

Domestic Abuse Policy

1.0 Policy Summary

- 1.1 This policy applies to all Stonewater customers.
- 1.2 For staff who may be experiencing Domestic Abuse, please refer to “staff experiencing domestic abuse” HR policy.
- 1.3 This policy and accompanying procedure, lays out Stonewater’s approach, and commitment to supporting customers who may be at risk of, or experiencing domestic abuse.

2.0 Policy Objectives

- 2.1 The aim of the domestic abuse policy is to ensure the safety of Stonewater customers who may be affected by domestic abuse and ensure that staff, volunteers and contractors are able to respond to customer needs in relation to domestic abuse.
- 2.2 Stonewater believes everyone has the right to live their life safely and free from harm. Domestic abuse is a criminal offence and occurs regardless of age, race, sexual identity, economic status, geography or tenure. It impacts on children, family and the community.
- 2.3 When dealing with reports of domestic abuse, Stonewater staff must be led by the wishes of the person experiencing the abuse. Staff will need to consider risk, safeguarding and child protection concerns. Where these concerns do not exist, the guiding principle should be that our response to domestic abuse is customer led.

3.0 Policy Details

3.1 Key definitions

Stonewater uses the Home Office’s definition of domestic abuse:

‘any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to psychological, physical, sexual, financial, and emotional.’

The definition includes issues of concern to black and minority ethnic (BME) communities such as ‘honour based violence’, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage. This policy is clear that people who experience domestic abuse are not confined to one gender or ethnic group.

Domestic abuse can take different forms, including:

- physical abuse
- sexual abuse

- financial abuse
- coercive control / emotional abuse
- digital / online abuse
- honour-based violence

Controlling behaviour is a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploring their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is an act or pattern of acts of assaults, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish or frighten their victim

3.2 Legislation and regulation

The Domestic Abuse policy takes into account the following legislation, and staff are encouraged to refer to this legislation where cases require:

- Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- The Family Law Act 1996
- Anti Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014
- Human Rights Act 1998
- The Data Protection Act 1998 and General Data Protection Policy
- The Housing Act 1996
- The Equality Act 2010
- The Care Act 2014

3.3 This policy and accompanying procedure details the principles to be adopted when dealing with:

- Raising awareness around Domestic Abuse and responding to reports of domestic abuse affecting Stonewater customers
- Communications, support and advice
- Housing
- Repairs, Security and Anti Social Behaviour

Raising awareness around Domestic Abuse and responding to reports of domestic abuse affecting Stonewater customers

Stonewater is committed to raising awareness around Domestic Abuse through its customer contact, website, social media campaigns and work within communities. Stonewater has signed up to the Chartered Institute of Housing “Make a Stand pledge”, which outlines our obligations around domestic abuse. When Stonewater staff become aware of Domestic Abuse, they will always take the views and wishes of the customer experiencing abuse into account, as well as manage their responsibilities around safeguarding. Volunteers and contractors will be made aware of this policy and their responsibility to report concerns around abuse to staff.

Communications, Support and Advice

Managing reports of domestic abuse requires a multi-agency approach, Stonewater will ensure those experiencing domestic abuse are sign posted to specialist advice and support agencies, with their consent. Stonewater does not directly provide legal advice or counselling services. Stonewater staff will ensure they have good local knowledge within the communities they work in of specialist support providers around domestic abuse including IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy) services, MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) and MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hubs) co-ordinators. Stonewater commits to acting on all reports of domestic abuse and will be led by the customer affected in decision making.

Housing

Our lettings team work with Local Authorities to ensure that Domestic Abuse is taken into account when prioritising nominations and there is sensitivity around lettings when Domestic Abuse is disclosed.

We will support customers who are experiencing domestic abuse around their housing options. This support will be customer led. Where there is an evident risk of harm to a customer or family residing in a property, we will work with specialist Domestic Abuse services, local authority partners and utilise our own processes where appropriate.

Repairs, Security and Anti Social behaviour

Asset management teams will carry out repairs which are required as a result of violent incidents. Where practicable these works will be carried out as emergency works (within 24 hours). Where this is not practicable, they will be carried out as soon as possible afterwards and this and time frames will be communicated to the customer.

Stonewater consider domestic abuse a form of Anti Social Behaviour and will refer to the Anti Social Behaviour policy when taking action around perpetrators of domestic abuse which may include action around the tenancy to support the customer experiencing abuse to stay safely in their home, and may be around applying for sole tenancy in the case of joint tenants.

3.4 Confidentially and data protection

Stonewater recognises that cases of domestic abuse can be very sensitive and managing it must be done with care. Stonewater staff will ensure they only involve other agencies and share information with the customer concerned, with the exception of:

- Raising safeguarding concerns about adults with care and support needs or child protection concerns
- Where Stonewater is required by law, for example, if being questioned by Police as part of a criminal investigation.

3.5 Health and Safety

Stonewater staff will follow health and safety and lone working policies at all times when managing reports of domestic abuse. Staff will also consider the safety of all parties involved in a case and the wider community.

3.6 Safeguarding

Stonewater will meet our statutory safeguarding requirements in line with our existing policies and procedures where there are safeguarding concerns about a vulnerable customer. In cases of suspected child abuse staff will refer to Stonewater's Safeguarding Children policy. In all cases of domestic abuse, staff will refer to Stonewater's Safeguarding Adults and children policy. Children witnessing domestic abuse is considered a type of child abuse and child safeguarding procedures should be followed.

3.7 Related policies

This policy is closely connected to and should be read in conjunction with:

- Anti Social behaviour policy
- Safeguarding adults and safeguarding children policies
- Access to housing policy
- Lone working policy
- Data Protection Policy

4 Key Outcomes

The key objectives of this policy are to:

- Support staff and volunteers to recognise, report and deal with domestic abuse reports effectively.
- Ensure all new and existing customers are aware that domestic abuse is a criminal offence and perpetrators of domestic abuse are committing a breach of the terms of their tenure
- Make sure that Stonewater staff have local knowledge of domestic abuse support services in the communities they work in and form effective working partnerships with these specialist services.
- Give those in an abusive relationship access to accurate and appropriate advice about their housing options and signposting around their legal rights and responsibilities
- Adopt a customer led approach in how Stonewater staff respond to domestic abuse reports

- Ensure that our services, in respect of dealing with domestic abuse, are equally available to all sections of the community, recognising differences in language, culture, religion, race, age or gender

5. Equality and Diversity

5.1 Stonewater is committed to Equality, Diversity and Human Rights.

- Equality means that treating everyone in the same way is not the same as treating people fairly. It means that no one individual or group is treated less favourably on the grounds of age, disability, sex (gender), sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, or any other inappropriate criteria or distinction.
- Diversity means acknowledging, respecting and valuing individual differences, talents, contributions and backgrounds of our staff and customers.
- Human rights are based on the core principles of dignity, fairness, respect and autonomy, human rights protect an individual's freedom to control their own life, take part in decisions that impact upon their rights and experience fair and equal access to services.

Stonewater will apply this policy consistently and fairly and will not discriminate against any person on grounds of their race, colour, ethnic or national origins, religion, sexual orientation, disability, gender, age or any other matter that they may cause a person to be treated with injustice.

Stonewater will supply those experiencing domestic abuse with translation services as necessary.

5.2 If any person believes that they have not been treated in accordance with this policy, or they are unhappy about anything related to the policy, they may complain in accordance with our Complaints Policy.

6. Technical Data

Detail any technical data that applies to the Policy within the table below. Delete any sections that do not apply. Delete this guidance paragraph too.

Risk Assessment	<p>When responding to reports around Domestic Abuse in our customers' homes, there is a risk around staff lone working and this should be considered in lone working risk assessments.</p> <p>There is also increased risk around customer data and personal information when dealing with cases of domestic abuse, as this could heighten the risk to individual customers if staff are not extra vigilant around their personal data, however our data protection policy should enforce this.</p>
-----------------	---

Responsibility for Implementation	This policy will be launched in conjunction with the Staff experiencing domestic abuse support policy.
Date of Issue	April 2019
Date of Next Review	April 2022
Committee Review	April 2022
Date agreed by Board	n/a
Performance Reporting & Tenant Scrutiny	

7. Author & Version

Author	Helena Doyle
Title	Head of Supported Housing
Version	1.0
Date	18 th April 2019

8. Revision History

Version	Date	Name	Description
0.1	11/03/19	Helena Doyle	Created and circulated for feedback to nominated team members
0.2	21/3/19	Helena Doyle	Amended based on feedback from Alina Kaur
1.0	10/4/19	Helena Doyle	Amended based on feedback from David Lockerman