

Birmingham Civic Housing Association

POLICY AND PROCEDURES DOCUMENT DOMESTIC ABUSE & VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

1. Introduction

This document sets out Birmingham Civic Housing Association's (BCHA) approach to dealing with domestic abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG).

2. Policy Statement

BCHA will not tolerate domestic abuse perpetrated towards or by its tenants. BCHA is committed to tackling domestic abuse in all forms.

BCHA aims to ensure that victims of abuse are dealt with sensitively, fairly and appropriately, according to their needs.

BCHA recognise the importance of supporting tenants whilst also ensuring that any action taken is with their consent.

BCHA will work collaboratively with external partners when responding to cases of domestic abuse and VAWG.

3. Definition

The Home Office (2013) 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”.

The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:

- ***Psychological & Emotional*** (constant ridiculing, criticism, isolation from friends and family)
- ***Physical*** (actual violence or threats of violence)
- ***Sexual*** (rape or non-consensual sexual acts)
- ***Financial*** (withholding access to money)

Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) refers to crimes which disproportionately are experienced by women and girls. This includes domestic violence abuse, sexual offences, female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage, honor based violence, trafficking and prostitution.

4. Reporting Domestic Abuse and VAWG

Domestic Abuse and VAWG can be reported by a tenant, their family members or friends, neighbours, contractors, BCHA employees or via other agencies such as the police or support workers. Reports can be made in different ways:

- In person at BCHA office to a member of staff
- By email to bcha@bcivic.co.uk
- By letter to BCHA offices
- During a home visit
- By phone
- On-line via the BCHA website (www.bcivic.co.uk)
- Via a third party person or organisation acting on behalf of the complainant

5. Responding to Reports of Domestic Abuse and VAWG

Reports of domestic abuse or VAWG will be dealt with as **High Priority** with a response within **1 working day**.

A Housing Manager will be designated to respond on behalf of BCHA and to be the contact point for the victim.

The Housing Manager will assess the support needs of the victim, such as interpreter and translation services and ensure appropriate support is provided throughout.

The Housing Manager will be flexible about when and where to meet the victim and will agree a method of communication that does not compromise the safety of the victim.

The Housing Manager will assist the victim access specialist support, with their consent (e.g. Women's Aid, The National Domestic Abuse Helpline, Men's Advice Line, ManKind, Galop, Karma Nirvana, Gov.uk Forced Marriage Unit) in order to complete a *DASH risk assessment and potentially a referral to **MARAC.

Where there are serious Safeguarding concerns, the Housing Manager will make a referral to the appropriate local authority social services team. If there is concern that there is immediate risk of harm the Housing Manager will contact the police, with the victim's consent.

The Housing Manager will agree a plan of action with the victim and provide ongoing support maintaining regular contact and agreeing the frequency and method of contact.

*DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honor Based Violence Risk Identification Checklist)

**MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference)

The Housing Manager will be sensitive taking into account the impact the behaviour is having on the victim and their wishes.

Records will be kept confidential, information will be disclosed on a need to know basis only and in accordance with data protection legislation

The Housing Manager will keep under review the support needs of victims, their families and any witnesses and identify an external support/witness services provided by other agencies e.g. police, victim support or community support schemes and help them to access these.

With the consent of the victim a referral will be made to a specialist financial inclusion service for support relating to financial issues.

The Housing Manager will consider if additional security measures are required (e.g. bell camera, locks) and these will be provided by the association.

BCHA will repair damage caused by the perpetrator of domestic abuse or VAWG.

In very serious cases and where this is the most appropriate solution the Housing Manager will facilitate a temporary or permanent move for the victim - subject to recommendations from specialist support services or other agencies such as the police. This may involve a referral to the local authority or refuges via the National Domestic Violence Helpline.

BCHA will monitor satisfaction with performance on dealing with domestic abuse and VAWG and report this regularly to the Board of Management.

6. Actions Against Perpetrators

BCHA will take appropriate enforcement action against the perpetrator, where they are a tenant of BCHA, based on the available evidence. This may include legal remedies such as injunctions and possession proceedings.

Where the victim and perpetrator have a joint tenancy the Housing Manager refer the victim to obtain independent legal advice on their options, which include:

- Seeking an occupation order
- A court order to transfer the tenancy to their sole name

Where the victim has been rehoused as a direct result of domestic abuse or VAWG, the perpetrator will be required to vacate the property, if they fail to do so BCHA will take possession proceedings to remove them from the property.

A risk assessment will be completed for dealing with high-risk perpetrators.

7. Working in Partnership

BCHA will work with partner agencies to identify and support individuals experiencing domestic abuse and, where appropriate, to take action against perpetrators, where we can do so without compromising the safety of the individual experiencing domestic abuse.

Consideration will be given to arranging, with the agreement of the individual experiencing domestic abuse, multi-agency meetings to ensure support is received from all relevant agencies where the DASH Risk Identification Checklist does not meet the local authority threshold for a MARAC referral.

The Housing Manager will provide advice on external agencies that can offer further advice and support dependent upon their needs and work with partners to ensure co-ordinated services to prioritise the safety of the victim and the safety of their children, where present.

8. Training

Training and development activities will be facilitated to ensure that all relevant employees have the knowledge and skills to respond effectively to reports of domestic abuse and VAWG.

9. Complaints

Complaints about the way BCHA has responded to domestic abuse or VAWG will be dealt with under the Complaints Policy.

10. Monitoring of Domestic Abuse and VAWG

Performance on dealing with domestic abuse and VAWG will be monitored and satisfaction results will be reported to the Board of Management.

11. Review

This policy will be reviewed every three years or more frequently if there are changes in relevant legislation or regulation.

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