



Domestic Abuse Policy

Title:	Domestic Abuse Policy
Person responsible:	Head of Neighbourhoods
Customer consultation arrangement:	Feedback gained through a customer engagement process
EIA required:	Yes
EIA completed (date):	Yes
Approved by:	Executive Leadership Team
Business Strategy Objective	Growing, Transforming
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Links to other key policies:	ASB Policy, Safeguarding Policy, Allocations Policy, Data Protection and Data Privacy Policy
Review date:	September 2026

Document management

Version	Date amended	Amendments
1		New Domestic Abuse Policy

1. Purpose and Scope

Perpetrators of domestic abuse can have a devastating impact on the lives of their victims and their actions can result in injury, trauma and potentially death.

The policy applies to anyone living in our properties or receiving a service from us. We have a separate policy which applies to SLH colleagues, contractors, and volunteers.

This policy sets out how South Lakes Housing will respond to anyone suffering from domestic abuse and the key principles that underpin our response. The policy also sets out how we will hold perpetrators to account.

It recognises the need to share information and work in partnership with other agencies with greater experience of domestic abuse in order to reduce the risk of harm to survivors.

Our aim is to support survivors of domestic abuse by

- Speaking to the customer and taking account of any safety concerns around communication
- Listening and believing their account
- Working with them to assess risk and agree an appropriate action plan.

We will work with relevant external agencies, share information appropriately and in line with GDPR and our data sharing protocols.

We will work with survivors ensuring we stay focused on their individual needs and the needs of their family/ household.

We understand that anyone can be a victim of domestic abuse regardless of age, gender, race or sexuality. However, we recognise that domestic abuse is a largely gendered crime with the vast majority of survivors being women and girls, as set out in the government's Tackling violence against women and girls (TVAWG) strategy (2021).

- Each year nearly 2 million people in the UK suffer some form of domestic abuse - 1.3 million female survivors (8.2% of the population) and 600,000 male survivors (4% of the population) (Womens' Aid 2022)
- Seven women a month are killed by a current or former partner in England and Wales (Womens' Aid 2022)
- 280,000 people aged between 60 and 75 experienced domestic abuse in 2019 (Age UK)

2. Regulatory and Legislative Requirements

This policy complies with the Regulator of Social Housing's Standards, particularly the Neighbourhood and Community Standards that relates specifically to this service.

Other relevant legislation and reference points include, but are not limited to:

- Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- Housing Act 1985 (as amended 1996)
- Family Law Act 1996
- Children Act (1989 and 2004)
- Crime and Disorder Act 1998
- Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Protection From Harassment Act 1997
- Sexual Offences Act 2003
- Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011
- Localism Act 2011
- Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014
- Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (Clare's Law)
- Regulator of Social Housing Consumer Standards

Associated Policy and Strategic Aims

- Cumbria Choice Based Lettings Policy
- SLH Corporate Plan
- SLH ASB Policy
- SLH Safeguarding Policy
- Conditions of Tenancy Agreement

3. Definitions

Domestic abuse is defined in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 as any of the following:

- Physical or sexual abuse
- Violent or threatening behaviour
- Controlling or coercive behaviour
- Economic abuse
- Psychological, emotional, or other abuse

Domestic abuse can occur between individuals aged 16 and over, who are personally connected, including married or civil partners, intimate partners, relatives, or those with a parental relationship. Anyone can experience domestic abuse regardless of gender, race, sex, ethnic or religious group, sexuality, class, or disability, amongst any other characteristic but some people who experience other forms of oppression and discrimination may face further barriers to disclosing abuse and finding help.

Typically, domestic abuse involves a pattern of physical, sexual and emotional abuse and intimidation which escalates in frequency and severity over time. It can be understood as the misuse of power and the exercise of control by one partner over the other in an intimate relationship, this can occur between anyone regardless of gender. It has profound consequences in the lives of individuals, families, and communities.

Children

It is recognised in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 that children can be victims/ survivors of domestic abuse. Children living in households where domestic abuse occurs are recognised as victims of that abuse and our approach reflects this. We will inform statutory services where we believe that a child is harmed or at risk due to domestic violence as safety is our priority – this also applies to vulnerable adults. Children who witness domestic abuse between their family members are at risk of suffering long term psychological and emotional damage either as a result of witnessing abuse or becoming actual targets of abuse.

4. Our Approach

South Lakes Housing does not tolerate acts of domestic abuse. We recognise that domestic abuse is a violation of human rights and that every person has a right to live a violence-free domestic life and to live safe from abuse and fear within their own home.

We shall take a victim centred approach to domestic abuse and will ensure that the victim's safety is the highest priority. All reports of domestic abuse will be taken seriously, and appropriate help offered. We have dedicated Domestic Abuse Champions who are provided with additional training to be able to provide advice and support.

The role of South Lakes Housing's colleagues is not to make judgments about the victim's situation but to give support and information about choices available to that individual.

We also recognise that the need for confidentiality is paramount. Information on any case will only be declared to a third party with the victim's express consent (except issues covered by legislation or information exchange protocols). Extreme caution will be exercised by colleagues when dealing with any request for information and appropriate validation will be required to ensure that the applicant for any information is genuine.

We may take action against persons who we believe to be the perpetrators of domestic abuse in or around the locality of the neighbourhoods where we work, where SLH customers are the victim, whether or not they are a tenant of SLH. We shall also ensure appropriate support is provided to victims.

We will respond within 2 working days to reports of domestic abuse.

Our key principles are:

- We will act promptly and effectively in investigating incidents of domestic abuse and will actively listen and seek to understand victims' experiences and concerns.
- We will be non-judgmental, supportive, and understanding of survivors' decisions.
- Identify the signals of domestic abuse and respond swiftly and sensitively by ensuring that our colleagues are aware of domestic abuse issues and fully trained and supported to evaluate, risk assess and respond appropriately.
- We will provide practical support for victims of domestic abuse to protect them from further violence or abuse and identify and act (or support other agencies taking action) against the perpetrators of domestic abuse whilst working collaboratively with victims, acknowledging their wishes and insight.
- Deliver our responsibilities in line with the Domestic Abuse Act
- Monitor incidents of domestic abuse and the effectiveness of the policy and procedure and review at least every three years or as necessary due to any legislative changes
- Work in partnership with other agencies to tackle the cause and effect of domestic abuse, to create an environment in which domestic violence or abuse will not be tolerated and to increase the safety of survivors of domestic abuse.
- In circumstances where it is appropriate to do so, we may refer perpetrators to domestic abuse perpetrator programmes. We will manage any breach of

tenancy agreement by perpetrators in line with the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy and Procedure.

Advice and Support

We will make information available to residents on our website of agencies that provide support and advice.

5. Data Protection

All data handled in domestic abuse cases will be done so in accordance with SLH's Data Protection and Data Privacy Policy.

Disclosures to Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) are made under the Data Protection Act, the Human Rights Act and the Caldicott Guidelines. Relevant information can be shared when it is necessary to prevent a crime, protect the health and/or safety of the victim and/or the rights and freedoms of those who are victims of violence and/or their children. It must be proportionate to the level of risk of harm to a named individual or known household.

The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (Clare's Law) is a mechanism whereby SLH, or a third party (a parent, sibling, neighbour or friend) can make an application to the Police if they are concerned about whether a partner may have been violent or abusive in the past. SLH will promote this where applicable.

SLH will keep records of all disclosures of domestic abuse in a controlled environment to be used for internal reporting and reference only.

6. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

SLH is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion and we will endeavour to provide a service that seeks to meet the needs of a particular individual or household and ensure no-one is disadvantaged in accessing our services. We recognise that some of our customers may have permanent or transitory vulnerabilities and where customers require additional support, we will endeavour to make reasonable adjustments. We will also take vulnerability into account when carrying out case risk assessments.

7. Monitoring & Review

This policy will be reviewed every three years or where there have been significant changes to regulation, legislation, operations or best practice to warrant a further review.

This Domestic Abuse Policy outlines South Lakes Housing's commitment to addressing domestic abuse, supporting survivors, and creating a safe and secure environment for all individuals using our services.

Monitoring of cases will be in line with our ASB and Safeguarding Policies and procedures with cases and outcomes being assessed on a regular basis and reported on annually.

This policy will be reviewed every three years, or where there have been significant changes to regulation, legislation, operations or best practice to warrant a further policy review.

If you have any questions about this policy, please contact SLH via email, customerservices@southlakeshousing.co.uk.