

Housing Domestic Abuse Policy 2024–27

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Introduction

We do not tolerate domestic abuse and take seriously our duty to support survivors and survivors. This policy sets out how East Devon District Council will take steps to assist and support any person experiencing or threatened with domestic abuse. This includes forced marriage. It applies to all customers including those living with our tenants.

Domestic abuse is still a largely hidden crime and measuring the true scale of the issue is difficult. Domestic abuse happens in all communities, regardless of gender, age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, marriage or civil partnership and pregnancy or maternity.

As a Housing Provider we are well placed to recognise the signs of domestic abuse. It is essential that we take all reports of domestic abuse seriously and work positively and pro-actively with the survivor to offer support.

East Devon District Council uses the DA Act 2021 recognised definition of Domestic Abuse. Domestic abuse describes abusive behaviours that take place between two people aged over 16 who are personally connected to each other. This includes people who are, or have previously been married, in civil partnerships or in relationships; or have a child together; or are relatives, including abuse of adult parents or adult children.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 states that abuse can be a single incident, but is often a pattern of behaviours that can take many forms including:

- Controlling behaviour
- Coercive behaviour
- Economic abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Online Abuse
- Psychological and emotional abuse
- Physical abuse

It also includes stalking and so called 'honour' based violence such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage. The Law also defines children Stonewater Domestic abuse policy – Customers V1.0 Approved: COG 24 May 23 Page 2 of 8 Our vision

Definitions of domestic abuse

Controlling behaviour

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

Sexual abuse

This could include rape and coerced sex, forcing a survivor to take part in unwanted sexual acts, refusal to practice safe sex or use contraception, threatened or actual sexual abuse of children.

Coercive behaviour

An act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their survivors. It includes forced marriage or so called 'honour violence.' Abuse from more than one perpetrator is not uncommon.

Economic abuse

This could include controlling money or bank accounts, making a survivor account for all expenditure, running up debt in a survivor's name, allowing no say on how monies are spent, controlling or withholding rent payments, refusing them to allow to study or work.

Elder Abuse

Elder abuse, also known as abuse of older adults, older people or abuse of a vulnerable adult, is intentionally harming a person who's older than 60. This could be by intentionally inflicting pain (physical or emotional), neglect or financial exploitation. Abuse causes serious risk and harm. Abuse can happen anywhere and to anyone. Most often, people closest to a vulnerable adult are the ones who mistreat them. If you or a loved one experiences abuse, reach out to local authorities and/or adult protective services to report it.

Psychological and Emotional Violence

Abuse techniques include but not limited to:

- Creating isolation e.g. not allowing them to see other people, preventing them from making their own friendships, not allowing them to go anywhere on their own, causing them to feel bad about themselves and then using this against them.
- Use of threats e.g. stalking, threats to kill their family, children, friends, pets, to throw them out of the house and keep the children, to find them if they ever leave, to have them arrested and locked up, telling people that they are 'mad.'
- Putting them down e.g. humiliating and undermining them in front of others and their children, telling them they are stupid, hopeless, that no one would believe them or they are a bad parent.

Physical abuse

This could include hitting, punching, kicking, slapping, hitting with objects, pulling hair, pushing, or shoving, cutting or stabbing, restraining, strangulation and finally murder.

How to use this policy

This policy applies to all East Devon District Council staff, contractors, subcontractors and agents working for East Devon District Council and details how we will support our social housing tenants and leaseholders and the public accessing our housing service.

Our approach to raising awareness of domestic abuse and promoting early help.

- How we expect staff, contractors, sub-contractors, and their agents to respond to disclosure of domestic abuse.
- Details of the options available to East Devon District Council Housing tenants seeking assistance from Housing and Regeneration and our Housing Advisory Service
- Information for all residents as to their rights and how to access housing service help should they experience abuse in the future.

Our Core Principles

This policy is built on a set of core behaviours that all Council staff are expected to demonstrate, helping us to provide all our services across Housing in a way that is respectful, responsive and co-ordinated.

Our core principles are:

- promote equal access and inclusivity,
- consult and engage with our communities,
- promote the health and well-being of our residents and colleagues,
- deliver quality, accessible services – a great service, first time and every time,
- be open, clear and transparent,
- treat others and their opinions with respect always,
- Adopt a Trauma informed approach
- work towards reducing our carbon footprint and enhancing our environment,
- operate as one Council team.

In our work to prevent domestic abuse and support survivors and survivors across all housing services we will:

Prioritise Safety

survivors have the right to be safe in their homes and communities. We will prioritise safety and recognise that safe intervention starts by talking to individuals and providing appropriate services and support in a way that avoids triggering further trauma. These may include referrals to partner agencies for support, looking for out of district placements, or referrals to the Detect and Protect service to help with making their home safer, by installation of additional safety measures in the property such as locks or a tamper proof letter box., that will be installed by our contractors.

Be non-judgemental

survivors disclosing abuse will be believed, listened to, and accepted. We will create safe environments to enable open, honest, and respectful discussions and all disclosures will be taken seriously and treated in confidence. Be person-centred. survivors are at the heart of any intervention and support. We will focus support and care based on the individual's needs.

Amplify survivor voices

Feedback and suggestions about the services we provide are valued, escalated when appropriate and lessons are learnt. We will collect their views in several different ways, including through working groups and informal conversations.

Understand intersectionality

survivors all have different experiences and face barriers related to their identity and protected characteristics such as age, sex, gender, sexual orientation, religion or belief, disability, pregnancy and maternity, marital status, and socio-economic status. We will respect and seek to fully understand individual differences, experiences and needs, enabling tailored services and the right support.

Trauma informed approach and practice

It is essential to embed principles that recognise the impact of trauma, promote safety and empowerment, and avoid re-traumatisation.

Safety – Ensure physical and emotional safety for survivors and staff.

Trustworthiness & Transparency – Build trust through clear, consistent communication and actions.

Empowerment & Choice – Support survivors to make informed decisions and regain control.

Collaboration – Work in partnership with survivors and across agencies.

Cultural, Historical & Gender Awareness – Recognise how identity and systemic factors affect experiences of trauma.

Our approach

Predict

We predict current and future needs through using local and national crime data, our population data and equality impact assessments. These are regularly reviewed, informed through service user and staff feedback and enable us to make commissioning decisions based upon predicted demand.

Target

We direct our limited resources toward those with the greatest needs. Through Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour based risk identification checklist (DASH) Risk checklists and other assessments, we can identify individual's needs and the best way to meet them.

Prevent

We provide accessible, co-ordinated and early help to stop situations escalating. This means raising awareness and learning from our experiences through audits, case reviews and user feedback. We have a robust complaints system to alert us to any issues that need additional attention.

Deliver

We provide high quality services through meeting regulations, allocating our resources appropriately, listening to our service users and staff and gaining accreditation.

Vision and Commitment

At East Devon District Council we believe that our customers and tenants should not live in fear of violence or abuse from a partner, former partner, or any other member of their household.

People experiencing domestic abuse will be treated in a sympathetic, supportive, and non-judgmental way. A survivors' disclosure alone is sufficient for them to be given advice and assistance as a matter of priority by staff.

- Ensure that people experiencing any form of domestic abuse can access appropriate services as early as possible and are given advice to allow them to make choices about what to do next.
- Support people who are / have experienced abuse to rebuild their lives by working in partnership with them and other support agencies.
- Ensure that where children and young people are affected by domestic abuse, they too have access to services as early as possible.
- Ensure that people experiencing abuse are not deterred from reporting abuse.
- Seek appropriate support solutions for perpetrators of domestic abuse to prevent abuse recurring.
- follow the relevant child protection / Safeguarding Children policies and toolkits if
- if we believe a child is at risk due to an abusive relationship.
- Follow the relevant reporting domestic abuse toolkit if we believe a vulnerable adult is at risk due to an abusive relationship.
- We will Launch the Detect and Protect service by collaborating with the Property and Assets team to prioritise emergency repairs and ensure tenant safety for all survivors of domestic abuse. The aim is to support survivors in remaining safely in their homes wherever possible.

People and Partnerships

We will Introduce generic housing officers who are specifically trained to provide this service

We are developing collaborative work with local partners and organisations such as the Safer Devon Partnership and the DDAA (Devon Domestic Abuse Alliance) in order to provide advice and support to meet the needs of our tenants experiencing domestic abuse.

Action and Monitoring

This Domestic Abuse Policy will be reviewed every 3 years or in line with business need or changes in regulation and/or legislation. Appropriate training and guidance will be provided to staff as a result of any changes.

To monitor our progress and ensure that the service continues to improve, we will review cases on an ongoing basis. Learning and feedback on cases will be shared and discussed with officers, on an ad hoc basis through case reviews.

Feedback from those survivors who have experienced our service provide important insight into performance and therefore we will actively seek feedback and evaluation where appropriate.

This Policy and the reporting of Domestic abuse Toolkits have been cross referenced with good practice and Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) standards.

Equality, diversity, and inclusion

Equality, diversity and inclusion are central to the decisions we make on how to deliver the best possible outcomes for our tenants. We will make sure that everyone receives fair, sensitive, and equal treatment and are treated with dignity and respect when accessing our housing services. This includes making sure that tenants are aware of their rights and supported to make informed decisions.

Although we know that anyone can be a survivor, we use national and local data in addition to tenants feedback to make sure we offer the right types of accessible support.

The Office of National Statistic (ONS)³ and Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)⁴ provides some insights into the gender, age and ethnicity of survivors of domestic abuse. This data helps us target our support, commission services, and make appropriate referrals to meet differing needs. Analysis of the most recent available national data at the time of publication of this policy shows us that:

- 73% of domestic abuse crimes list the survivor as female
- Female survivors were aged 30 to 34 years, whereas male survivors were generally older with the highest proportion of survivors aged 75 years and over.
- 76% of survivors of domestic homicide were female

Regulation and evidence

Confidentiality and data protection

East Devon District Council recognises that cases of domestic abuse can be very sensitive and managing it must be done with care. East Devon District Council colleagues will only share information with our customer's permission with the exception of:

- Raising safeguarding concerns about adults with care and support needs or child protection concerns
- Referring high risk cases to MARAC
- Where East Devon District Council is required by law, for example, if being questioned by Police as part of a criminal investigation.

Regulation and Legislation considerations.

This Policy helps to fulfil the following legislation:

- The Housing Act 1988 & 1996
- The Family Law Act 1996
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Human Rights Act 1998
- The Data Protection Act 2018
- Neighbourhood and Community Standard
- Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004
- Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007
- Police and Justice Act 2006
- Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003
- The Equality Act 2010
- Protection of Freedoms Act 2012
- Matrimonial Causes Act 1973
- Children Act 1989 and 2004
- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014
- Serious Crime Act 2015
- The Care Act 2014
- Clare's Law, also known as Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS)

Related East Devon District Council Policies

- Allocations Policy
- Tenancy Policy
- Homelessness Strategy
- Lone Worker Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Safeguarding Policy
- Anti-social behaviour Policy
- Equality Policy and objectives 2021- 2025
- EDDC Domestic Abuse Toolkit for Frontline Officers