



Domestic Abuse Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Medway Council (the Council) Housing Services have an important role in reducing incidents of domestic abuse and providing support to its victims.
- 1.2 The Council recognises that domestic abuse can have a serious and devastating impact on an individual's sense of security, health and well-being and will treat all incidents reported to us with the utmost seriousness.
- 1.3 The Council recognise that domestic abuse can happen to anyone, regardless of social background, disability, age, gender, religion, sexuality or ethnicity.
- 1.4 The Council is committed to providing a sensitive and confidential response to anyone approaching us for assistance in cases of domestic abuse.

2. Purpose

- 2.1 This policy sets out how the Councils Housing Services will:
 - 2.1.1 respond to reported incidents of domestic abuse;
 - 2.1.2 support people who are experiencing domestic abuse;
 - 2.1.3 provide secure and safe accommodation and meet the housing needs of those experiencing domestic abuse;
 - 2.1.4 work in line with good practice;
 - 2.1.5 raise awareness of domestic abuse to employees and contractors to enable them to support customers with the appropriate actions and legal remedies.

3. Scope

- 3.1 This policy applies to the following:
 - 3.1.1 Medway Council employees involved in Housing Services including contractors and sub contractors used on the Councils behalf.
 - 3.1.2 All tenure and occupancy types of Medway Council owned properties and customers of the Strategic Housing Services;
- 3.2 For the purpose of this policy **Housing Services** relates to:
 - all **Housing Management** services involved in the running of council owned properties, including repairs and estate services
and
 - all **Strategic Housing Services** including the following services: Private Sector Housing, Housing Solutions, Temporary Accommodation, Homechoice, Disabled Adaptations and Strategic Housing Services.

3.3 For the purpose of this policy the following cross-government definition is used:

3.3.1 Domestic violence and abuse is any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behavior, 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

3.3.2 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.

3.3.3 Coercive behaviour is an act or a pattern of acts of assaults, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish or frighten their victim.

3.3.4 This definition includes so called honour based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, and is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group (Home Office 2009).

4. Legislation and Guidance

4.1 External

- 4.1.1 The Children Act 1989
- 4.1.2 Housing Act 1996
- 4.1.3 Family Law Act 1996
- 4.1.4 Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- 4.1.5 Data Protection Act 1998
- 4.1.6 Crime & Disorder Act 1998 S.17
- 4.1.7 Freedom of Information Act 2000
- 4.1.8 Homelessness Act 2002
- 4.1.9 Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003
- 4.1.10 Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004
- 4.1.11 Civil Partnership Act 2004
- 4.1.12 Localism Act 2011
- 4.1.13 Protection of Freedoms Act 2012
- 4.1.14 Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014
- 4.1.15 Serious Crime Act 2015

4.2 Internal

- 4.2.1 Anti Social Behaviour Policy
- 4.2.2 Tenancy Agreement(s)
- 4.2.3 Allocations policy
- 4.2.4 Safeguarding Adults policy

5. Appendices

- 5.1 Appendix A Contact numbers for Housing Services
- 5.2 Appendix B Organisations providing external support.

6. Policy

6.1 Reporting domestic abuse

- 6.2 Residents can report domestic abuse to us in different ways, including in person, in writing, by telephone, online or via a third party such as a police officer (a list of contact numbers can be found at appendix A).
- 6.3 Residents can ask us to not contact them on their own telephone numbers, at their own address or to send correspondence to their address. Residents can ask us to contact them on a safe telephone number or at a safe address of their own choice.
- 6.4 Employees will be sensitive to the diverse needs of households that have experienced domestic abuse.
- 6.5 Residents can be arranged to meet an officer at a location they feel safe at and can request that an officer of the same sex attends the meeting.
- 6.6 Employees will establish if there are any special needs that should be taken into account for the meeting such as the need for an interpreter or sign language translator.

6.7 Sharing information

- 6.8 Housing Services respect confidentiality and will not disclose information to people or agencies unless the survivor has given us permission. However if it is deemed there are safeguarding issues we will inform the appropriate agencies.
- 6.9 Medway Council shares relevant information on residents that are experiencing domestic abuse under Section 115 Crime and Disorder Act.

6.10 Action taken

- 6.11 Housing employees conduct risk assessments (using the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and 'Honour'-based Violence (DASH) Risk Identification checklist) and safety planning to provide support for the victim and their children where present.
- 6.12 Employees signpost or refer to appropriate agencies with the agreement of the survivor. Employees refer to Domestic Abuse floating support, via the supportedhousing@medway.gov.uk.
- 6.13 Where victims are vulnerable or have mental health issues we refer them to appropriate agencies for further support.
- 6.14 Medway Council will refer cases involving child protection or vulnerable adults to the relevant authority.
- 6.15 Any identified high risk survivors of domestic abuse will be referred to the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) for information sharing to incorporate a multi agency safety plan.
- 6.16 Employees can report incidents to the Police on behalf of victims or support victims in doing so (with their permission), where they feel too intimidated to report incidents themselves. Medway Council also offer

third party reporting services if requested.

6.17 Housing Services offer housing advice to individuals and refer to external advice agencies for example Legal Services or Citizens Advice Bureau where relevant, and /or make referrals to our welfare benefit advice team for support around financial issues.

6.18 Housing Services provide measures to assist tenants to remain in their own homes through provision of advice support and security measures (panic alarms and mobile phones where necessary), where it is safe and appropriate to do so.

6.19 Medway Council signpost perpetrators of abuse to the relevant support agencies.

6.20 Housing assistance for people fleeing domestic violence/abuse

6.21 People fleeing domestic abuse are entitled to apply to any local authority for housing assistance. (Contact details for Medway Council's main housing office can be found at appendix A)

6.22 The Council will not refer a client back to their own local authority if they are at risk of violence if they return.

6.23 The Council will adhere to legislation set out in the Housing Act 1996 and Homeless Act 2002 when considering whether the local authority has a duty to provide accommodation to a client.

6.24 Allocation of properties for people experiencing Domestic Abuse

6.25 Due to the complex nature of cases involving domestic abuse a different method of housing need assessment applies. A panel of housing staff meet to decide which band, if any, is applicable. This decision takes account of information received from the Police, Independent Domestic Abuse Workers and other agencies involved with the client. Through this process referrals are made to the appropriate agencies and that other advice and assistance is offered where appropriate. For more information please refer to [the Homechoice Allocations policy](#).

6.26 Council housing tenants

6.27 Medway Council is committed to providing safe and secure homes that tenant and leaseholders want to live in.

6.28 Housing staff inform the victim of their legal rights in respect of the tenancy and provide advice so that survivors can access appropriate services as early as possible and make choices about what to do next.

6.29 Where a perpetrator of ASB (antisocial behaviour) subsequently reports to be a victim of domestic abuse, we will take into account all circumstances, but our priority will be to ensure any resident's personal safety.

6.30 Staff training

6.31 Relevant Officers receive specialist training on domestic abuse in order to be able to support those affected. This includes training on domestic abuse awareness and completing the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and 'Honour'-based Violence (DASH) risk checklist.

6.32 Housing Services have set procedures for responding to cases of

domestic abuse that ensure the appropriate action is taken.

7. Role, Responsibilities and Authority

- 7.1 The Assistant Director of Physical and Cultural Regeneration retains the overall responsibility for the implementation of this policy.
- 7.2 The Head of Housing Management and Head of Strategic Housing are responsible for the operational delivery of this policy and the associated procedures. This includes responsibility for monitoring and reviewing, staff awareness and training, policy development and communication to tenants.

8. Monitoring, Review and Evaluation

- 8.1 This policy will be reviewed every two years or in line with legislative or regulatory changes.
- 8.2 Levels of domestic Abuse in Medway are monitored at a council wide level.

Cross References: Anti Social Behaviour Policy, Tenancy Agreement(s), Medway Council Allocations policy

Lead Officer: Head of Housing

Officer responsible for producing policy: Business Development Officer

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Next review: July 2019

Appendix A

Medway Council Contacts

Kingsley House

Medway Council's main housing office is based at [Kingsley House](#). The council also provides access to housing services locally by working with different agencies and partners.

37-39 Balmoral Road, Gillingham, ME7 4PF

Kingsley House is located opposite Gillingham Train Station and offers an enhanced range of services.

Call **01634 336 000** to book an appointment.

If you urgently require accommodation outside of office hours you can phone the emergency out of hours number **01634 304 400**.

Opening times

- Monday, 8.30am to 5.15pm
- Tuesday, 8.30am to 5.15pm
- Wednesday, 8.30am to 5.15pm
- Thursday, 8.30am to 5.15pm
- Friday, 8.30am to 4.45pm

Surgeries at Kingsley House

An Independent Domestic Violence Adviser is here Monday and Thursdays from 9am to 12 (noon).

You must book an appointment in advance - phone **01634 333 600**.

www.medway.gov.uk/housing/housingadvice.aspx

Medway Council Housing Tenants

Housing Officer Duty Line

To talk to a housing officer during normal working hours about your rent or any tenancy related matter including ASB.

Phone: **01634 333344**

Email: neighbourhoodhousingofficers@medway.gov.uk

Welfare Reform Team

Welfare and money advice.

Phone: **01634 333344** or

Freephone: **0800 4088080**

www.medway.gov.uk/housing/counciltenantsleaseholders.aspx

Medway Council

Open Monday to Thursday from 8.30am to 5.15pm and Friday from 8.30am to 4.45pm

Phone: 01634 306 000

www.medway.gov.uk/default.aspx

Appendix B - Organisations providing external support

Medway Police Domestic Abuse Team

If you or your family are in immediate danger don't be afraid to call the police on 999. Otherwise please contact Kent Police on the non-emergency telephone number 101

Email domestic.violence.dz@kent.pnn.police.uk.

Care First

A confidential service for information, advice and counselling available to you free of charge. Calls to Care First are voluntary – you decide when and if you want to use the service and you make the call yourself – from wherever you want. Care First are available 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year – your call will be answered by a professional and there is no limit to the number of times you can contact them.

Phone: 0800 174319

Email: counsellingformedwaycouncil@care-first.co.uk

Medway Domestic Abuse Forum

This forum has produced a Domestic Abuse booklet, which gives full details of where you can go for help, advice and support. A copy is available on Medway Council domestic abuse website page or you can attend the one stop shop or download a copy from www.domesticabuseservices.org.uk

Email: mdaf@medway.gov.uk

Contact: Deborah Simpson, Chair on 01634 333333

Medway One Stop Shop

Anyone experiencing domestic abuse can attend the One Stop Shop every Tuesday morning between 09.30 – 11.30 at The Sunlight Centre, Richmond Road, Gillingham, to access free support and advice from multi agency partners including Independent Domestic Violence Advisors, Solicitors, Floating Support, Health and many more.

Domestic Abuse Support in Kent

An excellent website detailing services available in Medway and other areas of Kent, as well as a downloadable handbook:

<http://www.domesticabuseservices.org.uk/>

Choices Domestic Abuse Service

Choices are a specialist domestic abuse charity that offers support and advice to anyone experiencing domestic abuse. They have trained Independent domestic abuse advisers that can support you.

Phone: 0800 917 9948

www.choicesdbservice.org.uk

Victim Support

Can support you emotionally and practically if you have been a victim of crime.

Phone lines are open Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm and Saturday 9am to 5pm on 0808 168 9276

<http://www.victimsupport.org.uk/>

Samaritans: 01634 730981, 08457 909090: National link line number.
Someone to talk to 24 hours a day

Shelterline: 0808 800 4444: Monday-Sunday, 8am-8pm
Emergency access to refuge services or housing advice

Shelter - www.england.shelter.org.uk/get_advice/domestic_abuse

Rights of Women: Web link for female victims and legal advice - www.rightsofwomen.org.uk

Women's Aid: <http://www.womensaid.org.uk/>

Refuge: The national charity for women and children experiencing domestic violence www.refuge.co.uk

National Domestic Violence Helpline –This helpline is run in partnership by Refuge and Women's Aid and is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Freephone: 0800 247 2000

For information and advice for **children and young people**, please visit the [Childline website](http://www.childline.gov.uk) or telephone Childline free on 0800 11 11

Men's Advice line: confidential helpline for men experiencing domestic violence or abuse from a partner or ex-partner (or from other family members).

Freephone: 0808 801 0327, Mon – Fri 10am – 1pm and 2pm – 5pm,

Email info@mensadviceline.org.uk

www.mensadviceline.org.uk/ or phone 0808 801 0327

Galop – anti-LGBT hate crime charity <http://www.galop.org.uk>

If you are worried you might be **forced into marriage** or are worried about a friend or relative contact the [Forced Marriage Unit](http://www.forcedmarriageunit.org.uk) on 0207 008 0151.

If you are concerned about your abusive behavior, or for professionals and victim/survivors looking for **help for an abuser**, contact the Respect Phone line on 0845 122 8609 or visit www.respectphoneline.org.uk.