



Domestic Abuse Policy for Residents, Tenants, Leaseholders and Members

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1.0 Introduction and policy purpose

1.1 We believe that everyone has the right to live free from fear of abuse or violence. We know that domestic abuse can be experienced by anyone, regardless of gender, age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, marriage or civil partnership and pregnancy or maternity differences.

1.2 It has been estimated that there are currently 2.3 million victims of domestic abuse a year aged 16 to 74 (two-thirds of whom are women), and more than one in ten of all offences recorded by the police are domestic abuse related (Gov.uk, 2022).

1.3 We believe that as a local authority and housing provider, we are well placed to recognise and respond to domestic abuse. We recognise that there are many barriers to disclosing domestic abuse, but we want to reassure our residents, tenants, leaseholders and members that any concerns they raise will be met with an empathetic and appropriate response.

1.4 This policy acts in the intention of reducing the risk of domestic abuse, and outlines how we will respond to domestic abuse when it affects our residents, tenants, leaseholders and members.

1.5 This policy references the support we will provide to those who are victims of, or have been victims of, domestic abuse. It states that we will not condone or tolerate domestic abuse, and outlines how we will hold perpetrators of domestic abuse accountable for their actions.

2.0 Note on language

2.1 In this policy we use the terms 'victim' and 'perpetrator'. 'Victim' is used to refer to the person/s who has been or is being abused, and 'perpetrator' refers to the person/s who is acting, or has acted, abusively.

2.2 We use these terms as they allow us to describe how the abuse affects those involved, in a context in which individual names are not available or appropriate to use.

2.3 We recognise that a 'victim' may prefer to be referred to as 'survivor', but we have chosen to use 'victim' within this policy as it allows us to clearly acknowledge that a person is or has been subjected to domestic abuse, without making assumptions about where they are within their own personal journey.

2.4 Within our practices, and particularly when engaging directly with those who are, or have been victims of domestic abuse, we will use the terms of address that they prefer where it is possible to do so.

3.0 Policy scope

3.1 This policy applies to residents within the Dacorum area, Dacorum Borough Council tenants and leaseholders, and Dacorum Borough Council members.

3.2 When our employees are affected by domestic abuse, we will refer to our Domestic Abuse Policy for Employees. Where a person is a resident, tenant, or leaseholder, and also employed by Dacorum Borough Council, we will refer to both policies for guidance and tailor our response accordingly.

3.3 Although this policy is primarily for Dacorum Borough Council residents, tenants, leaseholders and members, the guidance included within [Appendix 2](#) can be used by anyone who needs to access support as a victim of domestic abuse.

4.0 Our values

4.1 We are committed to demonstrating our organisational values in all that we do, including how we support those affected by domestic abuse.

We will:

- **Be honest** about the prevalence of domestic abuse, and **act with integrity** by doing all we can to support residents, tenants, leaseholders and members who have been affected.
- Utilise the support of our internal service areas, specialist domestic abuse services and partner agencies, because we recognise that we need to **support each other and work together** to provide a co-ordinated community response to domestic abuse.
- **Be ambitious for our places and our people** by continuously seeking opportunities to improve our response to domestic abuse.
- **Be accountable to each other** and honour the trust that our residents, tenants, leaseholders and members place in us when sharing their experience/s of domestic abuse by responding respectfully, and providing guidance about how and where they can access further support.
- **Nurture and celebrate Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in everything we do**, including how we recognise and respond to domestic abuse. We will take an intersectional approach when responding to domestic abuse by considering how a person's experience of domestic abuse may be impacted by their sex, age, gender identity, race, sexuality, disability, ethnicity, pregnancy status or social background differences.

5.0 Definition of domestic abuse

5.1 This policy uses an abridged version of the definition of domestic abuse provided by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

5.2 Behaviour of a person (“A”) towards another person (“B”) is “domestic abuse” if “A” and “B” are each aged 16 or over and are “personally connected” to each other:

“Personally connected” means:

- they are, or have been, married to each other
- they are, or have been, civil partners of each other
- they have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated)
- they have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been terminated)
- they are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other
- they each have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child
- they are relatives

And

- the behaviour is abusive

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

5.3 It **does not matter** whether the behaviour is a single incident or a course of actions: behaviour of this kind is domestic abuse.

5.4 Domestic abuse can also be a form of ‘honour’ based violence if it ‘has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of the family and/or community’ (NPCC, 2015).

5.5 More information about “Honour Based Violence” and other forms of abuse (including those that can also be domestic abuse), is included in our Children and Adults at Risk Policy.

5.6 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 recognises that children can be victims of domestic abuse, even when the abusive behaviours are not directly aimed at them.

They can also be victims if they:

- See, hear, or experience the effects of abuse
- Are related to the victim or perpetrator of the abuse (or both)

5.7 Further information about how domestic abuse affects children is provided in our Children and Adults at Risk Policy.

6.0 Our aims and practices

6.1 We will:

- **Support our employees to confidently recognise and appropriately respond to domestic abuse** by providing mandatory domestic abuse training for all employees. Additional training will be provided as it is relevant to the employees' roles and their level of engagement with residents, tenants, leaseholders and members. This policy is supported by internal procedures and guidance that our employees can refer to.
 - **Make information about what domestic abuse is readily available** through regular communications and during our engagement with our community.
 - **Set the expectation for all domestic abuse disclosures to be responded to empathetically and appropriately.** We have created a set of standards that victims of domestic abuse can expect us to uphold when they disclose domestic abuse to us. These are available at the end of this document, as [Appendix 1](#).
 - **Publicise support pathways for victims of domestic abuse** and make information about how to access domestic abuse support easily accessible, so that those who need support can access support that is right for them and their circumstances. We will review these pathways regularly to ensure that the information remains up-to-date, and to identify opportunities to increase provision where necessary. Information about how to access support as a victim of domestic abuse is included at the end of this document, as [Appendix 2](#).
 - **Work closely with local specialist domestic abuse services and agencies (such as the Police) to provide a co-ordinated response to domestic abuse** by making referrals where necessary, taking actions from Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference ([MARAC](#)), and being active contributors to the [Dacorum Community Safety Partnership](#) through engagement at the Responsible Authorities Group (RAG), Joint Action Group (JAG), and Community Safety Action Group (CSAG).

- **Create opportunities for cross-working, collaboration and escalating barriers to supporting victims** by communicating regularly with local services through events and our regular Domestic Abuse Forum.
- **Act in accordance with our existing safeguarding framework** by addressing any links to domestic abuse when safeguarding referrals are made, in the interest of protecting vulnerable adults and children.
- **Maintain flexibility and a victim-centred approach** because we know that no two experiences of domestic abuse are the same. Our employees will use this policy, its associated procedures and guidance documents and/or advice from our Safeguarding Lead, the Police and specialist domestic abuse services to ensure that they respond appropriately to domestic abuse.
- **Create ‘safety at home’ for victims of domestic abuse who wish to stay within their home** through working with the Police and partner agencies to use legal measures to remove the perpetrator from the property (such as Non Molestation Orders, Domestic Abuse Protection Orders and Domestic Abuse Protection Notices) and/or providing panic alarms, locks and additional security measures.
- **Support victims who wish to relocate because it is not safe, or preferable for them to remain at their address because of domestic abuse** by providing guidance and assisting their move to alternative accommodation. Our Housing service areas and our Domestic Abuse Action Group (DAAG) will take an active role in helping victims to live in accommodation that is free from abuse.
- **State that perpetrating domestic abuse is unacceptable, and take appropriate action to hold perpetrators accountable.** This sentiment is echoed in the Tenancy Agreement that is issued to tenants when they start a tenancy with Dacorum Borough Council. We reserve the right to take enforcement action against Dacorum Borough Council tenants, using the powers available under the Housing Act, up to and including terminating a tenancy, for domestic abuse related offences. When taking action against perpetrator/s, we will prioritise the safety and wishes of their victim/s, and ensure that their wishes and housing needs are considered.
- **Refer perpetrators to specialist support when it is appropriate to do so** because we recognise that long-term domestic abuse prevention requires behavioural change from those who cause harm. We believe in referring perpetrators, and those concerned about their behaviour or that of someone they know, to specialist services who can help them to change, when it is safe and appropriate to do so without increasing risk to the victim/s. Information about how to recognise abusive behaviour, and how to access support if you or someone you know are acting abusively is included at the end of this document, as Appendix 3.
- **Continually strive to improve our response to domestic abuse and Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG)** by seeking opportunities to

receive feedback from victims and survivors, and taking note of learnings from the Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) process. As of 2022, we are working towards accreditation from the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) because we want to provide our residents, tenants, leaseholders and members with an exemplary response to domestic abuse.



7.0 Confidentiality and GDPR

7.1 Any information related to domestic abuse will be treated with sensitivity, and if it is recorded, it will be stored securely on our systems. We will maintain confidentiality and prioritise gaining consent from victims before making referrals or taking further action, as far as it is practicable to do so. We may have to share information with agencies such as the Police or Social Services if an adult or child is at serious risk of harm.

7.2 If an instance of domestic abuse meets the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) risk threshold or if there are child protection concerns, we have a legal duty to share information with relevant partner agencies in the interest of reducing risk to those concerned.

8.0 Links to other policies and policy review expectations

8.1 We involved employees from across our organisation, including those with lived experience of domestic abuse, when developing this policy. We also sought feedback and contribution from service users of local specialist domestic abuse support services.

8.2 We will review this policy, related strategy, and information sources every three years at minimum to ensure that it aligns with changes in research, national legislation, policies and local support and service provision.

8.3 We may also review this policy in response to (but not limited to): employee and resident/tenant/leaseholder feedback; local Domestic Homicide Review; Serious Case Review and Serious Adult Review recommendations and findings.

8.4 This policy is supported by a number of internal procedures, and can be read in conjunction with the following policies:

- Children and Adults at Risk Policy
- Housing Allocations Policy
- Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Policy
- GDPR Policy

8.5 We recognise the need to align this policy with the legislative framework set out by the following:

- Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- Homeless Reduction Act 2017
- Serious Crime Act 2015
- Anti-Social Behaviour and Policing Act 2014
- Protection of Freedoms Act 2012
- The Localism Act 2011
- The Equality Act 2010
- Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007
- Civil partnership Act 2004
- Crime and Victims Act 2004
- Children Act 1989 and 2004
- Housing Act 1996, Part 7 (as amended by Homelessness Act 2002)
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Protection of Harassment Act 1997
- The Family Law Act 1996
- Housing Act 1985 and 1996
- Violence Against Women and Girls National Statement of Expectations 2022

Appendix 1 Our Standards for Responding to Domestic Abuse

We recognise that it can be difficult to share personal experiences of domestic abuse.

In any interaction with us, you can expect us to maintain the behavioural standards we set out in our housing service standards: Our House, Your Home.

If you believe that you are a victim of domestic abuse, and you decide to share your experience with us, you can also expect:

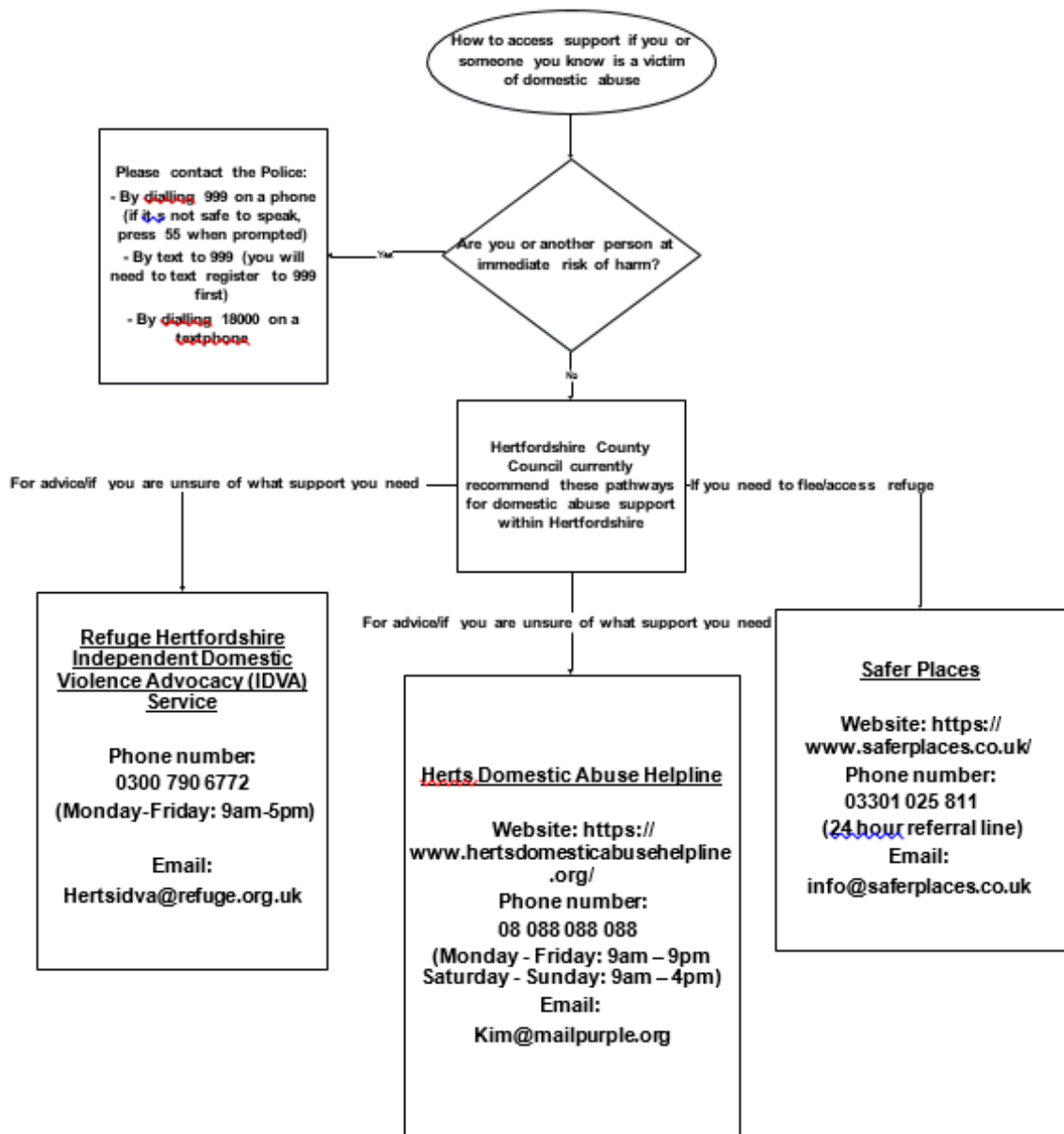
- To be listened to and treated in a non-judgemental and empathetic manner.
- We will meet your requests to speak with an employee of the same (or different, according to your preferences) gender and/or sexual orientation, as far as is reasonably practicable.
- To be able to discuss your concerns at the time that you make contact, if it is safe and possible for you to do so. Where there is a need to refer to another service area or employee/s, domestic abuse disclosures will be treated as a

priority, and you can expect to speak with a suitable employee within 24 hours at most.

- For the Dacorum Borough Council employee/s you speak with to consider your personal safety before engaging in any discussion of your situation, by asking you whether it is a safe and appropriate time to talk, and to make arrangements to speak with you alone.
- If the employee that you disclose your experience to is within a service area that will be unable to meet these expectations, or limited in the follow up support that they can provide, (such as the Customer Services Unit), they will make arrangements for you to discuss your situation further with an employee from a relevant service area.
- If it is not safe or appropriate for you to discuss your situation at the time that you make contact, the Employee should make arrangements for further discussion at a time, and in a way, that is safe, appropriate, and in accordance with your wishes, for example by arranging to meet with you in a mutually agreed location, or continuing the discussion at another time or via an alternative contact method.
- For an impartial interpreter to be made available and/or for other accommodations to be made if English is not your first language, and to provide support for any other literacy or support needs that may impact your ability to communicate effectively.
- To receive a relevant and supportive response that prioritises your wishes and your safety.
- For the Dacorum Borough Council employee/s you speak with to consider any associated safeguarding risks and escalate any concerns through our Safeguarding processes, including to any relevant partner agencies where it is necessary and appropriate to do so.

Appendix 2 How to access domestic abuse support if you are or have been a victim of domestic abuse

The following flowchart outlines the specialist domestic abuse referral pathways that are currently recommended by Hertfordshire County Council:



Appendix 3 How to access support if you are concerned about your own behaviour, or that of someone you know

We understand that it may be difficult to recognise and acknowledge that you, or someone you know is acting, or has acted abusively. We have put together the following checklist to help you recognise abusive behaviours:

Mental / emotional abuse

If you are being mentally or emotionally abusive towards someone, you might be:

- Criticising
- Using language designed to humiliate
- Blaming
- Intimidating and threatening
- Destroying their personal belongings
- Telling them that they are mad
- Telling them that you are not being abusive

Threatening behaviours

Using threatening behaviour towards someone includes making threats to:

- Take their children away
- Have their children taken away by Social Care or other people
- Have them deported
- Have them sectioned
- Abuse your victim's children, family, friends or pets
- Kill them
- Commit suicide
- Hurt your victim and/or their loved ones
- Stalk them (any of which could be in person, via phone call, email or text message)

Intimidation and isolation

You could be intimidating and/or isolating someone if you:

- Repeatedly criticise them
- Tell them that they are ugly / worthless / useless
- Prevent them from having contact with family and friends
- Humiliate them in front of others
- Give them a curfew or otherwise monitor or limit their activities
- Stop or monitor their phone calls/text messages/emails

Psychological abuse

Psychological abuse could be:

- Acting jealously
- Blaming them for causing the abuse
- Lying to them
- Manipulating them to get them to do what you want
- Ignoring them
- Undermining or confusing them
- Telling them that they are losing their mind

Financial abuse

Being financially abusive to someone includes:

- Building up debt in their name
- Withholding money from them
- Stealing money from them
- Limiting or preventing them from having access to money
- Not letting them work
- Using family money for alcohol / drugs
- Claiming and keeping their benefits
- Selling their possessions
- Not paying child support
- Refusing to pay bills
- Forcing them to earn money for you/ another person
- Threatening to report them to the Benefits Agency or other authorities

Sexual abuse

Whether in a relationship or not, if someone does not want to have sex, they do not have to. If you are forcing someone against their will, then you are being abusive.

Sexual abuse includes:

- Rape
- Forcing someone to engage in sexual acts
- Degrading treatment
- Sexual name-calling
- Forcing someone to prostitute themselves

- Making someone wear clothes that they haven't chosen
- Forcing someone to take part in or look at pornographic images
- Forcing someone to have sexual relationships with other people

Violence/Physical abuse

Violence and physical abuse includes:

- Hitting/punching/kicking/biting/shoving/burning someone
- Spitting at someone
- Using Non-fatal strangulation as a means of controlling someone or creating fear
- Pulling their hair
- Making physical threats to harm someone
- Using or threatening to use weapons to harm someone
- Forcing someone to use drugs and/or alcohol
- Depriving someone of sleep
- Hurting someone's pet
- Excessively invading someone's space

If you are concerned about your own behaviour, or that of someone close to you, we would encourage you to make contact with a suitable support service, such as Respect.

Respect Freephone line: 0808 8024040