

# **Domestic Abuse Policy**

**June 2024**

## **A Sovereign Network Homes Policy**

## Document Control Sheet

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Policy owner	Gerry Doherty Director of Operations
Policy author	Mattie Ware, Customer Service Graduate
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Date last reviewed	New Policy
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## Version Control

**Guidance:** When a document has undergone **major changes** requiring approval, the version number must change – eg. from V1.0 to V2.0.

When a document has undergone **minor changes**, not requiring approval, only the number after the decimal point must change – eg, from V1.1 to V1.2.

When a document is reviewed but no changes are made, the number after the decimal point must still change.

Date	Reviewed by (name and title)	New version number	Summary of changes
19/03/2024	Mattie Ware, Customer Service Graduate	Version 1.0	Development of new policy

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## 1. Scope

- This Domestic Abuse Policy sets out how Sovereign Network Homes and our contractors will support survivors and victims of domestic abuse, and our approach to dealing with perpetrators.
- This policy applies to anyone living in or visiting a property managed by Sovereign Network Homes and includes all rented tenants, shared owners, leaseholders and stakeholders. Domestic abuse can affect anyone regardless of socio-economic background or any of the Equality Act 2010 protected characteristics; age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. We recognise that women are more likely to experience domestic abuse. We also know that our colleagues may experience domestic abuse and support is available from our Sovereign Network Homes HR team and [Policy template \(sharepoint.com\)](#). Their email is: HR@networkhomes.org.uk

## 2. Policy statement

We aim to provide support to and improve the safety of customers who are survivors or victims of domestic abuse and prevent further incidents of domestic abuse whenever possible in partnership with other organisations.

## 3. Purpose and Objectives

When domestic abuse does occur, we will take a collaborative, survivor and victim-centred approach to supporting those who are affected and/or impacted.

We will do this by:

- Raising awareness of domestic abuse and how to get help and how to respond to a customer. This will be through:
  - our website
  - annual safeguarding e-learning
  - staff and contractors being trained to recognise the indicators of domestic abuse
- Creating a safe environment where survivors and victims of domestic abuse can talk, including private meetings rooms at our main offices.
- Making safeguarding referrals where needed as per our Safeguarding Policy and Procedure.
- Working to foster and improve our work with other support services and agencies for both survivor, victim or perpetrator.
- Responding to reports of abuse in a holistic way, where the survivor and victims, their family and their safety, wellbeing is put first.

## 4. Definitions

Definitions mentioned in this Policy are explained in the table below. This is not an exhaustive list. For further examples of abusive behaviour, please see our Domestic Abuse Directory: [Document Preview - Domestic Abuse Directory \(networkhomes.org.uk\)](#). The definition of domestic abuse that we use is set out in section 1 of the Domestic Abuse Act. [Domestic Abuse Act 2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

Term	Definition	Example
<b>Survivor/Victim</b>	We recognise that customers may describe themselves as a domestic abuse victim whilst others may use describe themselves as a domestic abuse survivor.	A survivor may be someone who may still be going through the recovery process.  A victim may be someone w still recovering and/trauma of the domestic a
<b>Domestic Abuse</b>	<p>Domestic abuse is a crime and occurs within all backgrounds and ages. The abused person may not realise they are in a domestic abuse environment.</p> <p>To define domestic abuse, the criteria is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For both people over the age of 16. This is because abusive behaviour directed at a person below the age of 16 is dealt with as child abuse.</li> <li>• For both people to be personally connected (see below for ‘Personally connected’), which includes ex-partners and family members.</li> </ul> <p>As per the statutory definition. Domestic abuse is defined in two parts. The first part deals with the relationship between the abuser and the abused. The second part defines what constitutes abusive behaviour. The domestic nature of offending behaviour is an aggravating factor because abuse of trust is involved.</p> <p>Please note, the examples refer to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• current or former partner</li> <li>• personally connected to the abuser</li> </ul>	<p>Examples include controlling behaviours to obtain power over another person. Domestic abuse often follows an escalating pattern of worsening oppressive, coercive and controlling behaviours. Power and control over another person form the basis of domestic abuse.</p> <p>More information on the following link: <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-bill-2020-factsheets/statutorydefinition-of-domestic-abuse-factsheet">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-bill-2020-factsheets/statutorydefinition-of-domestic-abuse-factsheet</a></p>

<b>Personally connected</b>	Personally connected people are defined as intimate partners, expartners, family members and/or people who share parental responsibility for a child.	There is no requirement for the perpetrator and person being abused to live within the same household or be in a current relationship.
<b>Some Indicators of domestic abuse</b>	The list of domestic abuse indicators is not exhaustive.	Examples include and are not limited to; coercive control, immigration status, emotional/psychological abuse, use of children, physical abuse, financial/economic abuse, homophobia, sexism, spiritual abuse, heterosexism, controlling behaviour, sexual abuse, online abuse.
<b>MARAC</b>	Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference. When statutory and partner agencies share information on high-risk domestic cases, for example local authorities, including police, health, schools, etc.	Where high risk domestic cases are presented.

More information around the definition is available in the [GOV.UK Statutory definition of domestic abuse factsheet](#).

## 5. Identifying a report of domestic abuse

A report of domestic abuse may not come from the survivor or victim and may not be labelled as domestic abuse by the person making the disclosure. We will ensure that we train our staff to be able to recognise a report of domestic abuse, even when it is not given that label by the person making the disclosure.

## 6. How we treat reports of Domestic Abuse

We will always take a survivor or victim-centred approach to domestic abuse. We will review or complete a risk assessment as part of our Safeguarding Policy and Procedure within two working days.

[Document Preview - Safeguarding Policy December 2023 \(networkhomes.org.uk\)](#)

[Document Preview - Safeguarding Procedure December 2023 \(networkhomes.org.uk\)](#)

The voice of the survivor and victim will be prioritised in the way we manage each case. We know survivors and victims of domestic abuse will often find it difficult to ask for help. If a survivor or victim makes a disclosure, we must deal with it in an empathetic, supportive, and sensitive manner, and assure them we are taking it seriously.

We also recognise that people's understanding of domestic abuse may be influenced by their culture and beliefs and as a result, some people may not recognise themselves as a survivor or victim of abuse. We will work sensitively with those experiencing abuse to promote their safety.

We will work to break down barriers that some communities may experience when reporting to us. We will do this by:

- Asking the survivor or victim if they prefer to speak to someone of the same sex, if possible.
- Adjustments that can be made are outlined in our [Reasonable Adjustment Policy](#) and [Slipping Through the Net Toolkit](#).

## **7. Supporting Survivors and Victims of Domestic Abuse**

This is managed as part of our [Safeguarding Procedure](#).

We acknowledge not all survivor/victims will be in a situation where they have left their perpetrator and we will continue to offer ongoing support.

Survivors and victims can report domestic abuse to any member of the Sovereign Network Homes team at any time. They can also contact us through the information on this link:

[Contact Sovereign Network Group | SNG, formerly Network Homes](#)

Colleagues can refer to our Domestic Abuse Support Directory, as well as our **Safeguarding Policy: [Policy template \(sharepoint.com\)](#)**

## **8. Sovereign Network Homes support for survivors and victims**

If the survivor or victim is at risk and needs to move out of their home due to domestic abuse this will be managed as part of our Allocations Policy, and our Safeguarding Policy.

If survivors or victims remain in their home, we will be able to offer advice and support working in partnership with external agencies.

## **9. Safeguarding Assessment and Management**

We will manage cases of domestic abuse in line with our safeguarding policies and procedures, and the Care Act 2014, where appropriate.

All Domestic Abuse cases will be regularly monitored and reviewed by the Safeguarding Champions until case closure.

## **10. Confidentiality**

Confidentiality is crucial to limit the risk to survivors or victims, and sharing information with support services and other agencies is key part of responding effectively to domestic abuse.

We will maintain strict confidentiality and only share information where we have permission from the survivor or victim to do so, except when:

- Any member of the household is at risk.

- There is lawful basis, for example if the police request information from us or the referral of a case to Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)

## **11. Perpetrators**

Perpetrators of domestic abuse are accountable for their actions.

Although our response to domestic abuse is focused on survivors and victims, we also recognise that working with perpetrators can help reduce incidents of domestic abuse.

Where appropriate, we will charge perpetrators for property damage resulting from their violence. Survivors and victims will not be held accountable for these costs.

We will take a zero-tolerance approach to domestic abuse, and where the available evidence supports it, we will use the legal tools or support the victim to use legal tools and powers afforded to us including evicting or excluding perpetrators from the home.

We will provide help and support to those perpetrators who request it, including signposting to external agencies.

If an alleged perpetrator of domestic abuse is aged below 16, they will be managed in accordance with our Antisocial Behaviour and Safeguarding Policies and Procedures and in conjunction with our partner agencies. This includes discussion with Children's Services to assess the child's needs for support, and a referral to Children's Services.

## **12. Partnership Working**

We will maintain strong partnerships with local agencies and share information through the MARAC and with the police where necessary.

## **13. Complaints**

Any customer or other stakeholder who is dissatisfied with how we have managed their domestic abuse case is able to submit a complaint using our Complaints process. Once our Complaints process has been exhausted, and if they remain dissatisfied, then they can contact the Housing Ombudsman Service, who can consider if we have acted appropriately.

## **14. Performance Monitoring and Compliance**

Domestic abuse cases will be logged as safeguarding cases, and managed and reported through our housing (case management) system and will be kept in line with GDPR and data protection policies and data retention schedules.

Neighbourhood Managers will regularly monitor each case of domestic abuse against our performance targets, provide appropriate advice and support to the Neighbourhood Officer dealing with a domestic



abuse case, ensure that they receive appropriate training; and ensure that all cases are appropriately recorded.

We will review this policy at least once every three years to make sure we are up to date with the latest legislation, regulations, and best practice developments.

This policy will be accessible for staff. Staff will be made aware of the policy through inductions and rollouts.

## 15. Training

All staff complete annual safeguarding e-learning, domestic abuse is covered as part of this e-learning.

Relevant teams will be trained in identifying and responding to domestic abuse, including how to make referrals to specialist domestic abuse support services and MARAC for cases that are high risk

## 16. Sustainability

At Sovereign Network Homes, we recognise the critical importance of sustainability in our operations and services. We are committed to embracing sustainable practices that contribute to environmental protection, social equity, and economic viability. Examples of sustainability may include thorough ethical sourcing, energy efficiency, community engagement, customer empowerment, long term investment, risk mitigation etc.

## 17. Responsibilities

Detail the team(s) and/or individual(s) responsible for achieving the aims and objectives of the Policy.

Role	Responsibility
Executive Director of Operations (London and Hertford)	Approving the Policy
Director of Housing and Head of Neighbourhood	Communicating the Policy
Team Leads	Communicating and implementing the Policy
Safeguarding Champions	Communicating and implementing the Policy
Contractors	To raise concerns with their manager
All staff	To raise concerns with their manager or safeguarding champion

## **18. Equality and diversity**

We are committed to a policy of fair and equal treatment for all its customers, employees and applicants, regardless of socioeconomic background or any of the nine Equality Act 2010 protected characteristics; age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation as determined in the Equality Act 2010.

## **19. Related documents**

- Safeguarding policy
- ASB Policy
- Reasonable Adjustment Policy
- Mental Health Liaison Policy
- ASB Policy
- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Legislation and regulation
- Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (Clare's Law)
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Modern Slavery Act 2015
- Serious Crime Act 2015
- Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing 2014
- Protection of Freedoms Act 2014
- Equality Act 2010
- Police and Justice Act 2006
- Child Safeguarding legislation including Children Act 2004
- The Children Act 2004 Domestic Violence Crime and Victim Act 2004 (S9 implemented in 2011)

- Sexual Offences Act 2003
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- The Care Act 1996 Housing Act 1996
- Social Housing Regulators Regulatory Framework

## **20. Review**

We will review this policy every 3 years or in response to changes in legislation or regulatory guidance.

