



Domestic Abuse Policy

Approval date	April 2023
Approval Level	Customer Experience Committee via Executive Team
Review Period	2 years
Next Review Date	April 2025
Policy Owner Role Title	Head of Customer Service Delivery
Responsible Director	Chief Executive
Is an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) required?	Yes
Is a Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) Required?	No

VERSION CONTROL NOTICE

Always refer to documents stored on the intranet when applying policy and procedure.

If you are viewing this document from your personal drive or as a hard copy, it may not be the latest version.



Contents

1.0	Introduction.....	2
2.0	Policy Statement.....	3
2.1	Our approach	3
2.2	Roles and Responsibilities	4
2.3	Training.....	5
2.4	Re-Housing	6
2.5	Review Panel	6
3.0	Internal Related Documents.....	7
4.0	Legal Framework	7
5.0	Definitions	8
6.0	Equality & Diversity	9

1.0 Introduction

This Domestic Abuse Policy is focused on supporting any of our service users who may experience and report domestic abuse. It has been developed in line with Wandle’s values, which are:

- Think customer
- Build relationships
- Work together
- Aim high
- Own it

The UK’s cross-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 abuse can encompass but is not limited to:

- *psychological*
- *physical*
- *sexual*
- *financial*
- *emotional*
- *controlling or coercive behaviour*
- *Honour based violence (HBV)*
- *Female genital mutilation (FGM)*
- *Forced marriage*

This policy should be read in line with both our Safeguarding Policy.

Any staff who are enduring domestic abuse or supporting a colleague who is, should refer to the Employee Domestic Abuse Policy.

This policy aims to ensure that those who experience domestic abuse are treated in sympathetic and sensitive manner, in accordance with their needs. It aims to ensure all employees act in a non-judgemental way.

2.0 Policy Statement

2.1 Our approach

We will believe anyone who discloses domestic abuse, whether they are someone enduring abuse themselves or reporting a possible case.

We acknowledge that domestic abuse affects people from all genders, sexualities, socio-economic, religious and cultural backgrounds, whether they are female, male, gender fluid or non-binary. We will ensure that residents are able to report domestic abuse to us through a variety of methods and we will investigate all reports that we receive.

We will endeavour to talk to anyone reporting a case of domestic abuse by the end of the next working day. When possible will offer the option of reporting to a member of staff of the same gender, if requested.

We will provide appropriate translation services where at all possible if a survivor is unable to communicate with us effectively in English.

We will maintain clear records and evidence for all domestic abuse cases to enable us to support survivors and take relevant action.

To help survivors remain in their home, where possible and necessary we will install additional security and protection measures to a survivor's home and will often do so in conjunction with other partner agencies. This might include security lights, extra locks and fire proof letter boxes. We will also treat any security related repairs that are related to a case of domestic abuse as emergency repairs and manage these in-line with our Responsive Repairs Policy.

Where a survivor and perpetrator are joint tenants with a lifetime tenancy and it is in the interest of the survivor, we will take steps to try and evict the perpetrator and allow the survivor to return to their home with a new tenancy agreement.

Signposting and additional support

We will signpost the individual experiencing domestic abuse to relevant specialist organisations to provide support and legal advice as appropriate. However we will consider whether the survivor and their family are in any immediate danger and make a decision on the necessity of the involving the police, social services and other specialist agencies.

Wandle's domestic abuse Procedure outlines the process for reporting domestic abuse internally and referring to the relevant specialist agency.

We are committed to working with partners such as the police, local authorities and specialist support agencies. We will also work with our partners through local multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC) and on local domestic abuse forums, as required.

We will make a referral to our welfare benefit and tenancy sustainment specialists or other relevant internal teams for any required support relating to financial issues.

We will make information about national and local domestic abuse support services available on our website, social media channels and in our office. We will refer survivors to these resources and in particular we will identify when specific support services might be required for children, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people, or those with certain cultural backgrounds or religious beliefs who may face additional barriers to finding support.

We will recognise that perpetrators may also require or be seeking support and will look to signpost perpetrators towards relevant support services.

Confidentiality and Safeguarding Responsibilities

We will always seek to gain consent from survivors of domestic abuse before reporting this to police and/or social services. However, there may be cases where for safeguarding purposes or if we need advice, we will need to share information with other agencies, even if we have not been able to gain consent. This will always need to be discussed with a manager and we will make clear to survivors the cases when we feel we need to inform other agencies, such as the Police.

We want to protect and respect the need for confidentiality and balance this against the need to empower our staff to support survivors of domestic abuse when they contact us.

If a report of domestic abuse involves a child then we will always involve social services.

Faith and Religion

Faith can be an important part of a someone's decision making and ability to escape abuse. We recognise that in some cases it can complicate their path to safety and survivors may be faced with abusers who manipulate religious beliefs and religious teachings, or faith leaders who lack the knowledge to provide counsel, creating additional barriers to escaping the abuse.

We will provide support to residents, regardless of their religious beliefs and will be mindful that religion and faith can act as a barrier for many who need support.

2.2 Roles and Responsibilities

Staff Responsibilities

In line with our safeguarding policies, all staff, apprentices and volunteers who visit customers' homes must:

- Be aware they have a duty to act promptly on any concern or suspicion that an adult who is vulnerable and/or at risk is being or is at risk of being abused
- Be aware of the different types and signs of domestic abuse that can occur

- Inform their line manager of domestic abuse concerns
- Make clear factual records of their concerns and actions taken

Managers

Managers have an important role to:

- Be open and available for staff to bring their concerns to
- Take responsibility for the quality of domestic abuse reporting in their teams and encourage staff to raise alerts appropriately
- Act immediately when an alert is raised, take the concern seriously and support staff to take the appropriate steps
- Refer concerns to the local authority, police or other external agencies, in line with this policy and the Domestic Abuse Procedure, when required.
- Foster a fair and open culture of domestic abuse awareness.

Contractors

Contractors who visit our customers' homes are expected to comply with our Safeguarding Adults policy by ensuring that their employees are able to report adult at risk concerns, including domestic abuse. Contractors must inform us when such concerns involve our customers.

Contractor Managers

To make sure their staff are regularly trained and know how and where to refer domestic abuse concerns.

Senior Domestic Abuse Champion

Wandle will appoint a Senior Domestic Abuse Champion who will ultimately own our activity in supporting people experiencing domestic abuse and be seen as a go-to person for Domestic Abuse queries or concerns. They will receive necessary training to enable them to fulfil this role adequately.

Domestic Abuse Champions

Wandle will appoint a number of other Domestic Abuse Champions across various teams, who will be seen as a go-to person for Domestic Abuse queries or concerns, whether regarding residents or staff themselves. They will receive necessary training to enable them to fulfil this role adequately.

2.3 Training

All staff will receive e-learning safeguarding training which helps them identify signs of domestic abuse and safeguarding issues in general, both when in a residents home and over the phone.

Further training will be given to customer facing staff, such as those in the contact centre and repairs operatives, to recognise and report cases of domestic abuse.

Staff responsible for responding to reports of domestic abuse will receive training which helps them gain a good understanding of the complexities of domestic abuse cases, how to interview survivors, how to access specialist help, temporary and permanent re-housing options, and maintaining confidentiality and discretion.

2.4 Re-Housing

We will work with survivors to find the best possible solution to their housing needs which may be remaining in their property or being rehoused.

When re-housing survivors of domestic abuse we will do this in-line with our [Allocations and Lettings Policy](#). We will consider the recommendations of specialist agencies and supplementary evidence will be required if rehousing is requested or if there are other resource implications.

If we are unable to re-house a survivor of domestic abuse in one of our own properties, we will work with local authority partners to find the survivor suitable alternative accommodation.

If a Wandle tenant has committed domestic abuse and we have sufficient evidence to support this, we will consider legal action against the perpetrator, which could result in possession proceedings.

2.5 Review Panel

We will convene a Domestic Abuse Case Review Panel every quarter and managed by the Neighbourhood Customer Service Manager.

Membership

This panel will consist of the Head of Customer Service Delivery, Neighbourhood Manager, and any Neighbourhood Officers with open or recently closed cases.

The Leasehold and Commercial Manager and any Homeownership Officers will be involved when they have any open cases.

Purpose of the panel

This panel will review any open cases or cases that were closed in that quarter to ensure a consistent approach, we are supporting our residents and that all cases are being effectively logged and managed.

3.0 Internal Related Documents

Key Strategy	Customer First
Policies	ASB Allocations and Lettings Safeguarding Data Protection Repairs and Maintenance
Procedures	Domestic Abuse Management Transfer

4.0 Legal Framework

Legislation	Main powers and relevance to policy subject
Domestic Abuse Act 2021	This legislation introduced a number of new measures, including a new legal definition of domestic abuse; placed a legal duty on councils to find support for survivors in 'safe accommodation', introduced new criminal offences; and created a guarantee that all survivors will be in priority need for housing, and will keep a secure tenancy in social housing if they need to escape an abuser.
Serious Crime Act 2015 section 76	Created a new offence of "controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship". This new offence closes a gap in the law around psychological and emotional abuse that stops short of physical abuse. The offence carries a maximum sentence of 5 years' imprisonment, a fine or both.
Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004	Created the new offence of "causing or allowing the death of a child or vulnerable adult". This offence enables prosecutions of people who stay silent or blame someone else. The 2004 Act was amended in 2012 by the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims (Amendment) Act 2012 to include 'causing or allowing serious physical harm (equivalent to grievous bodily harm) to a child or vulnerable adult'.

Legislation	Main powers and relevance to policy subject
Family Law Act 1996 (as amended by Part 1 of the Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act 2004)	Introduced "Occupation Orders" which can be used to temporarily exclude an abuser from the home and surrounding area and give the victim the right to enter or remain.
The Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014	This Act created new absolute grounds for possession, enabling social and private landlords to expedite possession where another court has proven significant anti-social behaviour or criminality in the locality of the property. It is intended to provide better protection and faster relief for those affected/witnesses.
Ground 14A of Schedule II of the Housing Act 1988.	<p>This ground must be used to seek possession where the property has been occupied by a couple (same-sex or opposite-sex), and one partner has left and is unlikely to return because of violence or threats of violence by the other towards them.</p> <p>The violence must have been a cause of the partner leaving. There is no requirement for the parties to be actually living together at the time of the violence (the perpetrator may be staying elsewhere), merely that they be in a relevant relationship.</p>
The Children Act 1989	<p>Provides a comprehensive framework for the care and protection of children. It centers on the welfare of children up to their 18th birthday. It defines parental responsibility and encourages partnership working with parents. Interagency co-operation is encouraged.</p> <p>It reinforced the message that all organisations working with children have a duty in helping safeguard and promote the welfare of children.</p>

5.0 Definitions

Domestic Abuse

The cross-government definition of domestic abuse 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. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional

Controlling behaviour

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

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.

Sanctuary Scheme

A Sanctuary Scheme is a multi-agency victim centred initiative which aims to enable households at risk of violence to remain safely in their own homes by installing a 'Sanctuary' in the home and through the provision of support to the household.

Femicide

Femicide is generally defined as the murder of women because they are women.

The term femicide was introduced to describe killings of women that were gender related in order to recognise the impact of inequality and discrimination, identified internationally as a root cause of violence against women.

Femicide has been identified globally as a leading a cause of premature death for women.

6.0 Equality & Diversity

Equality & Diversity is central to our business; promoting fairness and opportunity for customers and staff; helping provide the best services shaped by and for customers; and right for recruiting and developing our staff.

We are committed to celebrating diversity. To ensure equal access to our services is available, Wandle will comply with the Equality Act 2010 and all other legislative requirements relating to equality. We will work to avoid exclusions or restrictions that are not appropriate to the housing and support needs of our tenants and that may lead to discrimination. We will endeavour to ensure that all tenants receive a consistent level of quality service.

Equality Consideration

Under the *Equality Act 2010* Wandle must consider whether our policies adversely affect our customers and/or staff.

The following table identifies whether this policy disproportionately impacts upon any individuals in regard to the key protected characteristics, as identified in the Act:

Special Characteristic	Any impact? (Yes or No)
age	No
disability	No
gender reassignment	No
marriage and civil partnership	No
pregnancy and maternity	No
race	No
religion or belief	No
sex	Potentially
sexual orientation	No

As this policy may impact upon individuals in regard to one or more of these protected characteristics, an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed and can be found at:

<https://intranet.wandle.com/Interact/Pages/Content/Document.aspx?id=3273&SearchId=32887>