



## Policy statement

### Definitions

The government definition of domestic abuse is:

*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, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.

It may also include so called “honour” based abuse, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage. Domestic abuse is often also a criminal offence.

We recognise that domestic abuse can happen to anyone, regardless of social background, disability, age, gender, religion, sexuality or ethnicity. We recognise it affects both male and female victims and survivors, including those in LGBTQ+ relationships. It also affects those witnessing the abuse, particularly children.

### Legislation

The most notable legislation in recent times is The Domestic Abuse Act 2021. In addition under section 84 of this Act, Statutory Guidance was issued in July 2022.

The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme DVDS (also referred to as Clare’s Law) allows the police to release information about previous history of violence or abuse a person might have. Anyone can:

- apply for information about their current or ex-partner because they are worried the partner may have a history of abuse and are a risk to them
- request information about the current or ex-partner of a friend or relative, because they are worried they might be at risk

### Our approach – Housing Services

Lewisham Council condemns all forms of domestic abuse. We believe everyone has the right to personal safety and to be free from abuse.



Specifically, as part of our landlord duty to those living in properties that we manage, we are committed to supporting residents who have experienced domestic abuse. We will offer the victim/survivor an interview within 24 hours/ one working day of the incident being reported to us. This interview will include a risk assessment.

We employ a Domestic Abuse Support Officer within our Housing Service to provide support and assistance to victims of domestic abuse. Our ASB team will provide support and additional resources as needed to help residents. If a resident prefers a staff member of the same gender to support them, we will ensure this is available.

If required, we will meet with residents in confidence at their home, or at an agreed choice of safe venue. We will handle all information sensitively and confidentially, within the confines of Safeguarding and data protection legislation.

Our Housing Services ASB Policy sets out how we will investigate cases and support victims. In line with that approach, we will encourage residents to report domestic abuse to the police, and will support them to do so.

Support may include referrals to agencies for assistance, such as Athena or the National Centre for Domestic Violence, who can help obtaining non-molestation and occupation orders. Support also may include referrals to agencies who can help with counselling or mental health support or specialist agencies that fit the victim's needs. For example, those who support for the LGBTQ+ community. Our Welfare Benefits team may provide support around finance issues.

Support may also be carrying out security assessments and providing additional security to the survivor's home. On some occasions we may need to assist the victim to move home temporarily or permanently. If this is required, we will do this in line with our ASB Policy and Lewisham Council's Allocation's Policy.

Lewisham's Housing Service takes a zero tolerance approach against perpetrators of domestic abuse. If residents perpetrate domestic abuse, we will take enforcement action. Our tenancy agreement states: "You, or other members of your household, must not use or threaten to use violence against anyone else living in your home. Domestic violence includes, (but is not limited to) physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse and enforced imprisonment. If you cause or permit domestic violence it will be a breach of this agreement and we may take legal action to evict you."

### **Partnership working**

We use a multi-agency, multi-service approach to supporting survivors of domestic abuse. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Lewisham's commissioned Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) service – Athena
- The Metropolitan police
- Lewisham Council's Housing Options Service
- Social care
- Mental health services
- Support agencies

Housing Services are represented and actively participate in the Lewisham Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) each month.



We were involved in the creation of and support Lewisham Council's [Domestic Abuse and Violence against Women and Girls Strategy 2021-26](#). We also sit on Lewisham's Domestic Abuse/VAWG Board, a multi-agency strategic meeting to tackle domestic abuse in the borough.

### Other related documents

- ASB policy
- Vulnerable Residents policy

### Policy development and review

This policy was developed to work separately to, but in conjunction with, our ASB policy and procedure, and included an equality assessment. This policy and the processes that implement it will be reviewed at regular intervals, with regular monitoring. This will include feedback from residents and partners.

<b>Replacing:</b> Domestic Abuse policy statement 2023 (Lewisham Homes)	
<b>Date approved:</b> 11/04/24	<b>Effective date:</b> 11/04/24
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<b>Approved by:</b> Lewisham Council's Housing Executive Management Team	
<b>Policy owner:</b> Head of Housing and Communities	