

Domestic Abuse

Information Leaflet for Residents of Sutton Housing Society

Sutton Housing Society (SHS) does not tolerate any kind of abuse, including Domestic Abuse.

Definition of Domestic Abuse:

Domestic Abuse or domestic Violence is: “Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, 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.”

SHS' Approach

We believe that our residents should not live in fear of violence or abuse – everybody has a right to be safe.

Anyone can suffer abuse or mistreatment at any time in their life. People who are vulnerable because of their age, disability, state of health or any other reason are at most risk. There is no set age or disability that makes someone vulnerable and some people may go through periods of being vulnerable - for example after a bereavement

We take domestic abuse seriously and are committed to providing a sensitive and confidential response to anyone approaching us for assistance in cases of domestic abuse.

We don't want anyone to suffer in silence. The first step is to tell someone. It may be that all you want to do is tell someone or get some information but take it no further and we will respect that too. In very serious cases of abuse where the person is at risk of actual harm, we are obliged to share this information with other agencies such as the police.

We will:

- ✚ Attempt to identify victims at the earliest stages of a tenancy and will ask about any history of domestic abuse where this is disclosed; this will enable us to discuss any additional security measures that may be necessary.
- ✚ Enable residents to report domestic abuse to us in different ways - in person, in writing, by telephone, online or via a third party such as a police officer or IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advocate).
- ✚ Ensure that residents know that they can meet our staff, in confidence, at our offices or at an agreed choice of safe venue.

- ✚ Share information, when appropriate, with our colleagues from the Safer Sutton Community Safety team. This includes the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) and enables us to actively support our residents and to work with agencies specifically involved in domestic abuse cases.

MARAC can produce multi-agency action plans in response to high risk cases. **For cases which meet the MARAC threshold or if we have child protection concerns, we have a legal duty to share this with agencies.** In cases where the threshold is not met, with the agreement of the victim, we will make referrals to other support from relevant agencies (vulnerability conferences, police, victim support etc.).

- ✚ Provide improved security to a victim's home (e.g. security lights, window locks) where a need is identified.
- ✚ Ensure that people experiencing domestic abuse access appropriate services as early as possible and are given advice to allow them to make choices about what to do next.
- ✚ Follow the relevant child protection procedures if we believe a child is at risk due to an abusive relationship.
- ✚ Provide support and guidance to employees experiencing domestic abuse.

What is abuse or mistreatment?

Abuse or mistreatment can range from:

Physical: Pushing, slapping, hitting, restraining, keeping a person in a room, in bed or in a chair against their will.

Emotional and Physiological: Using threats, humiliation, intimidation, swearing, spitting and shouting, ignoring or isolating someone and not allowing them to join in. Denying a person privacy or not allowing them to be alone with other people.

Sexual: Making unwelcome comments, signs and gestures, touching someone sexually when they do not want to be touched, rape.

Controlling behaviour: A range of acts aimed at making a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from support networks (family/friends), exploiting their resources, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour: 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. This includes forced marriage and 'honour violence'.

Financial: Misuse of finances, exploitation, theft, using someone's possessions or funds for personal gain.

Neglect: Withholding medication or the provision of medical assistance and not assisting someone who needs help to get washed or wear clean clothes or deal with their personal hygiene when they are supposed to be receiving that help.

Institutional: This can happen in accommodation when people are mistreated because of poor or inadequate care, neglect, bullying or poor practice that affects that service.

Discriminatory: Behaviour based on race or sexuality or harassment, slurs or maltreatment because of someone's race, gender, disability, age, faith, culture or sexual orientation.

If you feel our staff are responsible for abuse or mistreatment you must contact us and report this immediately to a senior manager or an external agency such as a Local Authority Safeguarding Team, Social Care Team or the Police.

Responding to a report of Domestic Abuse

On receiving a report of domestic abuse directly from a victim, a face to face interview with the victim will be offered within 24 hours. Where this is not possible due to the weekend, or a bank holiday, the person will be referred to a relevant support agency or interviewed on the next available working day.

Where a report of domestic abuse is received via a professional third party e.g. a police officer, we will seek to establish what details have been taken from the victim, what support is in place and what is required from us. Where required we will then contact the victim directly and offer an interview as above.

Carrying out an initial interview

- Interviews will be carried out in a sensitive and supportive manner
- Immediate housing options and tenancy rights will be discussed
- Contact with the police and medical services will be discussed
- A referral to MARAC will be made if the threshold is met
- Advice of support available (National Centre for Domestic Violence, Women's Aid, Citizens Advice etc.) will be given.

At the end of this interview, the Officer should agree with the victim what action will be taken. The victim will then be written to (or contacted by other preferred means) within working two days with the agreed action plan.

Further action

The Officer will ensure that contact is maintained with the victim until it's agreed that support from SHS is no longer necessary. Further contact with the victim may include discussion on issues such as:

- Contacting the police if not already done so
- Longer term housing options
- Advice on welfare benefits
- Legal action to be taken against the perpetrator
- Re-housing options
- Referral to Women's Aid
- Referral to National Centre for Domestic Violence
- Advice on how to self refer to National Centre for Domestic Violence

Where possible, we will assist and support the victim to enable them to remain in their home. (This could include a referral to suitable local agency). In some cases however, the victim may feel unable to return to their home, either in the immediate or longer term - for example if the perpetrator remains in the property or in the locality of the property.

We do not have access to emergency or temporary housing. If the victim can not return home and has nowhere else to stay, advice will be offered regarding options for rehousing with the local authority or other agency.

If the victim is the sole tenant consideration will be given to a transfer request. The appropriate officer will decide whether the request will qualify as a Management Transfer. Evidence may be required from the Police or another agency before a management transfer is granted.

Where a management transfer is offered to a victim, this will normally be on a 'like for like' basis and where possible, depending on the wishes of the victim, away from the victim's local area.

Legal action against the perpetrator

Eviction of perpetrator

The Housing Act 1996 created the power for housing associations to evict a perpetrator of domestic abuse, whether or not they are a joint or sole tenant of the property.

This option will usually be considered where the victim (and his/her dependants) has left the property and the perpetrator remains in a property. Consideration also needs to be given to the likely success of the action based on what evidence is available.

The option to evict a perpetrator will be discussed with the victim and they will be reassured of necessary support from the company or other agencies.

The perpetrator will be advised in writing of SHS' intention to seek possession of the property using Ground 14a Domestic Violence. The Notice must also be served on the partner who has left (whether they were a joint tenant or not). If the property is not vacated by the effective date of the Notice of Seeking Possession, legal advice will be sought and solicitors appointed as appropriate.

Injunctions

Injunctions against the perpetrator can be sought by both the victim, SHS or the National Centre for Domestic Violence on behalf of the victim. In cases of domestic abuse, an injunction would normally involve the perpetrator being not allowed to come into the locality of the victim's home.

Damage to and security of the property

We will consider arranging and paying for additional security of a property in order that a victim of domestic abuse feels safe to return. This may include items such as lock changes or additional door or window locks.

Where the police wish to install additional security, permission will be given immediately subject to agreement on who will maintain such items.

In cases where the property has been damaged by a perpetrator of domestic abuse, repairs will be carried out in line with our Repairs policy. Although a crime reference number is usually required, in exceptional circumstances, the appropriate officer has the authority to waive this condition.

Any damage will be photographed and noted and a recharge raised to the perpetrator. Where appropriate, the company may seek to take direct action against the perpetrator and report the damage to the police as a crime.

Victims' responsibilities

We will provide support and assistance to victims as outlined in this leaflet. Victims are responsible for working with us and support agencies to make the support work. Where victims fail to engage and show no signs of a willingness to engage, and where the behaviour is having an impact on neighbours, we may consider addressing the behaviour under our Anti-social Behaviour Policy.

Victims are responsible for adhering to their tenancy agreement. Breaches of the tenancy agreement will be addressed in accordance with the relevant policy, ensuring any action taken is reasonable and proportionate given the victim's circumstance and the impact of their tenancy breach.

Confidentiality/Data Sharing

We recognise that incidents of Domestic Abuse are extremely sensitive, private incidents for victims to report and will ensure total confidentiality on any cases that are reported.

We may share relevant information with local agencies such as the police, to deal with cases more effectively by either gathering extra evidence to carry out enforcement measures against the perpetrator or sharing information in the interests of the victim and/or their dependants to provide better or more effective support.

Further information and Support

- Sutton Women's Centre - free Confidential Advice - Please contact: 020 78011777
- Victim Support – <https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/>
- Female victims – women's Aid <http://www.womensaid.org.uk/>
- Male victims – MALE http://www.mensadvice.org.uk/mens_advice.php.html
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) victims – Galop <http://www.galop.org.uk/> and telephone number is [0800 999 5428](tel:08009995428)
- Forced Marriage Unit <https://www.gov.uk/forced-marriage>
- Respect Phone line which provides help and advice for perpetrators of [domestic abuse](#) or professionals working with perpetrators <http://www.respectphoneline.org.uk/>
- National Domestic Violence Helpline – 0808 2000 247. This helpline is run in partnership by Refuge and Women's Aid and is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year <http://www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk/>
- Refuge, the national charity for women and children experiencing domestic violence <http://www.refuge.org.uk/>
- Safe Lives which provides [help and advice](#) to organisations and professionals working with [domestic abuse](#) victims <http://www.safelives.org.uk/>
- Female victims and legal advice – <http://rightsofwomen.org.uk/>