



Domestic Abuse Policy

April 2024

1. Policy Statement

- 1.1 We believe that no one should live in fear of violence or abuse of any kind. Domestic abuse is a criminal offence and SW9 will work in partnership with other organisations to eradicate domestic abuse in all its forms from our estate.
- 1.2 Domestic abuse is widespread and underreported. Survivors can face many barriers that prevent them from telling someone about the abuse. One of the main barriers is housing, fear of losing it, lack of it, access to it, and support in moving. We recognise that as a community housing provider we have a key role to play in supporting survivors of domestic abuse through all aspects of their survival journey from the first conversation to final case closure.
- 1.3 As part of demonstrating our commitment to supporting survivors of domestic abuse, we will work towards accreditation by the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA). This includes working to align with the principles of being non-judgmental and person-centered, amplifying survivor voices, intersectionality, safety, and being active in our role as part of the coordinated community response.
- 1.4 This policy applies to anyone living in or visiting a property managed by SW9 Community Housing (SW9) and includes all rented tenants, shared owners, leaseholders and stakeholders. Much of our stock forms parts of multi-tenure estates.

2. Aims and Objectives of Policy

- 2.1 Our housing service is well placed to recognise and identify the signs of domestic abuse through the regular contact and existing relationship we have with our residents and service users. Through this policy, we aim to:
 - Set out how SW9 will support survivors of domestic abuse, and our approach to dealing with perpetrators.
 - Improve the safety of people who are survivors of domestic abuse and prevent further incidents of domestic abuse whenever possible.
 - Compliment and work in parallel with relevant safeguarding statutory guidance and policies and procedures.
 - Create a safe and secure environment for survivors of domestic abuse to report their experiences.
 - Help survivors understand that what has happened to them is not their fault and that help is available through SW9.
 - Provide guidance and information to staff who may be involved in supporting a survivor of domestic abuse.
 - Promote partnership working with the local authority and other local agencies to support survivors of domestic abuse to safely escape their abuser and to move on to a better and safer life situation.
 - Adopt a survivor-centric approach to handling cases of domestic abuse.
- 2.2 SW9 acknowledges that members of staff may be survivors of domestic abuse, and we will support them in accordance with SW9 HR policies.

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3. Definitions

Domestic Abuse

- 3.1 The government has defined domestic abuse under s.1 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 but limits the definition to circumstances where both perpetrator and survivor are aged 16 or over.
- 3.2 SW9 acknowledges that domestic abuse can be perpetrated against people under the age of 16 and therefore we have defined domestic abuse as any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence that occurs between two people who are personally connected. Abuse is not always physical violence, it can include:
- Coercive control and “gas lighting”
 - Economic/financial abuse
 - Online abuse
 - Threats and intimidation
 - Emotional abuse
 - Psychological abuse
 - Sexual abuse
- 3.3 Anyone can be a survivor of domestic abuse, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexuality or background. SW9 recognises that domestic abuse is very common and that in the vast majority of cases it is experienced by women and is perpetrated by men. In the majority of those cases domestic abuse is perpetrated by a partner or ex-partner, but can be also be perpetrated by a family member or carer.

Coercive Control

- 3.4 Coercive or controlling behaviour is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten the person subject to the behaviour.
- 3.5 The crime of coercive or controlling behaviour was first introduced under the Serious Crime Act 2015 but has since been amended to widen the scope of the offence. So that the offence of controlling or coercive behaviour now applies to partners, ex-partners or family members, regardless of whether the person to whom the behaviour is directed and the perpetrator live together. The amendment was introduced under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and came into force in April 2023. It is important because it recognises that controlling or coercive behaviour can evolve when the perpetrator no longer lives with the survivor, with new tactics being deployed to exercise control over the survivor.

Personally Connected

- 3.6 This means people who:
- are married to each other or in a civil partnership.
 - have previously been married or entered into a civil partnership with one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated)
 - are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other.
 - have, or have had, a family relationship with each other.
 - have a child (whether they share parental responsibility or not)
 - are relatives.
- 3.7 This definition is not limited to partner-to-partner violence, but includes violence between any extended family members, including child to parent violence (and vice versa).

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4. Domestic Abuse Casework

Identifying a Report of Domestic Abuse

- 4.1 A report of domestic abuse may not come from the survivor and may not be labelled as domestic abuse by the person making the disclosure. We will ensure that we train our staff to be able to recognise a report of domestic abuse, even when it is not given that label by the person making the disclosure.
- 4.2 Generally, we will seek to deal with any disclosures of domestic abuse in person and at our offices or at a neutral location. We will only visit the home of a survivor of domestic abuse where we are confident that it is safe to do so for the survivor. This is to avoid the risk of alerting the perpetrator to the disclosure of domestic abuse and prevent the survivor being put at risk.
- 4.3 We will always take a survivor-centred approach to domestic abuse. This means that anyone, whether adults or children, reporting domestic abuse to our housing services will be treated in a sensitive, supportive, and non-judgemental manner.
- 4.4 The voice of the survivor will be prioritised in the way we manage each case. We know survivors of domestic abuse will often find it difficult to ask for help. If a survivor makes a disclosure, we will deal with it in an empathetic, supportive, and sensitive manner, and assure them we are taking it seriously.
- 4.5 We also recognise that people's understanding of domestic abuse may be influenced by their culture and beliefs and as a result, some people may not recognise themselves as a survivor of abuse. We will work sensitively with those experiencing abuse to promote their safety.
- 4.6 We will work to break down barriers that some communities may experience when reporting to us. We will do this by:
- Asking the survivor if they prefer to speak to someone of the same sex, if possible.
 - Offering an interpreter if the survivor does not speak English. We will not allow family or friends to interpret in abuse cases or cases which we think may involve abuse due to safety reasons.
 - Providing services in a way that considers a person's accessibility needs.
- 4.7 If the survivor is the person making the disclosure, we will ensure that they are offered advice and assistance and signposted to agencies that can offer further support. We will also follow our safeguarding policies and procedures and make appropriate referrals. We may decide to involve the police at the initial report stage depending on the seriousness and nature of the abuse and the level of risk posed to the survivor and other household members. Cases will be risk assessed on an individual basis.

Supporting Survivors of Domestic Abuse

- 4.8 If you are a victim of domestic abuse and are in immediate danger, you should always call the emergency services on 999. If you are unable to talk, press 55 when prompted and your call will be transferred to the police.
- 4.9 For advice, you can call the 24-hour free National Domestic Abuse Helpline for advice - 0808 2000 247.
- 4.10 Other national advice and assistance services are also available including:

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- The Men's Advice Line, for male domestic abuse survivors – 0808 801 0327 www.mensadvice.org.uk (run by Respect)
- The Mix, free information and support for under 25s in the UK – 0808 808 4994 www.themix.org.uk
- National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline – 0800 999 5428 www.galop.org.uk/gethelp/helplines (run by Galop)
- Samaritans (24/7 service) – 116 123 www.samaritans.org
- Women's aid www.womensaid.org.uk/ and the Survivor's Handbook www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/the-survivors-handbook

4.11 If you are in Lambeth and need help or would like to learn more about local services, call the Gaia Centre on 020 7733 8724 or email lambethvawg@refuge.org.uk.

4.12 You can report domestic abuse to any member of the SW9 team at any time by telephone or email as follows:

Email: Neighbourhoods@sw9.org.uk

Telephone: 0207 326 3700 (same number for out of hours)

5. Risk Assessment and Management

5.1 We will always undertake an initial risk assessment of the survivor's safety and anyone else in the household. This risk assessment will be updated regularly every time we receive new information in the case.

5.2 Confidentiality is crucial to limiting and managing the risk to survivors. Sharing information with support services and other agencies is key part of responding effectively to domestic abuse.

5.3 We will maintain strict confidentiality and only share information where we have permission from the survivor to do so, except when:

- The survivor's safety may be at risk.
- Children may be at risk.
- There is lawful basis that compels us to share information such as a safeguarding concern.

5.4 In these cases, we may disclose information without the survivor's consent in line with our Data Protection and Safeguarding policies and procedures. This may include referring the case to Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) to safeguard survivors, or to seek legal advice, or to prevent a crime. Each case will be judged on its own merits.

5.5 If we believe there is an immediate risk to life, we will call the relevant emergency services.

5.6 We will take steps to undertake safety planning and contact arrangements to ensure safe future communications and we will ensure we identify the preferred contact method with each survivor. We will ensure ongoing support and contact is provided to the survivor. We will agree with the survivor how often to contact them, and whether they would like us to contact their caseworker, social worker or independent domestic violence advocate or any other support agency.

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- 5.7 We will work with other services in Lambeth and external support agencies on a response, including any safety planning and arrangements, where required.
- 5.8 All relevant staff will be trained on how to provide support, signpost, record the case and take appropriate next steps while upholding the survivor's confidentiality and safety.

6. Progressing a Case

- 6.1 When an incident of domestic abuse is reported, and where it is safe to do so, we will contact the survivor or referring agency within one working day.
- 6.2 If it is safe to do so, we will write to the survivor or referring agency within two working days of the report, to agree the next steps and confirm our commitments.
- 6.3 We recognise that experiencing domestic abuse will be traumatic and our teams will manage all cases with empathy and compassion.
- 6.4 We will use tailored action plans in each case, adopting a person-centred approach and recognising that each individual and their situation is unique. This will always include offering advice and information on the housing options available to the survivor.
- 6.5 We will make use of the sanctuary scheme available to all tenures if the survivor wishes, this can include making the survivors property more secure by using number of measures that could include installing additional locks, installing internal CCTV, installing London Barr locks, installing panic alarms, or installing a safe room.
- 6.6 If the survivor wishes to move out of their home due to domestic abuse. The neighbourhood's team will work with the survivor on finding safe accommodation options. This may not be within SW9 stock portfolio.
- 6.7 If a survivor indicates that they would prefer to try and remain in their home we will be able to offer:
- Measures to make the home more secure.
 - Legal powers and tools available to us to prioritise safety.
 - Support through referrals to specialist domestic abuse services.
- 6.8 We will manage cases of domestic abuse in line with our safeguarding policies and procedures, and the Care Act 2014, where appropriate.
- 6.9 The Care Act 2014 sets out the specific safeguarding duties that apply to any adult who is 18 years or over who:
- Has care and support needs, and
 - Is experiencing, or is at risk of abuse or neglect, and
 - Is unable to protect themselves because of their care and support needs.
- 6.10 If a survivor of domestic abuse meets the criteria above, we will refer them to the safeguarding services at the London Borough of Lambeth.
- 6.11 Under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, children are to be recognised as survivors in their own right if they are living in a home where abuse is occurring between two parties over 16. This will be relevant when making deciding to make safeguarding referrals to both children's and adult services.

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7. Perpetrators

- 7.1 First and foremost, perpetrators of domestic abuse are accountable for their actions.
- 7.2 Although our response to domestic abuse is focused on survivors, we also recognise that working with perpetrators can help reduce incidents of domestic abuse and prevent further harm being caused.
- 7.3 Where we are able to work directly with a perpetrator, we will contact www.respectphoneline.org.uk for advice and information about how to safely engage perpetrators in a way that does not put the victim/survivors including children at further risk of harm.
- 7.4 We will provide information about support services to perpetrators who approach us for help or advice to change their behaviour, and we will encourage perpetrators to seek help and signpost them to relevant agencies.
- 7.5 The safety of survivors and their children will be central to our approach to holding the perpetrator to account.
- 7.6 Where appropriate, we will charge perpetrators for property damage resulting from their violence. Survivors will not be held accountable for these costs.
- 7.7 Where the available evidence supports it, we will use the legal tools and powers available to us to reduce, mitigate and prevent further acts of domestic abuse. This may include excluding perpetrators from the home.
- 7.8 Where a perpetrator is a tenant, once the survivor and any children connected to the household are safe, we will use all legal remedies available to us to take back possession of the property. We will take a zero-tolerance approach to domestic abuse and will not allow a perpetrator to remain in a home managed by SW9.
- 7.9 If an alleged perpetrator of domestic abuse is aged below 16, we will engage with and make a referral to the Lambeth Council Children's Services for an assessment of the child's needs for support.

8. Partnership Working

- 8.1 We will maintain strong partnerships with local agencies and share information through the MARAC and with the police where necessary.
- 8.2 We will work in partnership with any referral agency that supports survivor to make a disclosure to SW9 to enable that agency to continue to offer support to the survivor.

9. Legislation and Regulation

- 9.1 The legislation listed in this policy is not intended to cover all legislation applicable to this policy. SW9 will take reasonable measures to ensure compliance with all applicable legislation by reviewing policies and procedures and amending them as appropriate. The legislation listed within this policy was considered at the time of the development of this policy, but subsequent primary and secondary legislation, case law and regulatory or other requirements will be considered and the policy reviewed and adopted in

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accordance with the requirements set out therein, even should such subsequent legislation not be explicitly listed within this policy. Any queries relating to the applicable legislation should be directed to the policy author.

10.Related Policies

SW9 Safeguarding policy.
SW9 ASB Policy
SW9 Handling Physical Data Policy

11.Equalities Statement

- 11.1 We are committed to promoting fair and equal access to services and equal opportunities in employment, the procurement of goods and as a community leader.
- 11.2 Our policies, procedures and day to day practices have been established to promote an environment which is free from unlawful and unfair discrimination, while valuing the diversity of all people. This includes our response to domestic abuse.
- 11.3 Discrimination on the grounds of race, nationality, ethnic origin, religion or belief, gender, marital status, sexuality, disability, and age is not acceptable: we will take action to ensure no person using SW9 premises or services receives less favourable treatment or is disadvantaged by requirements or conditions that cannot be justified.
- 11.4 We will tackle inequality, treat all people with dignity and respect and continue to work to improve services for all service users. The legal framework for SW9's approach is provided by the Equality Act 2010 and specifically by the Public Sector Equality Duty, under which a public authority must work consciously to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people with differing characteristics.
- 11.5 Our commitment to equality goes beyond complying with our statutory duties. We are working to ensure equitable access to our services by removing barriers and are supporting individuals and families to reach their full potential.

12.Compliance monitoring and Review

- 12.1 Domestic abuse cases will be logged, managed, and reported through our housing (case management) system and will be kept in line with GDPR and data protection policies and data retention schedules.
- 12.2 We will review this policy at least once every three years to make sure we are up to date with the latest legislation, regulations, and best practice developments.
- 12.3 This policy will be accessible for staff. Staff will be made aware of the policy through inductions and rollouts.

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Policy author:	Head of Neighborhoods	
Policy owner:	Director of Customer Services and	
Adopted from Network Homes: y/n	N	
Review schedule (1, 2 or 3 years):	3 years	
Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)	Date completed	September 2023
	Initial or full EIA	Full

Change Record

Date	Reviewed by (name and title)	Version	Summary of changes