



AIRE VALLEY HOMES LEEDS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

We believe that having a robust policy and procedure in tackling domestic violence is not only essential to support the victim but should also act as a deterrent by:

- Supporting tenants either directly or in conjunction with other service providers.
- Explaining conditions in our tenancy agreement to new and existing tenants and making it clear that Aire Valley Homes Leeds is serious about acting upon any breaches.
- Developing a communications strategy to ensure we are effectively communicating with all stakeholders.
- Application of appropriate allocations policies, to reflect commensurate priority for victims of domestic violence.

2. POLICY OBJECTIVES

- To ensure that domestic violence is never accepted or tolerated in any form. Violence in relationships is an abuse of power as well as likely to be a criminal offence
- To have systems in place that deal with incidents of domestic violence efficiently and effectively by taking a victim-orientated approach.
- Provide appropriate staff training to ensure adherence to our procedures when working with those experiencing or affected by domestic violence
- Work in partnership with voluntary and statutory agencies to meet our aims

- Raise the issue of domestic violence in the workplace, ensuring that all employees are able to respond appropriately and are able to provide assistance and information to those affected by domestic violence.
- Create a consistent approach for recording and monitoring incidences of domestic violence. This data will be used to identify needs to develop provision in the future
- Provide information to those affected by domestic violence to empower them to make choices
- Provide information and support in the work place for employees experiencing or affected by domestic violence.

3. RESPONSIBILITY AND REVIEW

The Board and Chief Executive Officer have overall responsibility for this policy. The person responsible for the effective implementation of this policy is the Chief Executive Officer. The Equality & Diversity Leadership Group will oversee the action plan and policy and produce regular reports for the Board

The Equality and Diversity Leadership will regularly review and monitor this policy and associated procedures to ensure that it continues to be effective. The Policy is to be reviewed annually and supporting action plan is to be reviewed on a quarterly basis.

A report will be included in the annual report which will give details of:

- The number of incidences of domestic violence, broken down in type, gender, age, ethnicity and whether involving children
- Outcomes of removing the perpetrator, re-housing the victim, any repeat behaviour
- The average length of time taken to bring a case to a satisfactory conclusion.

These criteria will also form part of the regular monitoring for Board and working groups.

Aire Valley Homes Leeds recognises that dealing with domestic violence can be difficult and will offer regular training to ensure that front line staff feel confident in their ability to handle such cases. Staff will be involved in the development and review of the policy and action through membership of the working groups.

All staff on induction will be given advice as to the protocols for dealing with domestic violence.

Aire Valley Homes Leeds will also seek to benchmark its approach to domestic violence with other Social Housing providers in the area.

4. DEFINITION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic Violence may take many different forms but the Housing Act 1996 defines it as “Violence or threat of violence from a person who is associated with the person under threat”.

Physical assault, sexual abuse, rape, threat of intimidation can form domestic violence, as can other kinds of intimidations such as degradation, mental and verbal abuse, humiliation, deprivation, systematic criticism or belittling (Home Office 2000).

To assist Officers applying this definition for domestic violence, the following non-exhaustive guidance, may be considered:

Physical Abuse

- Typically, this involves slapping, punching, kicking, biting, hair pulling and assaults with objects
- Injuries that may be evident include bruising, cuts, fractures, internal injuries and miscarriages
- Physical blows are often directed at areas of the body, which are covered from view such as the breasts, abdomen, back, legs and arms.
- Pregnancy is often a trigger for domestic violence and poses a great risk to both the women and unborn child.

Psychological and emotional abuse:

- Assaults and intimidation cannot be endured without psychological tactics to reinforce the control one person has over another.
- In the context of domestic violence, emotional abuse is the use of psychological tactics to reinforce the control one person has over another
- Any behaviour, which elicits fear, can be used and may include shouting, staring, threats, gestures, property destruction, prolonged silences and harassment. The possibilities are endless.

- It is important that all cases are considered individually and that officers recognise that the victim's view of what is intimidating or emotionally distressing will vary greatly. For example the longer the abuse has been endured, the more acceptable it may seem to the victim, particularly if no help or support has been offered in the past.
- Officers should be aware that emotional and psychological abuse can be physically and mentally devastating. It can also lead to self-harm

Economic Abuse

- Examples of this form of abuse may include controlling/preventing reasonable access to finances, demanding receipts for everything spent or providing an allowance knowing it to be insufficient and then using overspending or not buying as directed, as a reason to punish. Another feature of economic abuse may be withholding of financial resources to prevent the supply of basic needs for dependants.

4.2 Research shows that:

- One in three women will experience domestic violence at some point in their lives.
- Almost one in six men will experience physical or non-physical domestic violence
- Every week at least two women are killed by violent partners or ex-partners
- One in five young men and one in ten young women think that abuse or violence against women is acceptable.
- Every minute in the UK, the police receive a call from the public for assistance for domestic violence.

4.3 Although statistics and research shows that domestic violence tends to be perpetrated by men against women this policy extends to both women and men, to heterosexual, gay or lesbian relationships.

4.4 Domestic Violence usually involves partners or ex partners, but it can also include violence between other family members e.g. by children to parents. Furthermore it is the victim's perception of the situation that has to be paramount at all times.

- 4.5 Domestic Violence can begin at the start of a relationship or after years of marriage/living together. Many people are abused over along period of time before ever seeking any help.
- 4.6 Domestic Violence affects – and can completely overshadow – the lives of those who are experiencing it. Those experiencing it can be overwhelmed by fear and worry: trapped in a relationship without any obvious way out. Fear, economic dependency, lack of alternative housing and concerns over disrupting their children’s lives are barriers which make individuals feel trapped with no means of escape.
- 4.7 The effects of domestic violence and abuse spill over into the workplace and into individuals working lives, creating a damaging affect on business and employee morale.
- 4.8 The effects of domestic violence at work can have an impact on:
- Punctuality
 - Attendance
 - Health and Safety – some of the perpetrators of domestic violence come to the workplace searching for the victim, often because they are prevented through legal injunctions from going to the victims home.
 - Work performance and productivity.
- 4.9 In addition, as well as some employees suffering domestic violence there may be those employees who are perpetrators of domestic violence. Whilst Aire Valley Homes Leeds recognises that we cannot intervene in the private lives of our employees we will make it clear to all staff by this policy that we do not condone domestic violence and will support staff suffering from it. In addition, any perpetrator who displays domestic violence in the work place will be dealt with under the harassment at work policy.
- 4.10 Violence or threats of violence, which occur in the street or neighbourhood e.g outside the home, also fall into the remit of Aire Valley Homes Leeds harassment policy.

5. STATEMENT OF INTENT

Aire Valley Homes Leeds will not tolerate any act of domestic violence against any of its staff, tenants or leaseholders. We will

- Support those who have experienced domestic violence and reduce reoccurrence.
- Raising awareness of Domestic Violence
- Ensure that all employees understand the important role they can play in tackling domestic violence.
- Developing a consistent and fair approach to domestic violence
- Not asking victims to prove that they have experienced violence
- Not insisting that victims take legal action against the violent person, but offer advice regarding contacts should they wish to pursue this.
- Not pass messages from the perpetrator to the victim or act as a go between.
- Process all repairs reported as domestic violence as an emergency
- Providing adequate training to staff members to deal with victims of domestic violence

6. **SERVICE STANDARDS**

If we receive a report that domestic violence has taken place we will:

- Take the matter seriously
- Respect the confidentiality of victims and complainants
- Ensure that interviews take place in appropriate surroundings and those complainants can be accompanied for support if necessary.
- Provide “same sex” interviewers, if requested.
- Investigate complaints in an objective, sensitive, confidential and unbiased manner.
- Take firm and prompt action against perpetrators where appropriate and make every effort to support victims in their homes.
- Work with other agencies where appropriate, and with the victim’s consent, subject to the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 which contains an explicit power for us to disclose information to a number of different agencies.
- Discuss our proposed course of action with the complainant
- Communicate and review within 5 working days of first report
- Carry out emergency repairs if necessary
- Exercise discretion on whether or not to charge for repairing damage to property

7. PARTNERSHIP WORKING

We recognise that an effective strategy to prevent and deal with any allegation of domestic violence requires landlords to adopt a multi-agency approach with input from a range of agencies and local government departments.

It also recognises that households involved in domestic violence often have complex social and psychological support needs and that there is a need for landlords to always remain neutral and develop more effective partnerships with social services departments and other agencies providing support services.

Aire Valley Homes Leeds is therefore committed to working with arrange of agencies in partnerships to prevent and tackle domestic violence including:

- Leeds City Council
- Other Leeds ALMOs
- Leeds Inter Agency Project
- The Police
- Social Services
- The voluntary floating support services
- Victim Support schemes
- Local refuges