

PO35 Domestic Abuse Policy

Approval

Approved by Tenants' Forum	July 2010
Approved by Board	July 2010
Due for Review	June 2011

Review undertaken

Resident involvement <i>As agreed with Tenants' Forum</i>	Focus Group meeting 21 May 2010
Equality Impact Assessment	ASB full service EIA completed June 2010
Other consultation	ASB Review Group & Consultation with external agencies

Policy Statement

Soha Housing believes that no person should live in fear of abuse from a spouse, partner, former spouse or partner, or other member of their household. Soha will not tolerate domestic abuse and will take prompt action and appropriate steps to assist and support any person suffering from or threatened with abuse.

This policy is intended to cover all instances of domestic abuse, which can be physical, emotional, psychological, sexual or financial. This policy also covers honour-based violence, where the perpetrators perceive that a relative has shamed the family or community and this is given or assumed as the motive for the abuse.

1. Scope of Policy

This policy sets out Soha's approach to preventing and tackling domestic abuse experienced by Soha residents in all tenures of stock owned or managed by Soha.

Domestic abuse is an actual or threatened act of harassment, assault or violence (physical, mental or sexual) carried out by a current or former member of the household against another member of the same household.

Soha will respond promptly to all reports of domestic abuse, and take appropriate action according to the situation, including legal action. Soha's primary concern is to ensure the safety of victims of domestic abuse, supporting victims to remain in their own homes where possible.

Abuse against a customer perpetrated by a carer or person visiting or connected to the household is covered under a separate Vulnerable Adults policy.

2. Aims

Soha aims to support victims of Domestic Abuse by:

- A sensitive, confidential, consistent and prompt response.
- Taking a victim-centred approach to domestic abuse.
- Taking appropriate legal action against perpetrators of domestic abuse.
- Working with partnering agencies to develop strategies to prevent and tackle the causes of domestic abuse.
- Promote a clear message to customers that domestic abuse will not be tolerated.
- Having appropriately trained and skilled staff.

Soha will ensure victims of domestic abuse are aware of all options that are open to them, so they can make informed decisions.

Soha will apply our Domestic Abuse policy consistently and fairly, and will not discriminate against anyone on grounds of their race, colour, ethnic or national origins, religion, sexual orientation, disability, gender, age or any other matter which may cause a person to be treated with injustice.

3. Implementation

Soha will have effective procedures outlining how we will:

- Publish appropriate service standards developed with customers, which will include clear timescales for responding to any report.
- Have a range of ways for victims to contact Soha to report abuse.
- Always offer to discuss the victim's situation in a safe private place.
- Offer the victim a staff member of the same gender to discuss their situation.
- Each case will be fully investigated and Soha will develop an agreed action plan to deal with the problem and offer a named member of staff assigned to manage the case.

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- Keep information confidential and not share it with other organisations without the express consent of the victim. Soha will not require the victim to prove the abuse.
 - Respond promptly to any request to repair damage following an incident and will offer increased security to all victims.
 - Take a sympathetic approach and work with a victim to identify alternative accommodation away from the locality of perpetrator, if this is the wish of the victim. This can include a move from within the relevant council's housing policy (e.g. choice-based lettings process) or a direct offer of an alternative Soha home, on management grounds where this is appropriate.
 - Not use members of the household or friends as language interpreters.
 - Take prompt and appropriate legal action against perpetrators of domestic abuse.
 - Maintain effective representation on formal and informal strategic safety partner groups aiming to tackle or raise awareness of domestic abuse, in order to influence the work of these groups, improve Soha's working practices and target assistance effectively. Gather data from local police and from benchmarking against other associations to understand the extent of possible under-reporting to Soha of instances of abuse.
 - Act to increase awareness amongst customers, potential customers and wider communities about domestic abuse and communicate effectively our approach to helping victims and dealing with offenders.
 - Train members of staff who may be in contact with customers on best practice.

Soha will work with partner agencies to provide effective domestic abuse 'sanctuary' schemes for victims, where appropriate. This scheme will include effective arrangements for quickly improving security and safety at a property to help a victim remain in their home.

4. Appeals

Tenants who have been the subject of action under this policy have a right of appeal under Soha's Complaints procedure if they feel they have not been treated fairly.

5. Training

Soha Housing will provide the appropriate training and guidance to all staff who deal with domestic abuse cases to ensure that all those involved receive the best service and support available. Equality and diversity and Customer Care courses are mandatory.

6. Equality and diversity

We will ensure that our service is accessible to all and where customers have any particular needs or requirements we will do all we can to help. Examples of this are documentation available in appropriate languages and formats upon request (e.g. large font, audiotape). All complainants and alleged perpetrators have

access to an interpreter and performance monitoring by the 6 strands of diversity will be carried out.

7. Responsibility

The Director of Customer Services and Operations is responsible for the effective implementation of this policy.

8. Resident Involvement

Tenants were involved in a focus group for this policy review. Soha will report monitoring information on Domestic Abuse to the Tenants Forum and work closely with the Housing Management tenant portfolio holders. Soha will review this policy in consultation with tenants each year.

9. Monitoring and Review

All reports of domestic abuse will be recorded. Appropriate information will be provided to the Board and Tenants' Forum for each quarter on the number and types of incidents and performance against the service standards set with customers.

10. Context

Legal powers of housing associations include:

- Housing Acts 1980, 1988, 1996 & 2004.
- Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003
- The Family Law Act 1998
- The Domestic Violence, Crime & Victims Act 2004
- The Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Data Protection Act 1996
- Equality Act 2006
- Legal provisions for specifically addressing honour-based violence including the Forced marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007 and the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003.
- Respect standard
- TSA Neighbourhood and Community standard.