

# Domestic Abuse Policy



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<b>Department:</b>				
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## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 Domestic abuse can affect anyone regardless of ethnicity, religion, class, age, sexuality, disability or lifestyle. However the vast majority of the victims of domestic abuse are women and children, and women are also considerably more likely to experience repeated and severe forms of violence and sexual abuse.
- 1.2 Domestic abuse can also affect men and can occur in a range of relationships including heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender, and also within extended families.
- 1.3 Domestic abuse does not discriminate and as an organisation we have taken the view to include all diversity groups within this policy as they are all potential victims of domestic abuse. We accept that for many victims it can take repeated incidents before they seek support, however, we believe that each incidence of domestic abuse is a serious matter. We will work with people who are experiencing domestic abuse for the first time, as well as those who are repeat victims.
- 1.4 We acknowledge that Monmouthshire Housing Association staff may also be victims and we will deal sensitively with those staff who experiencing domestic abuse.

## 2 Definition of Domestic abuse

- 2.1 MHA has adopted the Welsh Government's definition of Domestic Abuse which is:

*'The use of physical and/or emotional abuse or violence, undermining of self confidence, sexual violence or the threat of violence, by a person who is or has been in close relationship'. Domestic abuse can go beyond physical violence. It involves emotional abuse, the destruction of a spouse's or partners property, their isolation from friends, family or other potential sources of support, threats to others including children, control over access to money, personal items, food, transport and telephone and stalking'. It can also include violence perpetrated by son, daughter or any other close blood relationship with the victim/survivor. It can include violence inflicted on, or witnessed by children. The wide adverse effects of living with domestic abuse for children must be recognised as a child protection issue. The effects can link to a poor educational achievement, social exclusion and to juvenile crime, substance misuse, mental health problems and homelessness from running away. DA is not a 'one off' occurrence, it is frequent and persistent' (see Tackling Domestic Abuse: The All Wales National Strategy, 2005).*

- 2.2 The Home Office also provides an extended definition of Domestic Abuse, available on their website: [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk).

### **3 Purpose**

- 3.1 That staff are clear and confident about MHA's approach to Domestic Abuse and relationship breakdown.
- 3.2 That outside agencies are aware of the role that MHA can play in assisting individuals experiencing domestic abuse and relationship breakdown and in raising awareness of domestic abuse.
- 3.3 That people experiencing domestic abuse and relationship breakdown are informed of the ways in which MHA can assist and support them.
- 3.4 To send a clear message to perpetrators that MHA condemns any form of domestic abuse, where possible, and will take appropriate action against perpetrators of domestic abuse.
- 3.5 To remove fear of stigmatisation for employees who have experienced domestic abuse by providing a clear link to the Domestic Abuse Workplace Policy for support and guidance.

### **4 Policy Statement**

- 4.1 Monmouthshire Housing Association aims to ensure that victims of domestic abuse receive a victim centred, sensitive, confidential, consistent and prompt response. This includes the provision of a flexible range of services to assist residents to live in safety and security. Officers will receive support and training to enable them to take appropriate action, adopting a multi agency approach.

### **5 Policy Details**

- 5.1 MHA will aim to ensure that staff are trained appropriately and adhere to procedures when working with those experiencing or affected by domestic abuse.
- 5.2 MHA will take into account published best practice guidance when dealing with domestic abuse, relationship breakdown and joint tenancies.
- 5.3 MHA will empower victims by making available to all residents clear information on its approach to dealing with domestic abuse, relationship breakdown and joint tenancies.
- 5.4 MHA will respond with empathy and treat a domestic abuse victim with respect and dignity.
- 5.5 MHA will provide support and information, in the workplace, for employees experiencing or affected by domestic abuse.
- 5.6 MHA will respect confidentiality, and adopt a non-judgmental victim centred approach when dealing with cases of domestic abuse.
- 5.7 MHA will ensure that where there are child protection concerns referrals are made to Monmouthshire County Council's Children's Services.

- 5.8 MHA will ensure all staff respond appropriately to enquiries, signposting or referring to appropriate agencies with the agreement of the victim.
- 5.9 MHA will ensure all staff are aware of the referral care pathway for all victims of domestic abuse, ensuring victims are aware of the appropriate support and advice available.
- 5.10 MHA will offer its tenants advice and guidance on rent arrears, rechargeable repairs, letting issues and tenancy issues when experiencing domestic abuse or relationship breakdown.
- 5.11 MHA will collect specific agreed data on domestic abuse (see Section 10) and return annually to the Domestic Abuse Forum and quarterly to the Domestic Abuse Coordinator.
- 5.12 MHA will attend the Daily Domestic Abuse Conference Call (DACC) and share relevant information on tenants that are experiencing domestic abuse under Section 115 Crime and Disorder Act (see section 12).
- 5.13 MHA will refer any identified high risk victims (Using D.A.S.H.) to the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) for safety planning.
- 5.14 MHA will work in partnership to meet the aims and objectives set out in the overarching Monmouthshire Single Integrated Plan.
- 5.15 The Domestic Abuse Policy and Procedures, complies with the following legislation:
  1. Housing Acts 1996 and 2004
  2. Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003
  3. Crime and Disorder Act 1998
  4. Data Protection Act 1998
  5. Equality Act 2010
  6. Mental Capacity Act 2005
  7. Human Rights Act 1998
- 5.16 For details on other related Legislation see procedures, Appendix C.
- 5.17 This policy has links to and has been developed in conjunction with other MHA documentation which includes:-
  1. Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy
  2. Anti Social Behaviour Policy and Procedure
  3. Equality and Diversity Policy
  4. Lone Working Policy
  5. Unacceptable Behaviour Policy
  6. Monmouthshire Homeseach Allocations Policy and Procedure

7. Tenancy Agreements
8. Tenancy Management Policy and Procedures
9. Welsh Language Policy
10. Information sharing agreement between Gwent Police, MCC and Registered Social Landlords
11. Leaseholder Policy and Procedures
12. Domestic Abuse Workplace Policy
13. Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy and Procedure

## **6 Background Information about Domestic Abuse**

### **6.1 TYPES OF ABUSE SUFFERED BY VICTIMS AND CHILDREN:**

Victims may suffer different types of domestic abuse which can include: psychological/emotional abuse; sexual abuse/violence; physical abuse/violence and financial abuse.

The following (6.1.1 – 6.1.4) are examples or signs that domestic abuse/violence could be taking place. These lists are not exclusive.

#### **6.1.1 Psychological/Emotional Abuse:**

Destructive Criticism And Verbal Abuse – Shouting, mocking, name calling, verbally threatening, constantly putting the victim down in front of other people. Not listening or responding to the victim when they talk, interrupting the victim, taking victims belongings with no permission, refusing to help with childcare or housework, lying, withholding information, being jealous, having other relationships, breaking agreements/promises.

Pressure Tactics – sulking , threatening to withhold money, disconnecting the phone, threatening to commit suicide, lying to friends and family about the victim, telling the victim that they have no choice in decisions made, pressuring someone to marry against their will, threatening to report the victim to welfare agencies or taking the children away.

Isolation – monitoring or blocking phone calls, telling the victim what they can or cannot do or where they can or cannot go, timing them when they go out, and preventing the victim from seeing friends or family.

Threats – making threats, using physicality to intimidate, shouting, breaking possessions or property in the home, punching walls/doors, wielding a knife or other potential weapon, threatening to kill or harm the victim and/or any children saying abuse doesn't happen, blaming victim for the abuse, begging for forgiveness, saying it won't happen again.

Harassment – following the victim, checking up on them, opening mail, checking texts/phone calls, embarrassing the victim in public.

### 6.1.2 Sexual Abuse Violence:

Using force, threats or intimidation to make a victim perform sex acts, degrading treatment. Forcing pregnancy, miscarriage from assaults, threats to have affair, called frigid, compared to others, having open affairs, humiliating in front of others, threatening to abuse the children or the victim if they do not conform.

### 6.1.3 Physical Abuse Violence:

This can involve punching, hitting, slapping, biting, strangling, drowning, pinching, kicking, pulling hair, pushing, burning. Stabbing, using weapons, assaulting pets and children, female mutilation, honour based violence and ultimately murder.

### 6.1.4 Financial Abuse:

Taking victim's money, forcing victim to account for every penny spent, forcing them to show receipts for items bought, stealing belongings and selling, gambling, keeping money for themselves and neglecting children and victim with their basic needs (food, clothing etc), taking loans out in the victim's name, not allowing the victim to have a bank account. It can involve making a victim give up work or take more than one job to support their abusive partner.

## 6.2 IMPACT OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

6.2.1 Some recognised possible impacts of domestic abuse are listed below. This list is not exclusive:

General – fear or shame; thinking they won't be believed; homelessness; economic instability; loss of job/educational opportunities; being or feeling like a prisoner in own home; being afraid to go to sleep at night; walking on egg shells and geographic displacement.

Health - physical injury, sometimes serious occasionally fatal; anxiety; depression; eating disorders; alcohol/drug dependency (see 6.4 below); pregnancy complications.

Children - harm to unborn child; poor educational performance; psychosomatic illnesses; anxiety; fearfulness; asthma; bedwetting and withdrawal.

### 6.2.2 DOMESTIC ABUSE AND ALCOHOL / DRUG MISUSE

There is a clear association between alcohol and drug misuse and domestic abuse. Alcohol and drugs are often wrongly attributed as being the cause or an explanation or excuse for domestic abuse. Victims frequently blame themselves and their use of drugs or alcohol for their experience of domestic abuse. Conversely drug or alcohol abuse may be used as an excuse by the perpetrator for the domestic abuse they are inflicting. This can increase the victim's sense of shame and make them less likely to seek support.

## 7 Responsibilities



- 7.1 Domestic Abuse is a category of Anti Social Behaviour. The Community Safety Team takes the lead at MHA and is responsible for domestic abuse cases including dealing with DACC and MARAC cases (see section 12 below). MHA's Service Standards for Anti Social Behaviour require incidents of domestic abuse that are reported to the Association be dealt with as urgent and to be passed straight to the Community Safety Team for attention.

## **8 Confidentiality**

- 8.1 Staff should comply with MHA's Information Security Policy.
- 8.2 Where there is risk of harm due to domestic abuse, sharing information in this situation is made possible under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (Section 115), the Data Protection Act 1998 and Human Rights Act (Articles 2 and 3). Also the Information sharing agreement between Gwent Police, MCC and Registered Social Landlords.

## **9 Property Security**

- 9.1 Where appropriate, measures to protect the victim in their home should be taken. For MHA tenants who are victims this may include changing or adding locks, offering window and door alarms, personal alarms, improving fencing, adding security lights, or securing the property whilst the victim is away from the property.

## **10 Performance Management**

- 10.1 We will respond to reports of domestic abuse within timescales as defined in our ASB Procedures for cases where a victim self discloses which will be monitored and reported on through our systems. MHA's ASB Procedures requires these cases of Domestic Abuse to be treated as urgent and as such the victim should be contacted within one working day.
- 10.2 We will take action in cases of Domestic Abuse brought to MHA via our engagement with DACC or MARAC within the timescales set for the action at the respective conference call or MARAC meeting. This will be on a case by case basis.
- 10.3 We will report our performance on domestic abuse to our Senior Management Team and provide agreed data to the Domestic Abuse Coordinator and the Monmouthshire Domestic Abuse Forum quarterly.

## **11 Risk Management - Staff**

- 11.1 MHA recognises that its own staff may require support, advice and guidance in order to deal with cases of domestic abuse. All staff will be supported by their managers to deliver the aims and objectives of this policy and procedure.

- 11.2 When dealing with domestic abuse cases or incidents, staff should ensure that they assess any risk to themselves and follow health and safety and lone working procedures. If necessary refer also to MHA's Unacceptable Behaviour Policy.

## **12 Partnership Working**

- 12.1 Monmouthshire Housing Association will work with a range of partner agencies to access additional expertise and knowledge around domestic abuse. We fully recognise that staff from other agencies can offer a wide range of measures, support and protection to victims of domestic abuse.
- 12.2 The Association will take part in the daily 'Domestic Abuse Conference Call' (DACC), where Gwent police share reported incidents of domestic abuse that occurred the day before.
- 12.3 The Association will take part in a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC), which is part of a coordinated response to domestic abuse, incorporating representatives from statutory and voluntary agencies. In doing so we will help to reduce the risk of serious harm or homicide of a victim of domestic abuse and support the safety, health and wellbeing of victims.

## **13 Equal Opportunities and Diversity**

- 13.1 Staff must be aware of the diverse communication needs of residents. The Association will provide document translation and interpretation services on request. Staff must be sensitive to the needs of residents who cannot read, which includes having an awareness of the issues surrounding both illiteracy and dyslexia. Where staff are aware of individual language needs they must adapt their communication methods as appropriate.
- 13.2 MHA recognises that it operates in a community with wide social diversity. It is committed to providing equal opportunities to all and valuing and promoting diversity, as per the Equality Act (2010).
- 13.3 MHA will seek to eliminate discrimination and promote and advance equality for all protected 'characteristics', as defined in the Equality Act (2010). These protected groups relate to age, disability, gender and gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation. MHA also recognises the impact of its policy and procedure on those of different socio-economic groups.
- 13.4 This policy has been developed alongside recognition of potential impacts on the nine protected groups, and how these can be minimised.
- 13.5 MHA will monitor access to the services it provides in relation to Domestic Abuse by different groups in order to monitor equality of opportunity.

## **14 Complaints**

- 14.1 If anybody feels that an MHA officer has not dealt with a domestic abuse case in accordance with MHA's Domestic Abuse Policy and Procedure and the associated ASB and/or Tenancy Management Procedures, they may complain through the MHA Complaints Procedure and their complaint will be dealt with according to that policy and procedure.

## **15 Review**

- 15.1 This joint Policy and Procedure will be reviewed on a three yearly basis by the partners involved to ensure it is fit for purpose and meets the needs of victims whilst complying with current legislation and best practice. A review will take place prior to this, if new legislation is released by the National or Welsh Government, which impacts MHA's Domestic Abuse Policy and Procedure.