

MERLIN HOUSING SOCIETY

DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY



1. KEY OBJECTIVES

- 1.1. We believe that none of our residents should live in fear of abuse from a spouse or partner, former spouse or partner, or other member of their household, and we will take steps to assist any person suffering from or threatened with violence or abuse.
- 1.2. We aim to offer assistance to any of our residents who are suffering from domestic abuse or threats of violence or abuse either from someone within their own home, or from a partner or former partner outside their home. This policy applies both to heterosexual partners and same-sex partners.

Also refer to the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy.

2. KEY POLICY STANDARDS

- 2.1. Merlin Housing Society (MHS) will use the following definition of domestic violence which is also used by all the police forces, local councils and other agencies:

“the use, attempt, or threat of violence, whether physical, emotional, sexual, mental or economic, within an intimate and/or family relationship. It reflects and reinforces inequalities of power within relationships and within society”

MHS will be particularly sensitive to the needs of those affected by relationship breakdown and any related problems of domestic violence. It will adopt appropriate interview, investigative and documenting procedures which afford privacy and confidentiality and a victim/person-orientated approach to those in need. Victims will be encouraged to allow us to share information with other agencies, including the police and local authority departments, to ensure that the full range of civil and criminal remedies can be pursued. However, all information provided by the victim will be treated with the utmost confidence, and only passed to external agencies with prior consent. The exception to this is where we consider a child is at risk in any situation or if there is a high risk of serious harm to anyone in the situation described. The Head of Operations will approve any disclosure without the victim's consent. Information will be shared with

work colleagues only on a strict 'need to know' basis. We will, at all times, adhere to our 'data protection and confidentiality policies'.

- 2.2. MHS will ensure that appropriate advice is given about the options available including the financial and legal issues involved and where to get financial and benefit advice, and will provide a support pack for which translations and different formats are available. Specific, detailed advice can be provided by the person's own specialist advisers or through relevant agencies specialising in the support of those experiencing domestic abuse.
- 2.3. The victim/survivor will be interviewed immediately or visited within 24 hours of the complaint, and involved in decisions taken about action against the perpetrator from the outset. The victim/survivor will be offered an interview by a same-sex investigator.
- 2.4. MHS residents suffering Domestic Violence can be accommodated in a safe house or temporary accommodation within 24 hours. The accommodation provided will match their needs as closely as possible but will be dependent on availability of accommodation.
- 2.5. Where children are affected, particular care will be taken to ensure that their interests are taken into account and that, where appropriate, the police, other local statutory, voluntary and support agencies are involved, provided that parental rights and wishes are followed; (unless action might otherwise be required of the MHS under legislation relating to children).
- 2.6. We will request the assistance of other agencies such as the Police, Survive, Next Link, Victim Support, Social Services, local schools and community groups in consultation with the victim/survivor.
- 2.7. MHS will look to join the multi-agency agreement and guidelines on information sharing.
- 2.8. We will enable the victim/survivor to stay in their home if they wish through the urgent repair of damaged property and the provision of security works (alarms etc.) There will generally be no charge for this service.
- 2.9. In the case of domestic violence as with other forms of harassment and anti-social behaviour, MHS will take firm, prompt and appropriate action against the perpetrators including, if necessary, action leading to eviction (where the perpetrator is a tenant) and in pursuance of crime and disorder legislation.

- 2.10. Wherever possible, we will endeavour to ensure that we assist those threatened with or suffering violence by providing them with accommodation, free from the threat or fear of violence or abuse. Where we are not in a position to offer such assistance, we will work in partnership with South Gloucestershire Council and provide advice to the victims of violence on alternative sources of accommodation and support, including assistance from voluntary organisations (such as Victim Support) and statutory agencies (such as Social Services, Floating Support Service, South Gloucestershire Domestic Violence Forum).
- 2.11. We will work with the Local Authority and other local agencies to develop appropriate strategies for responding to the needs of those experiencing domestic violence (e.g. linking with South Gloucestershire Domestic Violence Forum).
- 2.12. All cases involving domestic violence will be kept under constant review until the victim/survivor considers that the problem has been resolved satisfactorily.
- 2.13. Where a victim/survivor is dissatisfied with the investigation or the decision, they may pursue an appeal through our complaint procedure.

3. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

- 3.1. We will ensure that this policy is applied fairly and consistently to all our residents. We will not directly or indirectly discriminate against any person or group of people because of their race, religion, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, disability or any other grounds set out in our Equality and Diversity policy.
- 3.2. When applying this policy we will act sensitively towards the diverse needs of individuals and communities.
- 3.3. When applying this policy we will take positive action to reduce discrimination and harassment in local communities.
- 3.4. This policy and any other related publications of MHS are available on request in other formats (e.g. in an alternative language, in Braille, on tape, in large type).

4. KEY TARGETS AND PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- Compliance with Housing Corporation Regulatory Code, Housing Corporation inspection outcomes and Key Lines of Enquiry excellence standards

- Benchmarking review comparisons on best practice elsewhere as part of Continuous Service Review
- the achievement of the specified key policy standards

5. MONITORING, CONSULTATION AND REVIEW

- The Board and the Housing Corporation will receive regular reports on the performance against agreed targets and indicators.
- In line with our Resident Involvement Policy, tenants, leaseholders and stakeholders will be included in:
 - monitoring our performance
 - reviewing this policy, in order to reflect their needs and priorities

Further details about how this will be achieved are set out in the Resident Involvement Policy.

VERSION CONTROL AND APPROVAL DATES

Version no.	Name and date
1	Emma Lucker – November 2005
2	Hazel Gray – November 2007
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