Enfield Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy

2023- 2026

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Foreword

We do not tolerate domestic abuse and take seriously our duty to support victims and survivors. Domestic abuse is an increasing reason for homelessness¹ with studies showing up to 63% of victims having rent arrears that led to a Notice of Possession. This policy sets out how we will support victims/ survivors and their children to access safe affordable accommodation away from the abuse.

Domestic abuse includes physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological actions or threats of actions as the abuser seeks to hold power over their victim. Whilst this may be a one-off incident, in many cases the abuse continues over a period of time.

Everyone's situation is different, and a one- size-fits-all approach does not work. This draft policy sets out how staff across all our housing services tailor the support we provide based on the needs of victims and survivors. It shows how staff across all relevant teams work together to enable victims/survivors to make their existing home safe or support them to move away to another home if this is not possible. It explains what to expect from us, the processes we will use and our approach to perpetrators.

We welcome all feedback on this draft policy and I encourage you to respond to our consultation. Your feedback will help us develop a final policy for approval later this spring.

Cllr George Savva, Cabinet Member for Social Housing

1. Introduction

This policy explains the rights of all Enfield residents to access safe accommodation away from abuse. It sets out how we expect Enfield Council staff, contractors, subcontractors and their agents to respond to a disclosure of domestic abuse. It describes our commitment to promote early help and our approach to providing coordinated tailored support for victims/survivors and/or their children. The policy applies to Enfield Council Housing tenants and Enfield residents who access support from our Housing Advisory Service, regardless of their tenure, and is for adults and children affected by domestic abuse.

We take all reports of domestic abuse seriously and our officers will always treat victims/survivors with respect and dignity and empower them to make informed decisions. We use a safety-led approach and will always work with the victim/survivor to make sure any actions taken reduce harm to their personal safety or housing security.

We believe perpetrators (those committing the abuse) are responsible for their own behaviour and that they should be held to account for the consequences of their actions. We do not tolerate domestic abuse and will work with victims/survivors and

¹ https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/240<u>459/cri0198_domesticabusebill_appg_report_2019_aw_web.pdf</u>

relevant organisations to identify appropriate measures to stop perpetrators and work to prevent them committing abuse again in the future. Measures may include eviction or working with the police to issue orders such as an injunction, antimolestation order or Domestic Violence Protection Notice (DVPN) which prohibits the perpetrator from contacting the victim.

2. Definition of domestic abuse

The <u>Domestic Abuse Act 2021</u> defines domestic abuse as an event or pattern of events of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between people aged 16 or over who are (or have been) intimate partners or family members/ relatives (see section 63(1) of the Family Law Act 1996 for description) regardless of gender or sexuality.

Physical violence is just one type of abuse – domestic abuse can be any behaviour which is used to harm, punish or frighten, or makes the individual feel bullied, controlled or intimidated. This includes mental, sexual, financial and emotional abuse.

Some examples of abusive behaviour might be:

- being isolated or prevented from having contact with friends and family
- humiliating you in front of others, insulting or mocking you
- disproportionate anger or yelling
- threatening to do something to you or others
- withholding or stealing money from you or preventing you from working
- preventing you from escaping
- telling you are worthless, unwell or weak
- regulating your everyday behaviour

Domestic abuse can occur at any time during a relationship, it is rarely a one-off incident, and it often forms a pattern of behaviour where the abuser seeks to hold power over their victim.

Children aged under 18 are also recognised as victims/ survivors in their own right if they see, hear or experience the effects of the abuse and are related to the victim/survivor or the perpetrator.

This policy is subject to the <u>Domestic Abuse Act 2021</u>. It is also aligned with our Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, Enfield Council Tenancy Strategy 2022 – 2025 and Council Plan. Additional legal requirements and associated council policies and strategies are listed in Appendix 1.

We use terminology used in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA). This means that although the term Domestic Violence is still used in certain documentation and services, we have chosen to use the term

Domestic Abuse to cover all the different types of abuse and given in the definition above. We also refer to victims/survivors and their children to recognise:

- a) adults or children (aged under 18) who are domestic abuse victims/survivors due to experiencing the effects of the abuse
- b) our extended support to children who are not recognised as victims/survivors under the Act, but are under 18, living with (part time or temporarily) and/or have some dependency on (but are not the biological/legal child or relative of) the domestic abuse victim/survivor.

3. How to use this Policy

This policy applies to all Enfield Council staff, board members, contractors, subcontractors and agents working for Enfield Council Housing Service and details how we will support our social housing tenants and the public accessing our housing service.

It includes:

- 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 Enfield 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

4. 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 the Council in a way that is respectful, responsive and co-ordinated.

Our corporate behaviours are:

- We take responsibility
- We are open, honest and respectful
- We listen and learn
- We work together to find solutions

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

Prioritise Safety: Victims/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 borough placements or the installation of additional safety measures in the property such as locks or a tamper proof letter box.

Be non-judgemental: Victims/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: Victim/survivors are at the heart of any intervention and support. We will focus support and care based on the individual's needs.

Amplify victim/survivor voices: Victims/survivors' 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: Victims/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.

Work towards a Coordinated Community Response (CCR): Victims/survivors will receive support from local providers who will work together to offer the right support to meet their specific needs. We will build relationships with tenants and colleagues across Council teams and within other statutory and voluntary and community partners, to make sure we access and refer to the correct services to keep individual and families safe and well.

Our services and resources are delivered using the following approach²:

- Predict we predict current and future needs though 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 individuals 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

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² Better Council Homes Programme – delivery principles

- 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

5. 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 residents. 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 residents are aware of their rights and supported to make informed decisions.

Although we know that anyone can be a victim/survivor, we use national and local data in addition to resident's 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 victims and 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 victim as female
- Female victims were aged 30 to 34 years, whereas male victims were generally older with the highest proportion of victims aged 75 years and over.
- 76% of victims of domestic homicide were female
- Survivors are twice as likely to be a disabled women than non-disabled women.⁵⁶

6. Responding to reports of domestic abuse

³https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabusevictimchar acteristicsenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2021

⁴ <u>https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/crime-justice-and-the-law/crime-and-reoffending/domestic-abuse/latest</u>

⁵ https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Disabled_Survivors_Too_Report.pdf
⁶https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/disability/bulletins/disabilityandcrimeuk/2019

We take a zero-tolerance approach to domestic abuse and are clear domestic abuse is never the fault of the victim/survivor or their children. We also recognise that every situation is unique, as are the individuals involved, and we will work together to decide the most appropriate course of action.

There are many ways individuals can seek help and a person may disclose abuse at any point of contact with the Council. Every team within the Housing Service has either a domestic abuse White Ribbon champion or an ambassador who works to raise awareness of domestic abuse and offer guidance and support to staff so that everyone is able to provide the right support, advice and interventions to victims and survivors. The council also has a dedicated Domestic Violence Co-ordinator.

If an individual discloses domestic abuse to any member of staff, or a member of staff recognises signs of abuse, we will work together with the victim/survivor to discuss the situation within 24 hours of the initial discussion.

The initial interview will be held with someone who has specialist training (using a trauma informed approach). If needed, we will provide an independent interpreter and/or translation service or make reasonable adjustments to enable the conversation and collection of information.

Anti-social behaviour officers will carry out a risk assessment using the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour based risk identification checklist (DASH). This assessment will help us prepare safety plans and advise individuals of the options available to them.

Following the assessment and plan agreement, with the victim/survivor's consent, we will make referrals for specialist support such as to Solace Women's Aid, Victim support, Enfield's Women's Centre, Enfield Saheli, Kurdish, Middle Eastern Women's Organisation (KMEWO) or any other relevant reputable organisation (including Men's Advice Line).

The majority of adults or children who experience domestic abuse will need further action to promote their welfare and protect them from harm (also referred to as safeguarding). We will make a referral within the same day of the assessment to relevant support agencies and will clearly explain next steps to the victim/survivor. For further information see the Safeguarding section.

Where victims/survivors want to stay in their home, as a landlord, we will work with our partners to repair damage to the property and improve security⁷. Work will be based upon an individual security assessment, but it may involve window and door lock replacements or installations, window alarms and door chains, and/or installation of a fire-proof letter box. We will endeavour to carry out such repairs within 24 hours of the assessment taking place. We will also signpost to organisations that can support people to keep safe from abuse, such as Refuge. We will make referrals to the Council's Welfare and Debt Advice team and/or to

⁷ Research from Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance found that 13% of household repairs are linked to domestic abuse

financial inclusion partners for any required support relating to financial issues.

We may signpost the victim/survivor to legal advice (and <u>legal aid</u> where appropriate) if this is something the victim/survivor wishes to pursue. Legal advice may be about a non-molestation order, demotion of tenancy, a court order or possession proceedings. We will be supportive of anyone wanting to take legal action and provide information as to what to <u>expect</u> but we will not pressure victim/survivors to do so.

We will keep consistent, accurate and relevant records, that may be shared with partners, with permission, so that the victim/ survivor does not have to repeat the same information. Where appropriate, we will ensure that a member of staff of the same gender is assigned to the case and contact managed through a preferred method that is agreed with the individual.

7. Perpetrators of domestic abuse

Our main concern and duty are to the safety of the victim/survivor and that of their child/children. For this reason, any action taken against the perpetrator (sometimes called the 'primary aggressor') will be firstly discussed and agreed with the victim/survivor to minimise any harm or consequence to their personal safety or housing security.

If the perpetrator has been identified, either through disclosure by the victim/survivor, or through their behaviour, agency information-sharing, police callouts or anti-social behaviour, their details will be recorded within relevant case management systems. For council housing tenants, this will be recorded on our council housing case management system.

If the case is subject to safeguarding forums such as Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)⁸, this will be due to increased case risk and result in police putting a 'marker' on the victim's home which means any 999 calls from the property will be treated as urgent.

We recognise that housing professionals are in an ideal position to engage and build trust with perpetrators who are currently our tenants. If appropriate, we will try to use this position, to encourage perpetrators to access the right support (behaviour intervention, mental health, substance use services etc), potentially reducing the risk of harm that they pose to the victim/survivor and enabling them to take responsibility for their actions.

If agreed, we may take action in our capacity as the landlord, to stop the abuse and hold perpetrators to account through the courts. This may mean we ask the police to

⁸ A MARAC is a meeting where information is shared on the highest risk domestic abuse cases between representatives of local police, health, child protection, housing practitioners, Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs), probation and other specialists from the statutory and voluntary sectors.

prosecute for criminal damage and/or take action to evict the perpetrator of domestic abuse using the powers available under the Housing Act, considering the wishes of the survivor and their future housing needs.

8. Housing options

The majority of domestic abuse happens in the home, and we will support the victim/survivor and their children to stay at their current address by working together to identify and agree home safety adaptations. However, if the perpetrator cannot be removed or the risk of continued abuse is high, safe accommodation elsewhere may be needed for victims/ survivors and their children, to ensure their safety and wellbeing.

If the victim/survivor becomes homeless because of domestic abuse they cannot be treated as <u>intentionally homeless</u>. It is recognised they are homeless through no fault of their own and will automatically be identified as having a priority need for safe housing as set out in Section 189 of the Housing Act 1996 (amended by Pt. 7, s.78 Domestic Abuse Act 2021).

The resulting accommodation may be temporary, until it is safe for them to return. In other cases, if there is no chance of a safe return, we will support a move to alternative accommodation without an intention of them returning to their previous address. Based on the individual's needs, this accommodation may need to be outside of the borough.

We will support victims/survivors and their children through the process. Where they are existing council housing tenants, this will be done by our Council Housing Management Team. In other cases, this will be done by our Housing Advisory Service.

Council Housing Management

Our Council Housing Management team looks after all tenancy matters **relating to Enfield Council homes**. The team works with the Council's Community Safety Unit (CSU) and our partners to deliver a co-ordinated response to domestic abuse for our existing Council Housing tenants. Neighbourhood officers are often the first point of contact for victims/survivors of domestic abuse and will refer individuals to the ASB team for specialist support, while leading on all matters relating to the victim/survivors housing. Neighbourhood Officers continue to have oversight of all actions taken in order to support them until their housing situation is resolved. The council housing management team will keep up to date records regarding the case on the council housing management systems.

Housing Gateway Limited is a council-owned company housing tenants on assured shorthold tenancies, who may struggle to access private housing. For these tenants the XXX team will carry out these housing management actions to support victims/survivors and their children.

Housing Advisory Service

Our Housing Advice Service supports **Enfield residents** to solve problems affecting their housing situation and prevent homelessness. This includes supporting people with what to do if they have been asked by their landlords to leave their property, or if they have had to flee their property due to abuse. For people living in the private rented sector or in a housing association property, this may be the first-time housing services offered by the Council come into contact with a victim/ survivor of domestic abuse. This service has a dedicated Resilience Team that work with tenants to support access to safe accommodation and ensure they are given the right tenancy agreement (Part 7, Section 79 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021).

The Housing Advisory Service will also work with other Registered Housing providers to ensure they support their residents to avoid homelessness as outlined in Objective 4 of the Enfield Council Tenancy Strategy 2022 to 2025.

9. Staff duties and responsibilities

A disclosure of domestic abuse can come through any point of contact with Enfield Council. All housing staff including call centre operatives, caretakes, repairs operatives and housing management staff, receive basic awareness training on the signs of domestic abuse and how to deal with a report, as part of their induction process. These staff also receive refresher training and ongoing support and guidance, so they are aware of their abilities and are clear as to their professional and advisory boundaries and onward referral protocol. Housing staff are not specialists in domestic abuse, nor members of the emergency services, but they will refer on to the right support/services to get additional help as soon as possible once they reach their limit of expertise.

10. Safety-led case management

Relevant housing officers have a responsibility to oversee, and act as case manager, for disclosed domestic abuse cases for our Council Housing, Housing Gateway and temporary accommodation tenants, until they are resolved and closed. This ensures that referrals are managed, services and support is co-ordinated and housing needs are met. Our primary concern is that of safety and case details may be shared with other agencies if it is appropriate and necessary to ensure the safety and welfare of our tenants. This process will be discussed with victims/survivors before information is shared.

11. Safeguarding

A high percentage of domestic abuse cases have safeguarding requirements and it is our duty to ensure these are recognised and the correct referrals are quickly made.

Where there are safeguarding concerns about an adult with care and support needs (as either the survivor of abuse or the perpetrator) or child/children we will follow existing Council policies and procedures to meet statutory safeguarding requirements.

We will ensure that all staff are adequately trained in those policies and procedures on a regular basis. Where staff are not sure if such processes apply then we will ensure that they know who they can contact to discuss individual circumstances and get advice.

We will refer cases to Enfield's Multi- Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) when the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour based risk identification checklist (DASH) risk assessment threshold is met. Where the threshold is not met, we will arrange a multi-agency meeting to arrange support from different agencies, in agreement with the individual.

When a child is involved, we will make the relevant referrals to our Children and Family department via Children's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) or Early Help Hub.

We will sign post adults with care and support needs (or whom we have cause to believe have care and support needs) to Adult Social Care via referral to the Adults' Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) for consideration of Section 42 of Care Act (2014).

Where perpetrators are employed or volunteer with children or adults with care and support needs, we will ensure that staff refer to local Persons In a Position of Trust (PIPOT) or Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) processes to address risk to others. We will also ensure that there is appropriate training in how to make such referrals.

12. Awareness and communication of our policy

We will use our website to raise awareness about domestic abuse and make clear that we take all reports of domestic abuse seriously and that our officers will always treat victims/survivors with respect and dignity and empower them to make informed decisions. This policy will be available on our website.

We will provide clear contact details of who to contact to access help, including how to contact council housing teams for tenants of council housing.

Our website will also provide links to this policy and give details of the variety of specialist and targeted housing support services.

We will make sure residents are aware of the policy through providing relevant links (or paper versions) in tenants' documents such as the Tenancy Agreement⁹, in Council correspondence and on campaign-based posters that will be placed on estate notice boards. This will be accompanied by details of bespoke support should residents feel more comfortable initially accessing targeted independent support.

We will make the policy accessible, by creating an easy read version of the policy and providing an interpretation or translation of the policy where required for residents who do not speak English.

We will also raise awareness of the support available for victims/survivors and their children and will challenge harmful behaviours that perpetuate domestic abuse through participating in national and local campaigns and educational interventions, such as White Ribbon Day.

We will ensure that any third-party providers and/or contributors to awareness raising campaigns meet the quality standards needed for the RESPECT accreditation¹⁰.

13. User feedback

We want to make sure our support is appropriate, of high quality and co-ordinated to make sure we collectively meet the needs of our residents. To do this we need to make use of data collected within the Enfield Council Housing Service, across the council and through feedback given by service users with lived experiences and apply learning gained during reviews.

We value and seek service user feedback to gain insight as to the ease of access, quality of service and individual outcomes through using our Council funded housing and domestic support contracted services. This will be gained through;

- Our annual Council Housing Tenant Satisfaction survey
- involving tenants and leaseholders in decision-making through engagement with our council housing resident's forum, Customer Voice
- hearing the views of tenants/leaseholders/service users at topic-specific focus groups.

⁹ https://www.enfield.gov.uk/services/housing/council-housing/your-tenancy

¹⁰ Respect accreditation is a quality assurance certification offered for two types of services: those working with perpetrators and those working with male victims. Services working with perpetrators are assessed against the Respect Standard, and services for male victims are assessed against the Respect Male Victims Standard. https://www.respect.uk.net/pages/accreditation

14. Review

The policy will be reviewed on an annual basis and is due for full renewal in 2026 (3 years following approval of this version of the policy). Annual reviews will consider changes to legislation and feedback from our employees, council housing, Housing Gateway and temporary accommodation tenants and those who have used our Housing Advisory Service. We will also be implementing a satisfaction survey for each case close.

Appendix 1

Legislation

- Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004
- Children Act 2004
- Care Act 2014
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- The Family Law Act 1996
- Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Data Protection Act 2018
- The Housing Act 1996
- Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- Equality Act 2010

- Secure Tenancies (Victims of Domestic Abuse) Act 2018
- <u>Social Housing White Paper</u> November 2020 the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) which sets out what social housing tenants can expect from their landlord, including a dedicated section on supporting tenants facing domestic abuse.
- Mayor of London Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy

Enfield specific policies and strategies

- Enfield Council Plan 2023-2026
- Tackling Child Neglect Strategy 2022 to 2025
- Enfield Council Tenancy Strategy 2022 to 2025
- Enfield Housing Allocations Scheme
- Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020 to 2025
- Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy
- Fairer Enfield Policy 2021 to 2025
- Enfield Early Help for All Strategy 2021 to 2025
- Enfield Modern Slavery Strategy 2020-2023
- Enfield Community Safety Plan 2022-25

Glossary

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)

This is a group of highly skilled professionals representing the local police, health, child protection, housing practitioners, Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs), probation and other specialists from the statutory and voluntary sectors. It is co-ordinated by the Police.

An Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) presents the case on behalf of the victim and the representatives work together to increasing the safety of the victim and create a co-ordinated action plan. Each MARAC decides its own risk threshold requirement and our MARAC is scheduled to meet every 3 weeks at Edmonton Green Police Station.

White Ribbon champion

White Ribbon is a UK charity that seeks to prevent violence against women and girls by addressing its root causes. Enfield was the first London council to receive the title of 'White Ribbon Authority' in 2010. We renew our status on an annual basis and are known as a 'White Ribbon Borough'. As part of our commitment, we have staff that take on the role of White Ribbon Champion and Ambassador. These roles allow them to educate, raise awareness and "call out abusive and sexist behaviour among their friends, colleagues and communities to promote a culture of equality and respect."¹¹

DASH risk assessment

The **D**omestic **A**buse, **S**talking and **H**onour Based Violence (DASH) Risk Assessment has been used by the UK's Police Force since March 2009. This has been further developed and is now used by all professionals working with victims/survivors of domestic abuse. The risk assessment makes sure everyone asks the right questions and can accurately assess levels of risk. If the risk threshold is met, cases are then referred to the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC).

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¹¹ https://www.whiteribbon.org.uk/what-we-do