

Housing Services – Domestic Abuse Policy

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Purpose | This Policy exists to reinforce the Council’s organisational culture; where it is understood that anyone can experience domestic abuse. We aim to provide a supportive response that helps reduce risk and enhance safety and will do this by leading a culture that takes the subject seriously, with staff who have a positive, non-judgemental attitude. |
| Owner | Head of Tenancy Services |
| Related documents | Tenancy Management Policy Allocations Policy Succession Policy Anti-Social Behaviour Policy and Procedure Corporate Domestic Violence and Abuse Policy |
| Approved by | Executive |
| Date approved | 6 th August 2024 |
| Review frequency | 3 yearly or earlier if legislation changes. |
| Last review | N/A |
| Next review | August 2027 |
| Version | V 1.0 |
| Author | Arron Samson/Tony Hobby |



1. Introduction

Ipswich Borough Council's Corporate Strategy, Proud of Ipswich, recognises the importance of meeting the housing needs of our community. We aim to be an excellent Landlord to the people who live in our properties.

We understand that anyone can experience domestic abuse and that seeking support at the earliest opportunity is a positive thing. We aim to provide a supportive response that helps reduce risk and enhance safety and will do this by leading a culture that takes the subject seriously, with staff who have a positive, non-judgemental attitude.

This policy applies to all Council tenants, leaseholders, temporary licensees and occupants.

This policy complements the corporate Ipswich Borough Councils Domestic Violence and Abuse Policy which exists to ensure its employees understand the nature of domestic abuse and how to respond appropriately to help protect those employees suffering from domestic abuse.

2. What is Domestic Abuse?

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 defines domestic abuse as:

“Behaviour of a person (“A”) towards another person (“B”) is “domestic abuse” if—

(a) A and B are each aged 16 or over and are “personally connected” to each other, and

(b) the behaviour is abusive.”

“(3) 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

and it does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.”

The Council recognises that Domestic Abuse is built around control and coercive behaviour. These types of acts largely go unnoticed and can include making an individual subordinate / dependent, whilst being exploited for personal gain. This will, in some cases, mean the person is deprived of independence limiting their ability to escape from an abusive life.

Coercive behaviour will be identified by our trained staff as a pattern of acts, including but not limited around humiliation, intimidation and fear which is used to harm, punish, or frighten the individual. This definition includes honour-based violence. Honour-based violence is a term used to refer to a collection of practices used predominantly to control the behaviour of women and girls within families or other social groups in order to protect supposed cultural and religious beliefs, values and social norms in the name of ‘honour’.

The policy is clear that victims are not confined to one gender, sexual orientation, or ethnic group. There may, in some cases, be multiple perpetrators, usually family members whether directly related or not.

Domestic Abuse can be perpetrated by women towards men; however, research shows it is mainly abuse from men against women. Women are more likely to be injured, repeatedly abused, and murdered. Male perpetrators are far more likely to abuse post-separation than women and the Council recognises that this can be the highest risk period for women.

3. Policy Aims

This policy will aim to achieve the following.

- Raising the status of survivors by ensuring their voices are heard and influence the services we deliver.
- Adopt a coordinated community response by working together with our partners to meaningfully safeguard survivors.



- Ensure that staff are trained on a rolling programme to ensure domestic abuse is always at the forefront of our minds and dealt with confidently with sensitivity at the core.
- We will adopt a culture to demonstrate that it is okay to talk about this hidden crime and the Council is a safe place to seek support.
- We will take appropriate action against those who choose to abuse individuals utilising all available powers within Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and enforcement of terms of the Tenancy Agreement.
- The policy will aim to enhance the safety and security of those affected through sanctuary work at their home, with a view to increase confidence, resilience and empower them to live safely and independently.
- We will work in partnership with appropriate agencies to support or signpost perpetrators of domestic abuse who recognise and seek to change their behaviour; to increase their motivation, skills, knowledge and build confidence and resilience to combat their abusive behaviour patterns.
- We will actively promote awareness through various communication channels, whilst also supporting national campaigns.
- The Council is committed to the Chartered Institute of Housing Make a Stand pledge <https://www.cih.org/media/ob5oirgo/make-a-stand-the-pledge-document.pdf> to ensure a consistent national approach is delivered.

4. Our Approach

The Council will take a zero-tolerance approach to domestic abuse. We will do this by adopting a believing, trust-based approach, ensuring that the individual is aware we take the issue seriously whilst being sensitive and understanding to the individual's needs.

We recognise that not all people see themselves as a "survivor and we will ensure that these labels are not associated with the individual. We will listen to the needs of the individual and ensure that their voice is heard.

Our domestic abuse response will not be labelled or addressed as anti-social behaviour.

We will take reasonable and proportionate action against proven perpetrators which will include tenancy enforcement in addition to ensuring we adopt a support-based approach as a means of intervention to changing someone's behaviour, where they want to.

The Council recognise that housing is one of the main factors why survivors do not leave abusive homes, meaning that we have a key role to play within a response.



5. How the Council will respond

No single agency or professional has a complete picture of the life of an individual or family living with domestic abuse, however many will have insights that are crucial to their safety. The Council will adopt a collaborative approach with partner agencies when supporting people who are being abused.

We will ensure that the response to those reporting domestic abuse is consistent and that our services are accessible for all regardless of their identity or protected characteristics.

Safety and accountability will be at the centre of the Councils processing of cases. They will be managed in a safe and sensitive manner where trust and a non-judgemental attitude will form the basis of a response. This will be overseen by senior members of staff who will ensure that our approach is as we say, through regular case audits.

Risk management will be crucial to us working with people who are suffering, and we will ensure that every case is risk assessed appropriately.

We want to ensure that all staff working at the Council recognise that domestic abuse is a real issue affecting our customers and colleagues. We will provide training that enables staff to do their jobs through a “domestic abuse lens” making it daily business rather than something we react to before it is too late.

There is a range of civil and criminal action that can be taken to protect people from domestic abuse. These vary according to the circumstances of individuals. The Council will always advise individuals and families if legal advice is being taken.

6. Safeguarding

A significant number of adults who experience domestic abuse in some form will also require safeguarding in accordance with the Care Act 2014. If domestic abuse is an isolated issue and there are no other safeguarding concerns the Council will support the individual / family through the relevant policy and procedure.

If an individual experiencing domestic abuse has care and support needs relating to their physical or mental health, then an adult safeguarding referral should also be made in accordance with the Care Act 2014.

The Council acknowledges that there are strong, evidenced based links between domestic abuse and child abuse. Exposure to domestic abuse is always detrimental to children, although the impacts may vary. Children exposed to abuse at home may



be affected by physical and/or emotional abuse, neglect, and ongoing psychological damage.

Where children are present within a domestic abuse scenario our staff will always make the relevant Child safeguarding referrals to ensure any children are adequately protected.

7. Equality and Diversity

The Council will meet the needs and choices of customers from all backgrounds taking into consideration age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, race, religion and sexual orientation.

We will understand and consider cultural implications and the barriers to reporting domestic abuse.

We will ensure that all sections of our communities can have equal access to our services.

An equality impact screening exercise was carried out for this policy, and it identified positive impacts for the following protected characteristics:

Age, Disability, Race, Pregnancy & Maternity, Religion or Belief, Gender Reassignment, Sex and Sexual Orientation.

.

8. Appeals

A resident who disagrees with a decision made in the application of this policy may request a review of that decision within 21 days of receiving the written decision from the Council. A request for a review should usually be made in writing although the Council may also consider verbal requests for a review to be undertaken.

The resident should clearly outline the reasons that they have formally requested a review and a different officer at the Council will review the original decision. The review officer will be more senior than the original decision maker and will not have been involved in making the original decision. In some cases, the Council may need to request further information from the resident in order to make a decision. The Council will respond to the review request in writing within 8 weeks.