 We 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 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 train colleagues who deal with rent and money advice, to spot the signs of economic and financial abuse, and how to support victims where abuse is identified.

13.3 Colleagues dealing directly with domestic abuse victims are appropriately trained and resourced to deal with reports confidently and competently. These colleagues also receive one to one support on a regular basis to ensure their wellbeing.

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

13.5 Mandatory domestic abuse and safeguarding training is refreshed at least every two years, with role-specific training provided where appropriate.

14.0 Information sharing

14.1 We comply with GDPR regulations and ensure information remains confidential and is stored appropriately.

14.2 We 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 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 Equality, access and reasonable adjustments

15.1 IVH is committed to fairness and providing equal 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.

15.2 We take additional steps in the application of this policy and make reasonable adjustments to ensure compliance with the Act.

15.3 We take a person-centered approach to every report that is tailored and responsive to each individual, taking into account the risks identified, the victim's personal circumstances and needs and their wishes and if applicable, the needs of the perpetrator.

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

15.5 We involve customers, colleagues and key agencies in the development and review of our domestic abuse policy and procedures.

- 15.6 We record and monitor all reports of domestic abuse to ensure cases are closely monitored and action is taken. Customer EDI data is also available to assist in the planning and development of the service and identifying key priorities for the future.
- 15.7 We will 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.

17.0 Complaints

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 Board of Management holds overall responsibility for ensuring the organisation effectively prevents, responds to, and manages domestic abuse and violence affecting customers.

The Chief Operations Officer is accountable for the effective implementation of this policy.

The Head of Independent Living acts as the corporate lead for IVH safeguarding matters. Operational safeguarding is led by the Sustainment Services Manager. The Sustainment Services Manager, Housing Services Manager, and Housing Manager are responsible for case management and carrying out spot checks of domestic abuse and violence cases. All colleagues have a responsibility to report concerns regarding domestic abuse in line with 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.

Complex domestic abuse and violence cases are discussed monthly at a complex case review meeting, made up of heads of service and service managers, taking a multi-disciplinary team approach, to manage and resolve cases.

The effectiveness of this policy is monitored through safeguarding performance reporting to the Board via the Combined Assurance Framework and the annual Safeguarding Report.

This policy will be reviewed for effectiveness and policy/legislative change on a two-yearly basis, or sooner where there is legislative, regulatory or good-practice change, 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
- 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
- Working Together to Safeguard Children March 2026

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