



# **Housing Neighbourhood Services: Domestic Abuse Policy**



**May 2025  
Version 5**



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## About this policy

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# 1 Introduction

- 1.1 Domestic abuse is all too prevalent in our society, we recognise that domestic abuse can affect anyone, regardless of age, disability, gender identity, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation. It is serious and complex and causes those who experience it great distress, fear, and anxiety. Milton Keynes City Council (MKCC) are committed to assisting, supporting, and working with any tenant and members of their households experiencing, or threatened with, domestic abuse. Any disclosure will be treated sensitively and as a matter of urgency. We recognise that those who experience domestic abuse can identify as a survivor or a victim but for the purposes of this document we are using the term Survivor. We adopt a trauma informed and victim centred approach in all cases of domestic abuse. We recognise that the safety of the victim and their household members is paramount, and we will do all we can to support and protect them.
- 1.2 We believe that everyone should have the right to live free from fear of abuse or violence. MKCC recognises that Domestic Abuse is rarely a one-off event and is used systematically to gain power and control over the victim (“survivor”), with the violence and abuse often increasing in frequency and severity over time without appropriate intervention.
- 1.3 This policy provides clear and concise reassurance to survivors of domestic abuse and what they should expect from the Council when responding to domestic abuse concerns/incidents as a landlord.
- 1.4 We recognise that as a local authority and local provider of social housing, we are well placed to identify the signs of domestic abuse. We recognise that there are many barriers to disclosing domestic abuse in all its forms and recognise that the types of abuse can differ in nature and impact, but this policy aims to reassure our residents that any concerns they raise will be responded to in an empathetic and appropriate way, with victims being central to our response.

## 2 Aims

- 2.1 This policy aims to:
  - Deliver a robust and proportionate response to domestic abuse through a victim-centric approach which is broadly based on the core principles of safeguarding, prevention, harm reduction and risk management.

- Provide accessible services through clear and concise reporting methods for survivors of domestic abuse.
- Enable staff to confidently support survivors of domestic abuse through a catered approach based on the needs of the survivor.
- Encourage a holistic, multi-agency approach to risk-management where responsibilities are clear and understood.
- Contribute to local initiatives and campaigns to raise awareness of domestic abuse.
- Comply with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and the governments [Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance](#)

## 3 Definition of Domestic Abuse

3.1 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 became law in April 2021, introducing stronger protections and support for survivors while increasing awareness of domestic abuse. The Act aims to improve the criminal justice system's response and ensure better support for those affected. For the first time, the Act provides a statutory definition of domestic abuse. Domestic abuse is defined in section 1 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. Domestic Abuse Act 2021: Part 1 Definition of “domestic abuse”

### Section 1: Definition of “domestic abuse”

(1) This section defines “domestic abuse” for the purposes of this Act.

(2) Behaviour of a person (“A”) towards another person (“B”) is “domestic abuse” if—

(a) A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and

(b) the behaviour is abusive.

(3) Behaviour is “abusive” if it consists of any of the following—

(a) physical or sexual abuse;

(b) violent or threatening behaviour;

(c) controlling or coercive behaviour;

(d) economic abuse (see subsection (4));

(e) psychological, emotional or other abuse;

and it does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.

(4) “Economic abuse” means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on B’s ability to —

- (a) acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or
- (b) obtain goods or services.

(5) For the purposes of this Act A’s behaviour may be behaviour “towards” B despite the fact that it consists of conduct directed at another person (for example, B’s child).

(6) References in this Act to being abusive towards another person are to be read in accordance with this section.

(7) For the meaning of “personally connected”, see section 2.

## **Section 2: Definition of “personally connected”**

(1) Two people are “personally connected” to each other if any of the following applies —

- (a) they are, or have been, married to each other;
- (b) they are, or have been, civil partners of each other;
- (c) they have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated);
- (d) they have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been terminated);
- (e) they are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other;
- (f) they each have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child (see subsection (2));
- (g) they are relatives.

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1)(f) a person has a parental relationship in relation to a child if —

- (a) the person is a parent of the child, or
- (b) the person has parental responsibility for the child.

(3) In this section —

“child” means a person under the age of 18 years;

“civil partnership agreement” has the meaning given by section 73 of the Civil Partnership Act 2004;

“parental responsibility” has the same meaning as in the Children Act 1989;

“relative” has the meaning given by section 63(1) of the Family Law Act 1996.

### Section 3: Children as victims of domestic abuse

(1) This section applies where behaviour of a person (“A”) towards another person (“B”) is domestic abuse.

(2) Any reference in this Act to a victim of domestic abuse includes a reference to a child who –

- (a) sees or hears, or experiences the effect of, the abuse, and
- (b) is related to A or B.

(3) A child is related to a person for the purposes of subsection (2) if –

- (a) the person is a parent of, or has parental responsibility for, the child, or
- (b) the child and the person are relatives.

(4) In this section –

“child” means person under the age of 18 years;

“parental responsibility” has the same meaning as in the Children Act 1989 (see section 3 of that Act);

“relative” has the meaning given by section 63(1) of the Family Law Act 1996.

Part 4 of the Act also introduced new legal duties on local authorities regarding safe accommodation for domestic abuse survivors: Requirement for local authorities to provide support in safe accommodation for victims and their children. • Safe accommodation can include refuges, specialist housing, or any other form of emergency or long-term secure accommodation. • Local authorities must assess the level of need in their area and develop strategies to ensure adequate support is available. • Support in safe accommodation includes advocacy, counselling, children’s support, and housing-related advice.

#### 3.2 The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:

Coercive control (a pattern of intimidation, degradation, isolation and control with the use or threat of physical or sexual violence)

Psychological and/or emotional abuse

Physical or sexual abuse

Financial or economic abuse

Harassment and stalking

Online or digital abuse

#### 3.3 Controlling behaviour is a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from 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.

- 3.4 Coercive behaviour is 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 victim. The Serious Crime Act 2015 made controlling and coercive behaviour a criminal offence.
- 3.5 Forced marriage is a criminal offence where one or both people do not (or cannot, in cases of individuals lacking capacity) consent to the marriage and pressure or abuse is used to compel them to enter the marriage.
- 3.6 “so-called” Honour Based Abuse: “so-called” Honour Based Abuse (HBA) is a form of Domestic Abuse which is motivated by the abuser’s perception that a person has brought or may bring ‘dishonour’ or ‘shame’ to themselves, their family or the community. It can take many forms, and can be complex to identify, but centres around the idea of controlling individuals to make them behave in certain ways or subscribe to certain beliefs. For some people, the concept of ‘honour’ is prized above the safety and wellbeing of individuals, and to compromise a family’s ‘honour’ is to bring dishonour and shame – which can have severe consequences. As a result, this can be used to justify many types of abuse, and even disownment or physical harm and domestic homicide.
- 3.7 Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), is a criminal offence which involves procedures to remove the external female genital organs for non-medical reasons.
- 3.8 Criminal law does not currently recognise domestic abuse victims under the age of 16. However, this policy is committed to supporting all victims of abuse, regardless of age or any other protected characteristic. This includes any child who has witnessed and/or been affected by domestic abuse. Children aged under 18 are also recognised as survivors in their own right if they see, hear or experience the effects of the abuse or are related to the survivor or the perpetrator.
- 3.9 We recognise that domestic abuse can affect anyone, regardless of age, disability, gender identity, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation. We recognise there are also additional barriers to services experienced by residents from protected groups and those experiencing multiple disadvantages, such as co-occurrences of factors such as risk of homelessness, drug and alcohol use, criminal justice system involvement and mental health.



## 4 Policy Statement

- 4.1 MKCC is committed to preventing and reducing the risk of domestic abuse to our residents. We have a zero-tolerance approach to domestic abuse, by holding perpetrators to account and supporting survivors of domestic abuse through the full range of tools and powers available to the Council.
- 4.2 Approach to disclosures:**
- 4.3 All residents will be treated as individuals and with fairness and respect. We aim to meet the needs and choices of people from all backgrounds, for example, economic status, gender, sexual orientation, ability, age, religion, ethnic group, or immigration status and so we will make sure our services are accessible to all.
- 4.4 We will respond within one working day, adopting a survivor and person-centered approach considering the needs of the resident and children in the household. We recognise that residents will often find it extremely difficult to make a disclosure about domestic abuse, therefore where a disclosure of domestic abuse is made, it will be dealt with in a sensitive, non-judgmental, and supportive manner.
- 4.5 Carry out a Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment (DASH) risk-assessment matrix to enable us to fully understand the current risk to victims of domestic abuse, and their vulnerability, and we will use information obtained from our assessment to identify an appropriate response.
- 4.6 Working in partnership, we will:**
- 4.7 Work in partnership with statutory agencies, charities, and other relevant organisations for the purpose of sharing information to identify risks and to empower agencies to take the necessary steps to support survivors of domestic abuse.
- 4.8 Signpost or refer a survivor of domestic abuse to a relevant support agency, such as MK-Act, Victims First Hub, Aurora New Dawn Stalking & Harassment advocacy service or the Sanctuary Scheme, to maximise the support available to survivors of abuse.
- 4.9 Work closely with partner agencies and other services, not limited to the police, probation, social care, fire service, drug and alcohol teams, health services, as well as charities and organisations which provide victim support.

- 4.10 Fully engage in professional strategy meetings and case reviews for the purpose of information sharing between agencies, not limited to the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) and the Multi-Agency Task and Coordination (MATAC) meeting.
- 4.11 Inter-Agency Risk Management (IARM) meetings shall be conducted as a matter of course by colleagues who have joint responsibility for managing cases of domestic abuse.
- 4.12 Professional meetings shall also be conducted through a multi-agency approach to support new and prospective residents, making sure that support and safety plans are shared between professionals from the outset and continue throughout the beginning of the tenancy.
- 4.13 Follow and comply with the Victims Code which was introduced through our Anti-social Behaviour Policy. The Victims Code can be found online at: [Victims Code | Milton Keynes City Council](#)

## 5 Housing Need

- 5.1 Where appropriate, housing requirements will be discussed with every resident experiencing domestic abuse. We will support victims to make decisions around their housing needs including whether they wish to remain in their home or move to a new home. We recognise that housing is one of the main factors why residents don't leave abusive perpetrators. If residents fear for their immediate safety, we'll work in partnership with relevant partners to ensure suitable measures are in place to support the victim or survivors' safety.
- 5.2 If temporary or permanent re-housing is considered, we'll work with residents and relevant partners to identify areas that will minimise the risk of future abuse. We'll also continue to act against the perpetrator where appropriate and provide perpetrators with housing advice to ensure ongoing safety for residents. Any move for resident may not always be a like for like home, as this would depend on housing available at the time.
- 5.3 In the event of an emergency and urgent police or medical assistance is required, residents should call 999 as a priority.

- 5.4 In some instances, survivors may feel their risk can be mitigated or secured by remaining at home in the short-term but may require alternative accommodation in the long-term – for example, following a perpetrator’s release from prison. In these instances, a Housing Officer will be able to advise on the necessary steps which can be taken to support the survivor which may include making a Management Move application through our Exceptional Decision process or accessing their wider housing options.
- 5.5 Similarly, if survivors of domestic abuse have made attempts to self-resolve (for example, by accessing refuge) to safeguard themselves in the short-term, the Council will likely consider their risk to have been mitigated and emergency accommodation will no longer be required. However, the survivor may still be eligible for a move via another process (i.e., Exceptional Decision) on the basis that the survivor may require new accommodation in the future.
- 5.6 Survivors who feel independent, professional advice is required can contact MK-Act Domestic Abuse Intervention & Support Service [home-page | MK-ACT Who is MK Act?](#) Assistance is also available from the National Domestic Abuse Helpline in confidence on 0808 2000 247 or visit [www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk](http://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk)

## 6 Support and Safeguarding

- 6.1 MKCC is committed to supporting and safeguarding survivors of domestic abuse through a multi-agency approach where a range of tools and powers can be utilised. We’ll agree the method of contact the resident wishes us to use when communicating with them. This includes talking to us over the phone, through an online video call, at our offices or another safe venue.
- 6.2 **Support provided by Housing Services**
- 6.3 We will provide clear and concise guidance for survivors of domestic abuse and how survivors who have fled from their home due to the risk of domestic abuse can seek immediate and emergency accommodation from the Council or any other local authority.
- 6.4 Make best use of the tools and powers available to the Council to support survivors of domestic abuse, using Sanctuary Scheme measures to target harden property enabling survivors to remain in their own home if it is safe to do so and if it is their choice. Housing colleagues will work collaboratively with internal teams and partner agencies for the purpose of risk and case-management. We shall work as a multi-

agency to identify and implement safety plans not limited to warning markers, Street Index Gazetteer (SIG) flags and target hardening measures, and where necessary, support survivors who require emergency accommodation.

- 6.5 We will work with our Asset Management team and approved contractors to carry out repairs, increase security measures and deliver a target hardened approach to safeguarding residents in their own home.
- 6.6 Support our residents, where possible, by using housing legislation to remove perpetrators from our homes who have been found to be responsible for domestic abuse, while enforcing the tenancy, where appropriate.
- 6.7 Always adhere to confidentiality unless we have a duty to disclose information for the purpose of safeguarding or for the purpose of preventing or detecting crime.

## **7 Staff Responsibilities**

- 7.1 All staff are responsible for raising safeguarding concerns, sharing information, and making onward referrals where indicators of domestic abuse have been identified. Colleagues will be competent, confident, and equipped with knowledge and tools to enable a disclosure of domestic abuse. They will receive regular, high quality mandatory training on domestic abuse, including how to spot the signs of abuse and how to deal appropriately with disclosure. We will ensure all front-line staff know how to approach the complex and sensitive issue of domestic abuse and to ensure they are aware of The Cycle of Change (a social cycle theory to explain patterns of behaviour in an abusive relationship), remedies and options and appropriate or new legislation, particularly if this changes. All employees and will be given regular safeguarding training, and will be updated on any changes to policy, procedure or legislation around domestic abuse and/or safeguarding. Our contractors will be provided with awareness training to ensure they know who and how to report and signs or incidents of domestic abuse.
- 7.2 To ensure consistency and compliance in handling domestic abuse cases, detailed procedures will be provided to all staff. These procedures will include step-by-step guidelines on how to respond to disclosures of domestic abuse, conduct risk assessments, and implement safety plans. Staff will be equipped with checklists and flowcharts to assist in decision-making processes, ensuring that all actions taken are in line with the policy and best practices. Regular audits will be conducted to ensure adherence to these procedures.

- 7.3 In addition to regular training, enhanced training programs will be developed to capture the authentic voice of the people with lived experience. These programs will help staff better understand the complexities of domestic abuse cases and prepare them to handle a variety of situations with confidence and sensitivity. Training will cover the latest legislation, support services, and best practices in domestic abuse response. Staff will also receive training on cultural competency to ensure that they can effectively support survivors from diverse backgrounds.

## **8 Reporting and Monitoring**

- 8.1 This policy will be kept up to date and amended accordingly to reflect any changes in legislation, standards, and guidelines. Regular monitoring of service delivery will be undertaken by the Housing Operations Manager Managers.
- 8.2 Our service standards will be reported back to the Head of Housing Operations and Landlord Board These are:
- Number of cases of domestic abuse reported.
  - Percentage of reports responded to within 1 business day.
  - Number of cases where emergency accommodation has/is being provided.
  - Number of cases where alternative intervention was sufficient - for example, a stay-at-home safety plan.
- 8.3 A feedback mechanism will be established to allow survivors of domestic abuse to provide input on the support they receive. This will include anonymous surveys, focus groups, and direct feedback channels. The insights gained from this feedback will be used to improve services, address any gaps, and ensure that the policy and its implementation are meeting the needs of survivors. Regular reports on feedback and subsequent actions taken will be shared with the Head of Housing Operations and the Landlord Board.

## **9 Implementation**

- 9.1 The Head of Homelessness and Tenancy Services is responsible for the implementation and monitoring of this policy.
- 9.2 We shall consult with resident groups, stakeholders, colleagues, and partner agencies in the preparation of this policy.

- 9.3 Regular training for colleagues, case reviews, performance monitoring and reporting will be carried out by the Housing Managers.

## **10 Equality and Diversity**

- 10.1 MKCC will ensure that in delivering our services we continue to be inclusive and representative. We will ensure that this is achieved through the delivery of our Equality and Diversity Policy.
- 10.2 MKCC will ensure that the Policy is widely available on our intranet, in Civic Building and on the website. The Policy can be made available in large print, Braille or on audio tape, upon request. Translations into other languages will also be available.
- 10.3 This policy will be applied to all residents regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partner status, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, and sexual orientation.
- 10.4 MKCC will not unlawfully discriminate, harass, or victimise any person in the delivery of this policy.

## **11 Review**

- 11.1 We will formally review this policy every 3 years unless changes in legislation, regulation or best practice require an earlier review. The Domestic Abuse Policy will be reviewed and updated regularly to reflect any changes in legislation, regulations, or best practices. This will include an annual review to ensure that the policy remains current and effective. Feedback from staff, stakeholders, and survivors will be incorporated into the review process to continuously improve the policy and its implementation.

## **12 Compliance**

- 12.1 This policy complies with the following legislation and regulation:
- The Childrens Act 1989
  - The Domestic Abuse Act (England & Wales 2021)
  - Victims and Prisoners Act 2024
  - Housing Act 1996

- Family Law Act 1996
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Data Protection Act 1998
- General Data Protections Regulation (GDPR) 2018
- Crime & Disorder Act 1998
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Homelessness Act 2002
- Homelessness Act 1996
- Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003
- Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004
- Civil Partnership Act 2004
- Localism Act 2011
- Protection of Freedoms Act 2012
- Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014
- Serious Crime Act 2015
- Care Act 2014

12.2 This policy should be read in accordance with the following policies and procedures:

- ASB Policy
- Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment 2025-2028
- Domestic Abuse Strategy 2020- 2025
- Overarching Safe Accommodation Domestic Abuse Strategy 2025-2028 due to be published June 2025
- Safeguarding Policy
- Tenancy Policy



