

Dover District Council

Domestic Abuse

(Housing Policy)



v1.0 Summary

Introduction

Domestic abuse does not discriminate, it can have a prolonged impact to the health and wellbeing of residents and communities. Dover District Council's ("the Council") Housing Service plays an important role in recognising domestic abuse and supporting victims / survivors to access appropriate advice and safe accommodation away from the perpetrator.

The new consumer standards, revised by the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, set a requirement for social housing landlords to work co-operatively with other agencies tackling domestic abuse and to have a policy for how they recognise and respond to cases of domestic abuse.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 ("the Act 2021") revised the definition of domestic abuse to include children as victims if they see, hear or experience the effects of domestic abuse, we use this definition of domestic abuse:

Behaviour of one person towards another who are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and the behaviour is abusive.

Behaviour is "abusive" if it consists of any of the following:-

- a. physical or sexual abuse;
- b. violent or threatening behaviour;
- c. controlling or coercive behaviour;
- d. economic abuse;
- e. psychological, emotional or other abuse.

The Act 2021 imposes a legal duty on the Council to work with our tier one local authority (Kent County Council) (KCC) to support victims / survivors of domestic abuse so far as reasonably practicable, the Domestic Abuse (Housing) Policy ("the Policy") sets out how we will do this

How we will recognise and respond to cases of domestic abuse

Domestic abuse may come to the attention of housing staff in different ways. These include (but are not limited to):

- Through contact with our allocations team
- From a routine visit by an Officer
- The victim / survivor coming forward
- Via a referral from an external partner
- By contractors raising a safeguarding concern
- Via a report of anti-social behaviour (ASB) – signs of domestic abuse can sometimes be misidentified as ASB (i.e., shouting and damage to property), reports of ASB will be investigated by Officers through a ‘domestic abuse lens’.

Staff must follow safeguarding procedures and associated policies when responding to cases of domestic abuse.

The safety of victims / survivors of domestic abuse, including their children, will always be our main priority. Officers must contact the police and might have to act without the victim's / survivor's consent if they determine there is an immediate risk of harm, thereafter internal and safeguarding procedures should be followed.

If there is an immediate risk of harm, the first point of contact should always be the police to give the necessary response, victims / survivors or other concerned individuals can contact us afterwards to report their concerns.

Where the victim / survivor has contacted us personally, we will aim to contact them within 2 working days to offer a personal discussion using discretion, sensitivity and integrity. Any discussions will take place in a confidential setting, and we can offer reasonable adjustments, such as giving the option to have a meeting with a member of staff of the same sex, which reflects our survivor led approach.

Officers should:

- Listen attentively and objectively
- Understand how the victim / survivor wishes to proceed and inform how we can support them
- Share information about specialist domestic abuse services and offer a referral (where there appears to be additional support needs, such as addiction, we can also offer these referrals)
- Record all discussions and actions clearly in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018. Clarity and accuracy within record keeping is particularly important as it could be called upon as evidence within a police investigation.

Children living in households with domestic abuse will always require safeguarding and will be referred to Children's Services in all cases.

Non-council staff (such as contractors) that recognise signs of domestic abuse must report this to social services and if they witness any incidents of violence, this should be reported to the police. Once this has been reported to social services or the police, they should make a member of housing staff aware of this.

We recognise that victims / survivors support needs will often fall outside the scope of housing, a list of services for advice and support is available on our website: Domestic abuse (dover.gov.uk)

As a part of Kent and Medway MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) we work with partner organisations to identify and support victims / survivors and provide co-ordinated services to prioritise the safety of victims / survivors, including their children. High risk domestic abuse cases will be shared at MARAC.

As recommended by MARAC, staff must complete a DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour Based Violence) risk assessment checklist for all cases of domestic abuse.

In accordance with the Act 2021, tier one authorities (KCC) have a duty to provide accommodation-based support for victims / survivors (such as support for complex needs) in safe accommodation and they must assess the need for this, tier two authorities (the Council) should work cooperatively with tier one authorities. Safe accommodation should not be 'bed and breakfast' accommodation or mixed gender.

KCC also commission domestic abuse services across Kent, known as the Kent Integrated Domestic Abuse Service (KIDAS); Oasis delivers and subcontracts services for Dover and Thanet.

Existing tenants and transfers

Victims / survivors may be able to apply to court to transfer the tenancy into their sole name. We will provide housing options advice to victims / survivors regarding their tenancy, which includes accessing temporary accommodation, remaining in the property with additional security measures and accessing specialist support and legal advice.

If you are a joint tenant, one tenant can end the tenancy by giving us notice. In accordance with the Act 2021, lifetime tenants who suffer domestic abuse will retain lifetime security if they are granted a new tenancy by a local authority for reasons connected to domestic abuse. We may also support housing victims in another locality through Kent Housing Reciprocal Agreement, which enables individuals and families at risk of domestic abuse and who have a social tenancy, to move to a safe area in Kent and Medway whilst retaining their social housing tenancy.

Any repairs for damage to the property that may leave victims / survivors at risk will be categorised as emergency repair work and will be carried out within 24 hours. Where required, we can provide improved security to the home such as changing the locks to doors and windows, we can also support with accessing Sanctuary Access for Eligible Residents (SAFER) which is KCC'S sanctuary offer which enables victims / survivors to remain in their home.

Homelessness applicants

The Act 2021 amended the Housing Act 1996 meaning that victims / survivors of domestic abuse will be in priority need for housing if they are eligible for assistance and not intentionally homeless. The Council has a duty to support the applicant together with any person who normally (or can be expected to) reside with them, source suitable accommodation. Temporary accommodation must be provided until this duty can be discharged through the provision of settled accommodation.

Perpetrators

We may take enforcement action against tenants responsible for acts considered to be domestic abuse. We will consult with specialist agencies such as Respect and social services whilst doing so.

Perpetrating domestic abuse is a breach of our tenancy agreement (see 3.4) and we may utilise the Council's powers to evict the perpetrator where it is safe and proportionate to do so.

Staff should not contact perpetrators to discuss any reports of domestic abuse or share any information with them.

Staff training and support

Domestic abuse training is embedded in the Housing Services induction programme, and we will review opportunities for external training on an ongoing basis, as well as internal reviews of our training programme.

Situations relating to domestic abuse has the potential to become tense and put staff at risk of abuse, a suitable risk assessment must be undertaken to identify the control measures and minimise this risk.

We value a culture that supports staff wellbeing and staff should be able to say when they feel overwhelmed through regular contact with their line manager.

Victim / survivor feedback and complaints

We will always ask victims / survivors to provide feedback on their experience. This will usually be after the situation has settled and will be used to improve and review the support provided. We welcome feedback at any time, and this can be sent to policy@dover.gov.uk

The Council's definition of a complaint is:

“An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or a group of residents.”

If you would like to make a complaint, please see our website: [If you are unhappy \(dover.gov.uk\)](http://dover.gov.uk)

