

# Domestic Abuse Policy

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# 1. Policy statement

Our aim at settle is to be an excellent landlord delivering good customer services for all residents and using data to provide targeted, flexible services that improve life outcomes for our residents. We want to support residents to have the confidence, resilience and skills to live the life they choose and in line with our customer strategy and customer promise, offer extra help where we can.

This policy covers our approach to support victims and survivors of domestic abuse. Our approach aims to enable colleagues to work collaboratively with those who need our help and in partnership with key agencies to improve life outcomes for our residents, enabling them to live comfortably within their home, so that they can live the life they choose.

settle recognises we have a crucial role to play in helping victims whilst understanding there are real challenges associated with people coming forward and being able to access the right help. In recognition of the fact domestic abuse is often hidden behind closed doors, our aim is to provide our customers with a safe, confidential, empathetic and supportive environment, so that anyone experiencing domestic abuse, can disclose this without fear. Daily we meet many of our customers through the services we deliver, and we want to make sure customers feel they can trust us to help them.

When we respond to reports of domestic abuse our priority will be to fully support the victim's needs to find security within their home, either support in moving to another home or ensuring safety should they wish to remain in their home.

# 2. Current Position

In the past two years we have invested significant resource towards supporting our customers who are experiencing domestic abuse. This includes, but is not limited to:

- 100% of frontline staff including the Customer Service Centre, Neighbourhood Team, Tenancy Support Team and repairs colleagues trained to help them identify signs of potential domestic abuse.
- Enhanced training for specialist colleagues to attend the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) ensuring that settle is always represented and able to act on behalf of residents at these discussions.
- Built strong partnerships with local Police Teams and the organisation Survivors Against Domestic Abuse (SADA) including an annual donation to support the SADA service.
- Updated online communication with customers highlighting the support available and how they can report domestic abuse in a safe and confidential way. This resulted in 397 unique views to our domestic abuse and violence page on our website.
- 100% of our cases within the last year included some form of partnership working with specialist organisations able to support residents.

- Committing to the Chartered Institute of Housing's "Make a Stand" pledge.

Between June 2020 and June 2021 we identified 44 cases of domestic abuse, a reduction from 69 in the same timeframe during the previous year.

A third of our domestic abuse cases were audited against criteria set out by the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance. We found broad evidence of our colleagues working with partner agencies, arranging for additional security to be added to the property and supporting victims throughout the duration of their case. We also found evidence of failure to complete the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment (DASH) checklist with victims when reporting their case often defaulting this task to an alternative agency.

97% of the victims we supported were female. Government data shows that one in seven men are victims of domestic abuse and that 49% of male victims will fail to report this.

In the last year we referred 15% of domestic abuse cases to our Tenancy Support Team at settle for additional support. We supported 55% of victims to stay in their home with support and additional security and helped 14% to relocate to alternative accommodation.

Our data reveals that we are a supportive organisation who responds to domestic abuse well, but there are gaps in specialist knowledge particularly when it comes to initial disclosures.

#### **What do we need to do?**

- There is more we can do to assure male victims that we will treat their case seriously and to ensure that we are able to provide a gender specific colleague to support their disclosure.
- To consider how we ensure we have the right specialist knowledge to ensure our support of victims is optimised.
- Complete the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment checklist (DASH) or take the right steps at the point of when we receive a report of domestic abuse, knowing that this can make an immense difference to the customer's safety and wellbeing.

## **3. Key Principles**

We will:

- Create an environment where victims feel that they can talk to us in a way that is safe and that they are listened to and supported to live comfortably.
- Take a victim centred approach to ensure that we communicate regularly to provide regular updates, ensure that the victim feels fully supported and engaged with the action being taken.
- Work in partnership to ensure victims receive specialist support that meets their individual needs.
- Ensure that the victim's safety is secured utilising safe spaces where necessary.
- Support victims to remain within their home if they choose to.

- Support perpetrators to address underlying behaviours that cause the cycle of abuse.
- Apply learning from casework and reviews to implement changes as identified in a timely manner.

## 4 Objectives

- To act in line with key legislation relating to domestic abuse and meet the obligations of the regulatory consumer standards for registered social landlords.
- Provide tailored support to customers when they need it, either directly from us or from one of our partner agencies.
- For our approach to be informed by data to best meet the needs to our customers when they need it
- For customers to feel they are engaging with colleagues who understand what action to take and are able to support to deliver the right solutions.
- For customers to have the intervention they require from us when they need it.

## 5. Policy Actions

- Ensure legislative and regulatory changes are incorporated into our practice and process following engagement with our residents and communities whilst paying due regard to equality standards. We will adopt the provisions outlined in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, acknowledging that domestic abuse is not just physical violence, but can also be emotional, coercive or controlling, and economic abuse. As part of this definition, children will be explicitly recognised as victims if they see, hear or otherwise experience the effects of abuse.
- Carry out a risk assessment in all cases and refer as appropriate to MARAC and/or specialist agencies.
- Keep up consistent support victims to access legal support and solutions with regards to their safety.
- Continue to support perpetrators to address the root cause of the cycle of abuse where appropriate by signposting to specialists.
- Strengthen our partnership with our partner agencies by establishing a special partnership agreement where a joint role is developed specifically for our customers.
- Provide more to support customers who are either not ready or unable to come forward for help by promoting further information for victims on their options, rights and how to contact agencies in a safe way through our website. This includes maintaining clear, accessible guidance on how we will support customers who need to move home as a result of abuse.
- Ensure effective training and support for colleagues to provide a person-centric approach to dealing with domestic abuse identifying that domestic abuse is a specialist subject which needs a competent response.
- Continue to take robust action against perpetrators where it is our responsibility to do so and support our partner agencies to do the same.
- Ensure all colleagues are upskilled to look out for signs of vulnerability or potential abuse and report through 'settle plus.'

- Prioritise the support we provide at the time of disclosures of domestic abuse, including an urgent, sensitive and confidential response.

## 6. Desired Outcomes

- Enable victims to feel safe from harm.
- Provide effective legal intervention with the support of specialist agencies where required.
- Encourage trust in those who we support that we are doing everything we can to support their situation.
- Support with access to specialist help to support physical, emotional and mental health needs.
- Enable perpetrators to access specialist services to address underlying behaviour to end the cycle of abuse.
- Sustain 100% compliance of all colleagues being trained to respond to cases of DA.
- Raised awareness: customers are clear on our position – with easy access to quality information and guidance.

## 7. Performance Indicators

Domestic abuse case management monitored regularly through operational performance indicators to ensure:

- 100% cases have an initial contact within 1 working day of receiving disclosure of domestic abuse
- 100% cases have evidence of a DASH being completed either by us or another agency.
- 100 % of action plans are completed within two weeks of the initial report.
- Contact with victims is made at least fortnightly, unless expressly agreed with the victim otherwise.
- 80% of victims report positive outcomes following our intervention or support.

## 8. Key Legislation

- The Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- The Family Law Act 1996
- Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003
- Anti Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014
- Human Rights Act 1998
- The Data Protection Act 1998 and General Data Protection Policy
- The Housing Act 1996
- The Equality Act 2010

## 9 Review

This policy will be reviewed every two years or earlier if required.