



## **Domestic Abuse Policy**

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## 1. Introduction

1.1 Stafford and Rural Homes (SARH) recognises that domestic abuse can happen to anyone regardless of social background, disability, age, gender, religion, sexuality or ethnicity.

Domestic abuse damages whole families affecting, victims, children and young people where parents are in an abusive relationship.

SARH believes that no-one should live in fear of domestic abuse and will take whatever steps possible to advise, assist and support any person experiencing or being threatened with domestic abuse regardless of gender and sexuality.

This policy applies to all customers who report that they have been victim of domestic abuse.

## 2. SARH Vision and Values

### 2.1 Vision

SARH' vision focuses on how we can deliver services to ensure positive outcomes for customers and partners. SARH vision is:

**‘Creating great places to live, work & grow’.**

## 2.2 Values

SARH Corporate Values demonstrate how employees should maintain a professional approach at all times.

The CARES values, developed with customers underpin our operating ethos, caring about the people we work with.

**C**ommunicating with one another in a range of ways that are timely and informative

**A**pproachable so that people can communicate with one another, share ideas and remain informed

**R**espectful of each others' differences, values and opinions, treating everybody as they would wish to be treated

**E**mpowering staff, customers and stakeholders to have real and meaningful input into the business

**S**upportive of each other, offering only constructive criticism and being willing to help make the service excellent

## 3. Corporate Plan Objectives

**3.1** The Domestic Abuse policy clearly links in with the SARH' Corporate objectives:

*"Creating Great Places to Live, Work & Grow"*

Particularly supporting the delivery of the objectives:  
Great Landlord and Support.

## 4. Definition of Domestic Abuse

**4.1** SARH uses the Home Office guidance issued in March 2013 and defines domestic abuse as:

'Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass but is not limited to, the following types of abuse:

Psychological  
Physical  
Sexual  
Financial  
Emotional

'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.

Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threat, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish or frighten their victim'

The Government definition, which is not a legal definition, includes so called 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, and is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group.

## **5. Domestic Abuse Context**

**5.1** One in four women and one in six men will be affected in their lifetime, with women suffering higher rates of victimisation and serious injury.

Domestic abuse is rarely one off incident, it is generally a persistent pattern of abuse that escalates over a period of time.

Evidence consistently shows that two women per week are killed by a current or former partner and domestic abuse contributes to 16 percent of all violent crime.

Domestic abuse often starts or intensifies during pregnancy and is a factor around 80 percent of Child Protection cases.

## **6. SARH approach to dealing with Domestic Abuse**

### **6.1 Approach**

SARH will ensure that its approach to Domestic Abuse is one of sensitivity, being supportive and as understanding as necessary to encourage victims to report issues and to continue to work with us and partners to deal with the situation from which they or their loved ones are suffering.

Customers can report domestic abuse in a variety of ways, including in person, in writing, by telephone or online.

SARH provide telephone support and reporting facility 24 hours a day 365(6) days per year.

It is not expected that employees will fulfil the counselling role of specialist agencies but will be able to offer sympathetic advice and assistance and signpost to specialist services e.g. Womens Aid.

SARH recognise that evidence of abuse/violence may not always be readily available.

SARH will accept the victim's account; we will also be guided by the victim and in consultation with appropriate professionals such as Police, IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advocate) & MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference), in determining the most appropriate course of action in responding to an incident of Domestic Abuse.

## **6.2 Confidentiality**

Where possible/appropriate reports will remain confidential from the start and should the case progress, all forward actions will be led and agreed by the victim unless the situation is high risk e.g. threat to life, and requires more urgent intervention. Where it is considered there is high risk information will be shared in line with the One Staffordshire Information Sharing Protocol.

Where an employee becomes aware of evidence of domestic abuse towards or having an effect on children they will report the incident to a Neighbourhood Services Officer who will ensure that contact is made with Social Services First Response or the Local Support Team inline with the Safeguarding Children Policy immediately

## **6.3 Contact/Actions**

SARH will make contact with all victims of Domestic Abuse within 24 hours of them making a report to us or on the receipt of a referral from an appropriate individual or organisation. The victim will be offered an interview in a location of the victims choice within 3 working days.

Victims will be offered an interview with an officer of the same sex. Where it is necessary to use an interpreter, he or she should also be of the same sex as the victim if the victim requests this.

SARH will agree all actions with the victim and will provide an action plan which will be updated at a frequency agreed with them.

SARH will encourage victims as appropriate to report domestic abuse to the Police at an early stage and will provide information about advice and support. If required by the victim SARH will report incidents to the Police on their behalf, where they feel too intimidated to report themselves.

Risk will be assessed by the completion of CAADA DASH (co-ordinated action against Domestic Abuse) risk assessment and where appropriate referrals will be made to MARAC.

## **6.4 Assistance/Guidance**

Wherever possible SARH will endeavour to ensure that assistance is provided to those threatened with or suffering violence by providing them with secure accommodation. This may include increasing home safety and security. SARH will also consider offering temporary or permanent re-housing where the victim feels unsafe to remain in his/her home and alternative remedies e.g. injunction are not practical or have not been effective.

Victims can also be guided and supported to make a homeless application to Stafford Borough Council where urgent temporary or permanent accommodation is required and SARH cannot assist due to the lack of available properties or where the victim wants to move outside of Stafford Borough.

Where a transfer is offered the property type will be determined in line with the current allocations policy unless there are exceptional circumstances, and away from the local area. The victim will not be made responsible for any damage to the

property which has been caused by the perpetrator and has been reported to the Police.

Victims will be offered a referral to SARH money advice team for support around financial issues.

SARH will signpost victims to relevant organisations so they are able to seek advice on a range of criminal and civil remedies, including injunctions. We will also assist victims to take their own legal action where necessary.

## **6.5 Action against perpetrators of Domestic Abuse**

SARH will adopt a multi-agency approach in dealing with perpetrators of domestic abuse. This will include working with the Police, local authority departments and other specialist organisations and agencies who may be able to offer support interventions as well as civil and criminal remedies.

SARH tenancy states:

*“You must not inflict domestic violence or threaten domestic violence against Your partner, Your children, Your partner’s children or any person living in Your home.”*

The tenancy also goes on to detail what action SARH will take where they have evidence that a tenant has been guilty of domestic abuse as below:

*“If You inflict or threatened domestic abuse SARH have the right to take following actions against Your tenancy, actions include but are not limited to, the following:*

- I. Apply, the to the Court for repossession of Your home, and grant a new tenancy of Your home to Your partner or to another appropriate person*
- II. If your joint tenant serves notice on SARH to end the tenancy SARH may terminate the joint tenancy and may grant a new tenancy to Your joint tenant in their sole name*
- III. If your partner leaves Your home because of violence, or threat of violence and does not intend to return, SARH have the right to apply to the Court for repossession of Your Home.”*

SARH will take firm action (where evidence is available against anyone responsible for domestic abuse.

Where damage has been caused to a SARH property by the perpetrator of domestic abuse the victim will be encouraged to report it to the Police as criminal damage and SARH will work with the Police to take action against the perpetrator to recompense SARH for the costs of repair.

## **7. Partnership Working**

SARH recognises that we cannot work in isolation and that the causes and effects of domestic abuse are wide ranging and varied and can affect people experiencing it in different ways.

SARH will therefore seek to work in partnership with other agencies to ensure that the best possible individual and family support is developed, delivered and evaluated. Some of our partners/forums include but are not limited to:

- Stafford Safer Communities Partnership
- Stafford Borough Council
- Staffordshire Police
- Stafford multi agency hub
- Womens Aid
- Social Services
- MARAC

SARH will ensure representation to any relevant multi agency meetings at Strategic and Operational levels.

## **8. Information Sharing**

Section 115 of the Crime & Disorder Act 1998 allows SARH and partners to share information for the purposes of preventing and detecting Crime & Disorder including domestic abuse.

SARH recognises that confidentiality is fundamental to developing a relationship of trust with people experiencing domestic abuse and guarantee that any information provided to us will be treated in the strictest of confidence. SARH will only share information where it is absolutely necessary and will only be exchanged in line with the One Staffordshire Information Sharing Protocol and relevant protocols for both child protection and vulnerable adults.

## **9. Prevention & Publicity**

Potential tenants will be advised of consequences in relation to legal action should they be a perpetrator of domestic abuse as part of the pre tenancy advice and guidance.

SARH will work with Partner agencies on any initiatives and publicity to raise awareness and prevention of domestic abuse.

SARH will where appropriate publicise successful legal actions/interventions against perpetrators to encourage the reporting of incidents and show customers that any complaints will be acted upon.

## **10. Ownership, Monitoring and Review**

The Domestic Abuse Policy is owned by Director of Neighbourhood Services but there is a responsibility in each Directorate for the implementation of the policy.

Domestic abuse is considered to be a category of ASB (anti social behaviour) therefore cases of domestic abuse will be recorded on SARH ASB recording system.

SARH will report monthly on the number of domestic abuse cases recorded on the system

The policy will be reviewed biannually or at any time regulation or legislation changes.

This policy is also subject to an Equality Assessment (EA) which is detailed as Appendix 1 which will be reviewed biannually to take into account any changes to the policy.

## **11. Communication**

SARH will ensure this policy is communicated amongst its staff, customers, partner organisations and contractors working with SARH. Any feedback will be reviewed and amended accordingly and where necessary.

A copy of this policy will be stored and available on the SARH website, SARH Head Office.

## **12. Corporate Complaints**

If during or following an investigation the victim is unhappy with progress, they will be referred to SARH Corporate Complaints Policy and Procedure.

## **13. Associated Documents/Legislation**

### Internal

- SARH – Equality and Diversity Strategy
- SARH – Data Protection Policy
- SARH – Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Policy
- SARH – Safeguarding Children Policy
- SARH – Anti Social Behaviour Policy
- SARH – Allocations and Local Lettings Policies
- SARH – Tenancy Agreement
- SARH – Domestic Abuse Procedure
- SARH – Complaints Policy/Procedure

### External

- Housing Act 1985, 1988 and 1996
- Crime and Disorder Act 1998
- The Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003
- Respect Standard for Housing Management 2011
- Police Reform Act 2002
- Civil Evidence Act 1995
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Children Act 1998
- Protection of Freedoms Act 2012

- Homelessness Act (2002)
- Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004(amended 2009)
- CAADA DASH risk assessment