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1. Purpose and context

- 1.1 Lewisham Council condemns all forms of domestic abuse. We believe everyone has the right to personal safety and to be free from abuse.
- 1.2 This policy explains how we will support Lewisham Council Housing tenants and household members experiencing domestic abuse, including our residents in temporary accommodation and all those who approach us for housing assistance.
- 1.3 We will provide support and assistance to our staff experiencing domestic abuse, in line with our Domestic Abuse Policy for Employees.
- 1.4 This policy and the services delivered meet statutory requirements and is consistent with good practice. This includes but is not limited to:
 - The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (including Statutory Guidance issued in July 2022¹)
 - The Homeless Reduction Act 2017 (HRA)
 - The Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homeless Act 2002)
 - Renters' Rights Act 2025
- 1.5 A full list of relevant legislation and regulation can be found in section 11 of this policy.

2. Scope

- 2.1 This policy sets out the response and support that will be provided to anyone

¹ [Domestic Abuse Act 2021 Statutory Guidance - large font version](#)

experiencing domestic abuse if they approach our housing teams.

- 2.2 It applies to victims, survivors and perpetrators who are Lewisham Council Housing tenants and those who approach the borough for housing and homelessness assistance.
- 2.3 This policy details what support the council can provide for different circumstances:
 - Lewisham Council Housing tenants
 - Homelessness prevention and relief
 - Residents in temporary accommodation
 - Additional housing support needs provided by our commissioned specialist domestic abuse service provided by Athena, run by Refuge

3. Our principles

- 3.1 Lewisham Council has a zero-tolerance approach to domestic abuse. We believe that every person has the right to be safe and to live a life free from abuse, intimidation, and control.
- 3.2 When responding to reports of domestic abuse we will:
 - treat all individuals with respect, regardless of ethnicity, culture, age, disability, gender identity, religion or belief, sexual orientation
 - adopt a survivor-led and non-judgemental approach towards victims or survivors
 - ensure that all disclosures are addressed in a sensitive and effective manner i.e. empathetic, non-judgemental etc
 - engage with perpetrators, reducing the risk they pose through deterrence, active prevention, sanctions and provision of services to address their behaviour

4. Definition of domestic abuse

- 4.1 This policy adopts the domestic abuse definition as provided in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021²:
- 4.2 Behaviour of a person (“A”) towards another person (“B”) is “domestic abuse” if:
 - 4.2.1 A and B are each aged 16 or over and are **personally connected** to each other (partners, ex-partners, family members)
 - 4.2.2 and the behaviour is abusive
- 4.3 Behaviour is “abusive” if it consists of any of the following:
 - physical or sexual abuse
 - violent or threatening behaviour
 - controlling or coercive behaviour
 - economic abuse
 - psychological, emotional or other abuse; and it does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct

² [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#)

- 4.4 “Economic abuse” means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on B’s ability to: acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or obtain goods or services.
- 4.5 For the purposes of this definition A’s behaviour may be behaviour “towards” B even though it consists of conduct directed at another person (for example, B’s child).
- 4.6 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.
- 4.7 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.
- 4.8 The definition of domestic abuse also includes other forms of violence and abuse such as female genital mutilation, forced marriage, and “so called” honour-based violence, and is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group.

5. How to get support

- 5.1 If you are a Lewisham Council Housing tenant or leaseholder, or a Lewisham Homes tenant contact 0800 0282 028.
- 5.2 If you are homeless or at risk of being made homeless then contact 0808 178 0939.
- 5.3 If you are currently in temporary accommodation placed by Lewisham Council, then contact your temporary accommodation housing officer on 0800 028 2028 or via email at temphousing@lewisham.gov.uk.
- 5.4 To contact our commissioned service Athena, call 0800 112 4052 (Monday-Friday 9am to 5pm) to speak to one of their support workers. If the line is busy or for out of hours calls, a voicemail operates on this number. If you leave a message, please do let them know your name, number and a safe time to call and they will get back to you.
- 5.5 If you or someone you know are in immediate danger, call the police on 999. For non-emergency police enquiries call 101.
- 5.6 For immediate advice and support, the National Domestic Violence Helpline is always open and free to call. Call 0808 2000 247.

6. Our approach

- 6.1 Where domestic abuse has been identified, we will discuss with the victim/survivor support options and the specialist domestic abuse support service provided in the borough, as well as other support options related to their needs, and we will refer the survivor to the appropriate services.
- 6.2 The direct support that we offer is different depending on your circumstances. The following section details what we can provide support with.

Lewisham Council Housing Tenants

- 6.3 As part of our landlord duty, we will support tenants experiencing domestic abuse to remain safely in their home where possible, or to move to a safe alternative where necessary.
- 6.4 We will work in partnership with Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)³ and relevant agencies to identify and support high-risk victims.
- 6.5 We will offer the victim/survivor an interview within one working day of the incident being reported to us with our Domestic Abuse Support Officer. This interview will include a risk assessment and help to understand their individual needs including their housing needs and support required.
- 6.6 If a tenant prefers a staff member of the same gender to support them, we will ensure this is available.
- 6.7 If required, we will meet with tenants 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.
- 6.8 The Domestic Abuse Support Officer will focus on providing housing needs support such as:
- Carry out security assessments and providing additional security to the survivor's home such as additional locks, fireproof letterbox
 - Assist the victim to move home temporarily or permanently. If this is required, we will do this in line with our Anti-social Behaviour Policy and Housing Allocation Policy.
 - Provide advice and assistance to make a homelessness application, including to other authorities where appropriate
 - Make referrals to agencies for assistance such as:
 - Athena or the National Centre for Domestic Violence, who can help obtaining non-molestation and occupation orders
 - Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)
 - Agencies who can help with counselling or mental health support or specialist agencies that fit the victim's needs e.g. those who provide support for the LGBTQ+ community
 - The council's Welfare Benefits team who may be able to provide support around finance issues
 - Ensure that tenancy enforcement action is considered where the perpetrator is a council tenant, in line with tenancy conditions and a zero-tolerance approach to domestic abuse
- 6.9 The length of support will depend on the housing needs, where they are no further housing needs then the housing support case will be closed. Other support will continue as appropriate.

Homelessness Prevention and Relief

- 6.10 We will provide a rapid, accessible and supportive response to anyone experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness due to domestic abuse.

³ [Lewisham Council - Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference \(MARAC\)](#)

- 6.11 When someone approaches the council and conveys that they are fleeing domestic abuse or are in danger due to domestic abuse, we will give them an emergency appointment which will be the same or next day. We do not require corroborating evidence at the point of approach.
- 6.12 Following the emergency appointment they will be allocated to a housing officer who will undertake a survivor-led full assessment to understand the reason for homelessness, undertake a Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment and Honour Based Violence (DASH) risk assessment and a domestic violence statement and enquire if the person is known to anyone else e.g. police, Refuge, if they have an independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) and any other pertinent details.
- 6.13 Where individuals can safely remain in their home with support, we will refer them to the Sanctuary scheme provided by Athena.
- 6.14 Where they are unable to remain in their home, we will support them to identify and access suitable alternative accommodation, taking account of their individual circumstances, needs, and available housing options. This could include temporary placement via our [Temporary Relocation \(Decanting\) Policy](#).
- 6.15 We will ensure that any placements consider the individuals' risk, so they are placed somewhere that reduces their risk of domestic abuse. This may include placing outside of Lewisham if appropriate.
- 6.16 We will also make referrals to agencies for assistance such as those mentioned in paragraph 6.8.
- 6.17 We will support individuals through the 'relief' stage under the Homelessness Reduction Act⁴. This stage, which last for up to 56 days, means places a duty on us to take reasonable steps to help secure accommodation for any eligible person who is homeless.
- 6.18 After this stage a handover occurs to whoever is relevant, for instance our Temporary Accommodation team if placed in temporary accommodation and includes all the notes stored electronically to ensure no information is lost or needs to be repeated unnecessarily.

Residents in Temporary Accommodation

- 6.19 We will ensure that all temporary accommodation placements are safe, suitable and respond to any risks to you and your household.
- 6.20 The Temporary Accommodation team provide temporary accommodation for victims/survivors of domestic abuse. They work closely with different teams internal and external to the council e.g. Athena and the council's Homelessness Prevention team to use their known information and risk assessment to inform the type of temporary accommodation needed.
- 6.21 Temporary accommodation is sourced to make sure that any property isn't in the risk area which may mean an out of borough placement.

⁴ [Homelessness Reduction Act 2017](#)

- 6.22 Individuals will remain in the temporary accommodation they are placed in until they move into settled accommodation e.g. social housing, private rented accommodation or they need to move due to domestic abuse concerns.
- 6.23 Where domestic abuse concerns are raised, the temporary accommodation team will rehouse them within 24 hours, this may include placements into emergency accommodation. This is typically more short term than temporary accommodation.
- 6.24 Where there are no domestic abuse concerns raised at the temporary accommodation, placements are reviewed every 6 months through a suitability assessment that considers household needs and risk issues, health and safety, medical needs and domestic abuse. Should domestic abuse concerns be raised then they will be rehoused as per paragraph 6.23.
- 6.25 Where individuals move out of temporary accommodation but still need domestic abuse support, they will be signposted to relevant agencies if not already engaged with them.

Commissioned Domestic Abuse Services

- 6.26 Athena, run by Refuge, are the commissioned service providing specialist domestic abuse service to Lewisham residents. The service offers:
- Refuge accommodation for those fleeing domestic abuse and in need of a safe place to stay
 - Independent Gender-based Violence advocates (IGVAs) to support anyone of any gender, who is at high risk of serious harm due to gender-based abuse
 - Outreach support to provide confidential support to anyone experiencing gender-based abuse
 - Sanctuary scheme to provide a range of practical measures to increase a survivor's safety at their own home
 - Drop-in services, held at confidential locations across Lewisham
 - A specialist group programme focusing on the dynamics of domestic abuse for women who have been subjected to abuse enabling them to regain ownership of their lives

7. Partnership working

- 7.1 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 Allocations Service
 - Social care
 - Mental health services
 - Support agencies
- 7.2 Housing Services are represented and actively participate in the Lewisham Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) each month to facilitate the exchange of information, evaluate the level of risk, and devise coordinated strategies and action plans to aid and safeguard victims.

- 7.3 We were involved in the creation of and support Lewisham Council's Domestic Abuse and Violence against Women and Girls Strategy 2027-31. We also sit on Lewisham's Domestic Abuse/VAWG Board, a multi-agency strategic meeting to tackle domestic abuse in the borough.
- 7.4 We are involved in the Lewisham Adults Safeguarding Board, who work in partnership to protect adults with care and support needs by ensuring effective safeguarding arrangements, preventing abuse and neglect, and promoting continuous improvement in safeguarding practice.

8. Perpetrator management

- 8.1 We will hold perpetrators of domestic abuse accountable for their use of violence and abuse. We will discuss any proposed actions against the perpetrator with the victim/survivor beforehand and will not take actions that might jeopardise the victim's safety. We will offer perpetrators of domestic abuse access to interventions to change their abusive behaviour, as well as any support to identify barriers to access interventions.
- 8.2 We will take action against perpetrators where we can do so, without compromising the safety of the individual experiencing abuse. This may include but will not be limited to: reporting crimes to the Police; supporting survivors to apply for Non-Molestation Orders and Occupation Orders; applying for Injunctions to prohibit perpetrators from the property / exclude them from the area.
- 8.3 Where a perpetrator is a Lewisham Council Housing tenant, committing domestic abuse is a breach of the tenancy agreement, and we will consider appropriate legal action, including action to end the tenancy. In case of joint tenancies, we may allow, depending on the circumstances, the victim to end the tenancy on behalf of both tenants and then issue a new sole tenancy to the victim.
- 8.4 Housing staff who are working directly with perpetrators can contact Athena or the council's Safer Communities Team where a case comes under VAWG for advice and information about how to safely engage perpetrators in a way that does not increase the risk to victims/survivors including children.
- 8.5 As part of Lewisham's whole systems partnership approach, we may offer housing support to perpetrators of domestic abuse to reduce the risk of homelessness, thus reducing the risk of them returning to victims/survivors' properties. Any action regarding perpetrators should be managed with multi-agency partners and safeguarding professionals.
- 8.6 Housing staff will align their approach to perpetrators with the actions set out in the forthcoming Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2027–2031.

9. Data protection and confidentiality

- 9.1 We will assure victims and survivors of abuse that disclosures made to the council are treated confidentially within limits, ensuring they know that an officer may have a legal authority to share information without consent where a victim or survivor is at risk of serious harm or homicide, or if there is a risk to a child or adult with care and support needs.

- 9.2 This could include a referral to adult or children's social care, or to a multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC).
- 9.3 Sharing information is an essential part of safeguarding victims, survivors, and children living with domestic abuse and helps professionals accurately understand risk and support needs. GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018 should not be a barrier to justifiable information sharing.
- 9.4 Officers will explain their rationale for sharing information and their legal authority for doing so and will clearly record this.
- 9.5 We are committed to protecting your right to confidentiality and privacy. Our staff have a duty of care towards keeping your information safe and secure in line with data protection legislation and our data protection policy.
- 9.6 All information stored on cases will be securely stored on our Housing Management System (HMS) with information locked down so only those that need to see domestic abuse related information can see it. Case notes and data stored will be factual, accurate and concise.

10. Monitoring and continual improvement

- 10.1 Information about domestic abuse cases for Lewisham Council Housing tenants are reported as part of a quarterly and annual safeguarding report provided to our Housing Directorate Management Team.
- 10.2 We are exploring the potential for a standalone domestic abuse report to provide a more focused oversight of domestic abuse cases.
- 10.3 We provide regular and refresher training on safeguarding to all staff and specific domestic abuse training, including refreshers, to officers most involved in providing domestic abuse support to residents.
- 10.4 Mandatory equalities and diversity training is undertaken by all staff to ensure that the important intersections with other inequalities and disproportionalities are well-understood by officers.

11. Legislation and regulation

- 11.1 Relevant legislation, regulation and good practice includes, but is not limited to:
- The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (including Statutory Guidance issued in July 2022⁵)
 - The Homeless Reduction Act 2017
 - The Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homeless Act 2002)
 - Renters' Rights Act 2025
 - Domestic Abuse Offender Disclosure Scheme (Clare's Law)
 - Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 (section 121)
 - Serious Crime Act 2015 (section 76, 70)
 - Family Law Act 1996 (section 63(1))
 - Children Act 1989 (section 20)
 - Civil Partnership Act (section 73)

⁵ [Domestic Abuse Act 2021 Statutory Guidance - large font version](#)

- Protection From Harassment Act 1997 (section 2A)
- Stalking Protection Act 2019
- Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 (section 33)
- Mental Capacity Act 2005
- Marriage and Civil Partnership Act 2022
- Asylum Act 1999 (section 95)
- Crime and Disorder Act 1998
- Care Act 2014
- Data Protection Act 1998
- The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018

12. Equality, diversity, and inclusion

- 12.1 An Equalities Analysis Assessment (EAA) has been conducted as part of the creation of this policy and concluded that the changes are expected to have a minor positive impact on all residents, including those with protected characteristics.
- 12.2 We, while offering a service to all regardless of sex and gender, adopt a gendered analysis of domestic abuse and recognise that women are disproportionately victimised through domestic abuse. We are committed to eliminating discrimination and promoting equality for all via our inclusive practices and in the context of this policy we will:
- Support all individuals experiencing domestic abuse regardless of their age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, religion, disability, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, and other protected characteristics.
 - Acknowledge the multitude of barriers experienced by survivors when seeking support and provide a supportive and enabling environment to encourage people to report domestic abuse.
 - Acknowledge that some groups including, but not limited to, older people, ethnically diverse communities, LGBT+ communities and disabled people may have additional barriers to make a disclosure because of, for instance, language barriers, fear of rejection by their community, cultural expectations, reliance on the abuser for care and support.

13. Communication and consultation

- 13.1 We will keep this policy available to residents through our website and share additional information relating to domestic abuse through other communications with residents, individually where required, and more widely where appropriate.
- 13.2 The draft policy was consulted on via an online survey and presentation at Tenant Advisory Board (TAB) and Service and Performance Panel (SPP). This collaborative engagement provided valuable insights into current practices, key challenges, and opportunities for improvement.
- 13.3 The policy was both developed and the draft consulted on with staff within the housing directorate and relevant corporate colleagues to ensure the policy is clear, deliverable and consistent with wider corporate goals, such as VAWG strategy and safeguarding approach.

14. Related policies

14.1 Related documents which support and complement this policy include but are not limited to:

- Domestic Abuse and Violence against Women and Girls Strategy 2027-2031
- Anti-social Behaviour Policy
- Housing Allocation Policy
- Housing Complaints Policy
- Vulnerable Residents Policy
- Reasonable Adjustments Policy
- Temporary Relocation (Decanting) Policy
- Housing Competence and Conduct Policy
- Lewisham Housing Services Code of Conduct
- London Multi-Agency Adult Safeguarding Policy, Practice Guidance and Procedures

15. Reviewing this policy

15.1 Amendments to this policy not reflecting a major change of policy may be made by the Executive Director for Housing in consultation with the Director of Law and Corporate Governance. Such changes will be reported to Members annually.

Replaces: Domestic Abuse Policy Statement (April 2024) <i>Expands on our previous policy statement on how we provide support for domestic abuse survivors in Lewisham (V2.0)</i>	
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