

Policy name:	
Domestic Abuse Policy	
Section:	Housing
Exec responsible:	Director of Housing
Review by:	Housing, Customer & Communities Manager, Director of Housing and Resident Engagement Panel
Tenant review:	Yes – Resident engagement panel
Authority to amend:	CEO
Frequency of review:	Every three years
Last review:	January 2024
Next review:	January 2027
Responsibility for delivery:	
Strategy:	Housing Strategy
Associated risk ID:	Health & safety failure or neglect, Risk of effects of anti-social behaviour Inadequate and ineffective customer service Risk of irrecoverable debts relating to void properties.
Health & safety:	
Equality & diversity:	Victims within the protected characteristics groups may be more at risk of domestic abuse. Details provided within the policy
Associated costs and value for money:	
Associated documents:	Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance, DASH Risk Assessment Form Devon Domestic Abuse Code of Good Practice Safeguarding Adults Policy Safeguarding Children Policy



Housing People

VERSION CONTROL			
Version number:	Sections amended:	Date of update:	Approved by:
1.0	First issue in new template	January 2014	Chief Executive
2.0	Amendments throughout	January 2018	Chief Executive
3.0	Amendments throughout	January 2024	Chief Executive

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1. POLICY AIMS

Domestic abuse is a high harm, high volume crime that remains largely hidden. The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)⁴ for the year ending March 2020 estimated that 2.3 million adults aged 16 to 74 had experienced domestic abuse in the previous year. Childhood Local Data on Risks and Needs estimated that, between 2019 and 2020, approximately 1 in 15 children under the age of 17 live in households where a parent is a victim of domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse has a devastating impact on children and young people. Growing up in a household of fear and intimidation can impact their health, wellbeing, and development, with lasting effects into adulthood. We need to ensure we are an organisation that has zero tolerance towards domestic abuse and that actively empowers victims, communities, and all staff to confront and challenge it, and provide victims of domestic abuse, including children, with the support they deserve.

Anyone can be affected by domestic abuse – regardless of age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief. In addition, domestic abuse can manifest itself in different ways within different communities. Domestic abuse remains under reported. There can be many barriers to disclosing abuse, seeking criminal justice outcomes, and accessing services.

Domestic abuse most commonly takes place in intimate partner relationships, including same sex relationships. Abuse can continue or intensify when a relationship has ended or is in the process of ending. This can be a very dangerous time for a victim including an increased risk to their physical safety. It is a highly critical period for ensuring support for victims, as they may consider returning to perpetrators during the period immediately after fleeing or ending the relationship. Separation can raise both the likelihood and consequences of risk because of the perpetrator's perceived lack of control.

Domestic abuse may also be perpetrated by a family member towards another family member: by children, grandchildren, parents, those with “parental responsibility”, siblings, or extended families including in-laws. Abuse within the family includes child-to-parent abuse, also commonly referred to as Adolescent to Parent Violence/Abuse (APV/A) and Child and Adolescent to Parental Violence and Abuse (CAPVA). Child-to-parent abuse can involve children of all ages, including adult children, and abuse toward siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles as well as other family members such as those acting as kinship carers. Young people can experience domestic abuse within their relationships. Teenagers may not self-identify as victims. They may perceive their relationships to be ‘casual’, for example engaging in multiple romantic and sexual partners through dating apps. Those who engage in abusive behaviour may seek to minimise or deny the abuse by stating that they were not in a relationship.

The aims of this policy are to set out how we will:

- Take a victim centred approach to support victims/survivors and witnesses who report incidents of domestic abuse.
- Work in partnership with services to protect and support victims/survivors.
- Ensure that perpetrators of domestic abuse are aware of the consequences of their actions and take appropriate legal action to hold perpetrators to account.
- Ensure staff members are fully trained to be able to deal appropriately with cases of domestic abuse, this will include recognising signs of abuse when visiting households and communicating with customers.
- Use the incident reporting procedure for all staff that ensures reporting is easy to do, consistent, documented and acted upon.
- Engage with other agencies to help prevent domestic abuse through intervention and support.
- Treat repairs arising as a result of domestic abuse.
- Monitor and record incidents of domestic abuse.
- Promote awareness of domestic abuse and provide information to; encourage reporting of domestic abuse and for those affected to access available support.
- Recognise children as victims of domestic abuse.

Commented [AS1]: can we add survivors here too? because we do and its worth noting both I believe

2. DEFINITIONS

2.1. The Home Office defines domestic abuse as:

“Behaviour of a person towards another person is “domestic abuse” if;

- A. *They are each aged 16 or over and are “personally connected” to each other and;*
- B. *The behaviour is abusive*

2.2. The term “abusive” behaviour refers to all incidents of domestic abuse and violence, this can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse:

- psychological
- physical
- violent or threatening behaviour
- controlling or coercive behaviour
- sexual
- economic (financial)
- emotional

It does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.

2.3. Two people are “personally connected” to each other if any of the following applies;

- A. They are, or have been, married to each other;
- B. They are, or have been, civil partners of each other;
- C. They have agreed to marry one another or have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether the agreement has been terminated or not).
- D. They are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other.
- E. They each have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child.
- F. They are relatives.

A person has parental responsibility in relation to a child if;

- A. The person is the parent of the child, or;
- B. The person has parental responsibility for the child

A “child” means a person under the age of 18 years.

2.4. 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, access to medicine or treatment, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour. This can include controlling or monitoring the victim’s daily activities and behaviour, controlling their finances including monitoring accounts or coercing them into sharing their passwords to accounts in order to facilitate economic abuse. Communication may be controlled including refusing to interpret or obstructing access to or intercepting messages, phone calls or internet use. Controlling behaviour may also include stalking and/or “gaslighting” (psychologically manipulating someone into doubting their own sanity or experiences).

2.5. 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. *

2.6. *This definition, which is not a legal definition, also 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.

2.7. Economic abuse means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on another person's ability to;

- A. Acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or;
- B. Obtain goods or services

2.8. A child is referred to as a victim of domestic abuse if they;

- A. Sees or hears, or experiences the effect of, the abuse and
- B. is related to the person experiencing the abuse (as defined above)

2.9. Family members are defined as mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister and grandparents, whether directly related, in-laws, common-law or stepfamily.

- Child on child under 16 within the family (not a domestic abuse incident)
- Adult on child under 16 within the family (child abuse investigation unit)
- Adult on adult over 16 within the family (domestic abuse incident)
- Partner on partner both aged 16 and over (domestic abuse incident).

A full definition of, and guidance relating to, domestic abuse, controlling and coercive behaviour is provided in Appendix 1 Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance

3. Policy and good practice

3.1. Cornerstone is signed up to the Devon Registered Providers Domestic Abuse Code of Good Practice (see Appendix 3) and in doing so we pledge to:

- Treat domestic abuse seriously, ensuring responsibility for the abuse is with the perpetrator and avoid "victim blaming" (considering use of language carefully)
- Record all incidents of domestic abuse and monitor statistical information.
- Adopt a strategic approach in responding to domestic abuse and review this approach.
- Develop working relations with specialist agencies, such as Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVA's), and make appropriate representation and contribution to discussions at Multi Agency Risk Assessment conference (MARAC) and local domestic abuse forums.
- Monitor the number of referrals made to MARACs.
- Ensure that the response to those affected by abuse provides them with support and protection.
- Make and record referrals to Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) for children experiencing or witnessing domestic abuse.

- Provide a supportive and enabling environment which encourages people to report domestic abuse to the police.
- Take a multi-agency approach in holding perpetrators accountable for their actions and ensure that the full range of civil and criminal remedies are pursued. Including supporting the police with the application of Domestic Violence Protection Notices (DVPN's) and Domestic Violence Protection Order's (DVPO's).
- Work co-operatively, and collaboratively, to enable households experiencing domestic abuse to access a range of housing and support options and provide consistent, ongoing support in partnership with other agencies
- Be sensitive to the diverse needs of victims and children considering their age, disability, gender, race or ethnicity, religion or belief, sexual orientation and transgender.
- Include measures that focus on the perpetrator. In addition to any enforcement necessary, where appropriate and safe to do so this may also include positive engagement and any support needed to reduce risk and the likelihood of re-offending.
- Recognise socio economic factors which may impact on those experiencing domestic abuse, such as low income, low literacy or numeracy skills, rural isolation or caring status.
- Recognise additional barriers to those experiencing domestic abuse who are frightened that reporting will bring unwanted attention to their personal circumstances.
- Carry out a risk assessment (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. Recognise that risk can change quickly, ensure risk assessment is reviewed as required, including review of case management, and updated as required.

4. RESPONSIBILITIES OF MANAGERS AND STAFF

- 4.1. Any staff member who witnesses, or receives a report of, domestic abuse will report this to the Domestic Abuse & Safeguarding Lead (Housing, Customer & Communities Manager), if there is an immediate concern for the victim(s) or witnesses call the Police on 999.
- 4.2. All staff will treat repairs reported by victims of domestic abuse as an emergency where it involves the security of the property. If requested by the police, lock changes will be at no cost to the victim. The provision of any additional security measures will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- 4.3. Housing staff will deal with all reports of domestic abuse in accordance with the code of good practice. They will be honest about what can be done to help and keep the victim and other agencies informed and updated as appropriate. The Housing Officer managing the case will record actions and any updates as stated in 6. Recording and reporting below,

- 4.4. The Housing, Customer & Communities Manager is our 'Domestic Abuse lead' and will record and monitor all cases of domestic abuse. They will also make and monitor referrals to MARAC and/or MASH as appropriate.
- 4.5. The Housing, Customer & Communities Manager will take prompt and appropriate action against perpetrators of domestic abuse in agreement with the Director of Housing.
- 4.6. All managers are responsible for ensuring that employees receive appropriate training and support for dealing with reports of domestic abuse.
- 4.7. The Director of Housing is responsible for overall monitoring of statistics related to domestic abuse and will keep our strategic approach under review as needed.

5. RISK ASSESMENTS

- Upon receiving a report of domestic abuse, the investigating Housing Officer and/or Domestic Abuse Lead will carry out a risk assessment using the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and 'Honour'-based Violence (DASH) Risk Identification checklist. Staff undertaking a DASH risk assessment will ensure the victim/survivor is alone and in a safe environment away from the perpetrator before discussing risk management.

- 5.1. Certain individuals from the protected characteristics groups detailed in the Equality Act 2010 could be more at risk of domestic abuse, as detailed in the table below.

Age	Children and young people affected by DA are more likely to be future victims or perpetrators themselves. Young people may not recognise abuse and are at risk of normalising abusive behaviours. The risk of domestic abuse, sexual assault and stalking is higher for females in younger age groups.
Disability	The availability of suitable alternative accommodation may be an issue. Limited information available in alternative formats.
Gender reassignment	There may be issues around reporting. Limited specialist support available.
Marriage and Civil partnership	People who are separated, divorced or widowed may have higher odds of being victim of domestic abuse and stalking compared with all other marital status groups.
Pregnancy and maternity	Studies have shown that a significant percentage of domestic violence starts during pregnancy, and many women are thought to be abused during pregnancy or after giving birth. Approximately ¼ of teenage mothers are believed to be in violent relationships.

Race	Women and girls from a black, minority-ethnic (BME) background may find it more difficult to leave an abusive situation due to cultural beliefs or a lack of appropriate services. Forced marriages, female genital mutilation (FGM) and so called 'honour'-based violence (HBV) are more likely to be prevalent in (although are not limited to) certain communities, including BME communities. Often prefer BME-only services as the service provided is accessible and relevant to them. There may be cultural issues around reporting.
Religion or belief	Certain types of violence do disproportionately impact women from some communities, and these have been listed and outlined above under Race. There may be cultural issues around reporting.
Sex	National data shows that the majority of people experiencing domestic violence and abuse are women. Many services are focused on providing support for women experiencing domestic violence or abuse, however, men can find it difficult to ask for advice, so need additional support. The safe house is available for men experiencing DA.
Sexual orientation	There are differences between those within the LGBT grouping, with bisexual and transgender people more likely to experience domestic violence and abuse than lesbians and gay men, as well as those with a disability or poor mental health. There may be issues around reporting.
Other (Ex forces, People involved with substance misuse, Ex – offenders, Homeless people, Gypsy and Traveller	Women working in the sex industry, traveller women and other minority groups can feel less believed and supported by agencies. Women offenders can be given a poor service from agencies because of their previous convictions or their involvement in prostitution. People who have used drugs (particularly in the last year) have higher odds of being a victim of domestic abuse and sexual assault. Alcohol use has also been found to be associated with a fourfold risk of violence from a partner.

6. REPORTING AND RECORDING SYSTEMS

- 6.1. Cases of domestic abuse will be recorded on our anti-social behaviour and safeguarding database and monitored as detailed above.
- 6.2. Where there is an identified risk to staff this will be identified by using our warning flag procedure.

7. DATA SHARING AND CONFIDENTIALITY

- 7.1. We are a member of the Devon Wide Domestic Violence Protocol and have a designated Domestic Abuse Lead who is the main point of contact for domestic

abuse cases. The Domestic Abuse Lead will treat the information disclosed in the strictest of confidence in line with Cornerstone's Confidentiality Policy.

7.2. Cornerstone will only disclose information to other agencies with the prior written consent from the victim but will make personal information available when required to do so by a Court or under the Devon and Cornwall Police domestic abuse information sharing protocol. However, in these circumstances it may be reasonable and appropriate to disclose information:

- The victim is considered at risk.
- A vulnerable adult is considered at risk.
- A child is considered at risk.
- A member of staff is considered at risk.
- Information about the perpetrator could reduce risk.
- A formal request is made through the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (also known as Clare's Law).

7.3. Cases being recorded on our anti-social behaviour database will be restricted to housing staff and confidential information of a sensitive nature will be held securely by the Director of Housing. Staff should be aware that perpetrators of domestic abuse may attempt to access information and/or control communication.

8. MONITORING AND REVIEW

8.1. Legislation and changes to the law or good practice will be monitored regularly and any changes will be reflected in this policy accordingly.

8.2. Cases of domestic abuse will be reviewed monthly by the Domestic Lead, Housing Officer and Director of Housing.

Appendix 1 - Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance

[Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

Appendix 2 - Further information and support:

- Victim Care Unit - <http://www.victimcaredevonandcornwall.org.uk> or 01392 475900
- Fear Free Fear Less – Devon wide one to one victim support for adults and children experiencing domestic abuse. [Devon - FearFree](#)
- <https://www.fearfree.org.uk/refer/devon/>
<https://www.fearfree.org.uk/refer/devon/>
 24-hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline (England) – run by Refuge, freephone: 0808 2000 247. British Sign Language access from 10am - 6pm on weekdays. The website offers a live chat service between 3pm - 10pm on weekdays.
<https://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk>
- Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse – an organisation that supports those who have lost a family member (or friend) through fatal domestic abuse. [What we do - AAFDA](#)
- Ask for ANI – a codeword scheme for victims to access support from the safety of their local pharmacy.
- • Broken Rites – a group offering mutual support and information to separated and divorced spouses and partners of clergy, ministers, and Church Army Officers.
- • Childline – a free 24-hour service providing support for anyone under 19 in the UK. 0800 1111.
- • Clinks – an organisation that supports the voluntary sector working with people in the criminal justice system and their families. Clinks have a directory of services, although it is not exhaustive, and are experienced in supporting women who have suffered domestic abuse.
- Dogs Trust Freedom Project – a specialist dog fostering service for victims fleeing domestic abuse.
- • Galop – a specialist organisation and LGBT anti-violence charity offering support to LGBT victims.
- • Hestia Respond to Abuse Advice Line – a specialist advice line supporting employers to help staff experiencing domestic abuse on 0203 879 3695 or via email Adviceline.EB@hestia.org. 9am - 5pm Monday to Friday.
- • HM Prison and Probation Service Unwanted Prisoner Contact Service – a service for victims to contact HMPPS to report unwanted letters, phone calls, texts or messages from a prisoner or to proactively seek to stop contact. You may access the service by completing the form on Gov.uk using the link gov.uk/stop-prisoner-contact (24 hr access) or call 03000606699 or via email unwantedprisonercontact@justice.gov.uk Monday to Friday 9am – 4pm. The Unwanted Domestic Abuse Act 2021 Statutory Guidance 148

Prisoner Contact service also offers victims the opportunity to contact HMPPS to raise concerns about a prisoner being released.

Hourglass – a specialist organisation aiming to end the harm, abuse and exploitation of older people in the UK. Their helpline can be accessed by phone on 0808 808 8141, text on 07860 052906 or email helpline@wearehourglass.org.

Jewish Women's Aid – a specialist organisation supporting Jewish women and children affected by domestic abuse. Their helpline is 0808 801 0500 and is open Mondays to Thursdays from 9.30 am - 9.30 pm (excluding Jewish holidays and bank holidays).

- Karma Nirvana 'Honour'-Based Abuse helpline – a specialist organisation supporting victims of 'honour'-based abuse and forced marriage. Their helpline is 0800 599 9247 and is open 9am - 5pm, Monday to Friday.
- Loving Me – a specialist organisation providing one-to-one online support and advocacy for high risk Transgender, Gender Queer and Non-Binary victims of domestic abuse.
- ManKind Initiative – a specialist organisation supporting male victims of domestic abuse and their children. • Men's Advice Line – run by Respect. 0808 801 0327 open Monday to Friday 9am - 8pm or email info@mensadvice.org.uk
- Muslim Women's Network – a specialist organisation supporting Muslim women and girls.
- National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse helpline – 0800 999 5428 Monday to Friday 10am - 5pm.
- National Stalking helpline – run by Suzy Lamplugh Trust. 0808 802 0300 9.30am – 4pm Monday to Friday.
- NSPCC – The UK's leading children's charity working to prevent abuse, rebuild children's lives and support families.
- NSPCC FGM helpline – 0800 028 3550.
- Operation Encompass Teachers' National Helpline – 0204 513 9990 open 8am - 1pm Monday to Friday. The helpline is for school staff to seek guidance and discuss queries they may have following an Operation Encompass notification and in preparation for supporting a child experiencing domestic abuse.
- Paladin – an organisation that provides support for victims of stalking. Domestic Abuse Act 2021 Statutory Guidance 149
- Parental Education Growth Support (PEGS) – an organisation that supports victims of child to parent abuse.
- Rail to Refuge – a scheme providing free rail travel to refuge accommodation for women, men and children fleeing domestic abuse through a member organisation of Women's Aid, Welsh Women's Aid, Imkaan or Respect (which runs the Men's Advice Line).
- Rape Crisis England and Wales – an organisation representing rape crisis centres across England and Wales which provide support for women and girls of all ages who

have experienced any form of sexual violence. Their telephone number is 0808 802 9999. Their website also offers a Live Chat service.

- Refuge – an organisation operated by an all female staff that provides support for all victims of domestic abuse and violence against women and girls.
- Respect – an organisation that works with male victims of domestic abuse and domestic abuse perpetrators. Respects operates the Men's Advice line, a confidential helping for male victims of domestic abuse and the Respect Phoneline for domestic abuse perpetrators and those supporting them.
- Restored – a specialist organisation working to tackle domestic abuse by partnering with churches and Christian organisations.
- Revenge Porn helpline – open between 10am and 4pm, Monday to Friday. 0345 600 0459 or help@revengepornhelpline.org.uk.
- Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) – centres providing medical, practical and emotional support to all victims of sexual assault.
- Sign Health Domestic Abuse Service – a specialist domestic abuse service to support the health and wellbeing of deaf people.
- Sikh Women's Aid – an organisation providing support for Sikh women and girls.
- Southall Black Sisters – an organisation providing support for ethnic minority victims and migrant women. Their helpline is 020 8571 9595 and is open between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday.
- Surviving Economic Abuse – a specialist organisation dedicated to supporting victims of economic abuse, working in partnership with Money Advice Plus to provide money and debt advice to victims experiencing financial difficulties. Domestic Abuse Act 2021 Statutory Guidance 150
- UK Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) – a Government policy unit leading on forced marriage policy, outreach and casework. FMU operates a public helpline to provide advice and support to victims and potential victims of forced marriage. 020 7008 0151.
- Women's Aid Federation England (WAFE) – an organisation supporting women affected by domestic abuse. Their website offers a Live Chat service available Monday to Friday 10am to 6pm and Saturday and Sunday 10am to 6pm. Women's Aid also provide a directory, listing local support services across the UK, although it is not exhaustive it is updated regularly.

Appendix 3 - Local Housing Authority points of contact

These are the single points of contact for domestic abuse and Sanctuary schemes

Exeter CC

Emergency Out of hours telephone: 0845 3511060

Telephone: 01392 265769

Email: housing.advice@exeter.gov.uk

East Devon DC

Emergency Out of hours telephone: 01395 516854

Telephone: 01395 517469

Housingneeds@eastdevon.gov.uk

Mid Devon DC

Emergency Out of hours telephone: 01884 255255

Telephone: 01884 234353

devonhomechoice@middevon.gov.uk

Teignbridge DC

Emergency Out of hours telephone: 01395 516854

Telephone: 01626 215347

housingoptions@teignbridge.gov.uk

Appendix 4 - Devon Registered Housing Providers - Domestic Abuse Code of Good Practice (August 2014)

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1. Aims of code

The purpose of this code is to ensure that housing professionals take a victim centred consistent approach to domestic violence and abuse. It aims to raise awareness, improve responses and encourage partnership working with specialist agencies. It also sets out standards of good practice for providers across Devon.

2. Definition of domestic abuse (as of August 2014 – review date)

The Home Office defines domestic abuse as:

“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 can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional

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 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.” *

* This definition, which is not a legal 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.

Family members are defined as mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister and grandparents, whether directly related, in-laws, common-law or step family.

- Child on child under 16 within the family (not a domestic abuse incident)
- Adult on child under 16 within the family (child abuse investigation unit)
- Adult on adult over 16 within the family (domestic abuse incident)
- Partner on partner both aged 16 and over (domestic abuse incident).

This code also recognises definitions provided by the following agencies:

- Devon and Cornwall constabulary
- Domestic abuse support services

For the purposes of the code of practice, the term domestic abuse refers to all incidents of domestic abuse and violence.

3. Policy on domestic abuse

Each participating housing provider pledges to:

- Treat domestic abuse seriously
- Record all incidents of domestic abuse and provide statistical information at a senior management level
- Adopt a strategic approach in responding to domestic abuse and review this approach annually
- Develop working relations with specialist agencies and make appropriate representation and contribution to discussions at MARAC and local domestic abuse forums
- Monitor the amount of referrals made to MARACs
- Ensure that the response to those affected by abuse provides them with support and protection
- Make and record referrals to MASH for children experiencing or witnessing domestic abuse
- Provide a supportive and enabling environment which encourages people to report domestic abuse to the police
- Take a multi-agency approach in holding perpetrators accountable for their actions and ensure that the full range of civil and criminal remedies are pursued
- Work co-operatively to enable households experiencing domestic abuse to access a range of housing and support options
- Be sensitive to the diverse needs of victims and children considering their age, disability, gender, race or ethnicity, religion or belief, sexual orientation and transgender
- Recognise socio economic factors which may impact on those experiencing domestic abuse, such as low income, low literacy or numeracy skills, rural isolation or caring status
- Recognise additional barriers to those experiencing domestic abuse who are frightened that reporting will bring unwanted attention to their personal circumstances.

4. Confidentiality

Participating housing providers are committed to maintaining the highest standards of confidentiality in order to ensure the safety and well-being of both victims and staff. Staff will treat information disclosed in the strictest confidence. The following points should be considered:

- The health, safety and wellbeing of the victim will be paramount in the recording of information
- Staff must ensure that they act in accordance with their own organisation's confidentiality policy
- Staff must not pass on information relating to a victim's tenancy to a third party, irrespective of their stated relationship with the victim, except where the tenant has given written consent

- Staff must place a written record of any requests for information about a victim on their file
- Staff must tell the victim about any requests for information they receive from members of the public at the earliest opportunity
- Staff must not take messages or accept gifts on behalf of the victim
- Housing providers would not normally disclose information to other agencies without prior consent from the victim, but will make personal information available when required to do so by a court, where there's a statutory obligation, or under the Devon and Cornwall police domestic abuse information sharing protocol (see 5 below)
- Otherwise, no third party can have access to personal information without the consent of the individual. However, sharing information is permissible under certain circumstances. The Public Interest Disclosure Act, Data Protection Act, Crime and Disorder Act support responsible sharing of information in the public interest
- In exceptional circumstances where the health and safety of an individual is at risk, in particular children, and it is not feasible to obtain the individual's consent, then information that would normally be considered confidential may be passed on to appropriate agencies.

In cases of domestic abuse it would be reasonable to disclose information if:

- The victim is considered at risk
- A vulnerable adult is considered at risk
- A child is considered at risk
- A member of staff is considered at risk
- Information about the perpetrator could reduce risk.

5. Sharing of information

Devon and Cornwall domestic violence and abuse information sharing protocol covers statutory authorities, registered housing providers, voluntary and charitable organisations.

The protocol is concerned with the exchange of personal data and aims to:

- Identify the level of incidences of domestic abuse within the Devon and Cornwall area
- Encourage the maximum number of victims of domestic abuse, and repeat victims to be guided by the recording agency into multi agency assistance and support
- To allow those agencies involved with the victim to have sufficient information to contribute to an effective outcome
- To allow those agencies involved with the victim to feedback information to the partnership to ensure re-offending is identified and minimised.

Participating housing providers should sign up to the protocol and ensure staff are aware of how to use it.

6. Dealing with disclosures

Housing staff may be a victim's first and only contact regarding a domestic abuse issue. It is therefore essential that people who experience domestic abuse feel safe and supported in order that they can talk about their experiences. The initial response from front-line staff will be very important and providers need to adopt a clear procedure to ensure that appropriately trained staff know what to do, who to contact, what information and advice to give and who in their organisation is responsible for investigating and reporting.

Staff should:

- Listen and take the victim seriously
- Agree a safe, confidential and comfortable environment for victims to discuss their situation
- Offer the choice of speaking to a woman or a man
- Be confident to raise the subject of domestic abuse where they suspect abuse is taking place and ask appropriate questions
- Be aware of the signs of abuse
- Remember that the safety of the victim and any children is paramount
- Check where information should be sent and what contact numbers are safe to use

It can add to a victim's distress if they have to keep repeating the detail of their experience in order to access services. When victims have given written consent, information can be shared with the usual agencies on the person's behalf to ease access to services.

Referrals to the following agencies should be considered:

- Specialist domestic abuse services
- Police – domestic abuse unit
- MARAC
- MASH
- Local housing advice centre
- Social services
- Educational welfare
- Legal services
- Equality and diversity support groups.

Information provided through MARACs and other sources should be kept securely and electronic exchange should be through secure email.

Care needs to be taken regarding access to this information internally. The housing provider should have their own internal procedures for the storage, transportation and access to information connected to domestic abuse cases.

7. Supporting victims

Victims may be concerned about losing their home, possessions, family support, friends, social networks and employment. They potentially have the upheaval of moving and changing their children's schools. They may have been financially dependent on the abuser and worried about future income and resources. Being drug and alcohol dependent as a way of coping with the situation could also be a factor

Victims may require information on the legal and service-based options available to them. They may find approaching statutory agencies difficult, especially if they have communication difficulties or English is not their first language. The support needs may differ due to their age, disability, gender, race or ethnicity, religion or belief, sexual orientation or transgender. They may also fear reporting will bring unwanted attention to their personal circumstances.

Staff should:

- Liaise with the appropriate agencies to identify the range of housing solutions available to them
- Assess whether there is a need for urgent legal sanctions or MARAC/MASH referral
- Work with the victim to identify their wants and needs
- Where possible respect the victims wishes and decisions
- Be sensitive to the individual needs of the victim
- Encourage the victim to work with agencies to increase their awareness, knowledge, self-esteem and confidence
- Where appropriate, offer continued support and contact with the victim or refer to specialist services
- Be aware that the abuse may continue after the relationship has ended
- Be aware that the victim may return to an abusive relationship or choose to remain in it
- Be aware that victims may have patterns of behaviour and enter into further abusive relationships
- Be aware that victims may suffer from mental health and substance abuse issues
- Be aware that victims may have been witnesses of abuse and may not consider that they are victims of abuse.

Domestic abuse always has a negative impact on children. If there are concerns regarding the welfare or safety of children or vulnerable adults, staff should make a MASH referral or discuss the issue with their line manager or designated child protection officer, who should refer to the MASH.

8. Supporting staff

Dealing with a case of domestic abuse or disclosure can have a significant impact on staff. Housing providers should ensure that line management support and counselling services are available to any affected staff.

9. Awareness raising

Housing providers should aim to adopt the following strategies to raise awareness of domestic violence and abuse:

- Nominate a domestic abuse lead
- Identify trained staff with specialist knowledge
- Include information on local services to tenants via residents' handbooks, newsletters and other formats
- Make relevant local information available for both staff and service uses
- Offer information in a variety of formats
- Invite local domestic abuse services to attend staff briefings
- Provide briefing to tenants or residents' panels (where appropriate) to inform them of the impact of domestic abuse.

10. Training

In order to provide a comprehensive approach to the issues of domestic abuse, it's essential to properly and sensitively train staff, ensuring that they are aware of the key issues and appropriate legislation.

Organisations should seek specialist advice and train all staff to the appropriate level.

Staff should be made aware of this code at their induction. Specialist multi agency domestic violence and abuse training can be accessed from the Devon safeguarding children's board and the Devon safeguarding adults' board. The Torbay safeguarding children's board, and the Torbay safeguarding adults' board. The Plymouth safeguarding children's board and the Plymouth safeguarding adults' board.

11. Preventing homelessness

Domestic abuse is a significant cause of homelessness. In many cases early intervention can prevent homelessness. Housing providers have a duty under the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 to co-operate with Local Authorities in their homelessness functions, and should endeavour to prevent homelessness through whatever means possible.

The Local Authority housing department has a duty to provide advice and information about homelessness and homelessness prevention. However, all housing staff should be aware of the range of options that are available through their own and partner organisations, including:

- The use of legal remedies to remove the perpetrator from the accommodation
- The use of injunctions to ensure the perpetrator does not return to the property
- The use of sanctuary schemes to improve the security of accommodation and help the victim feel safe in their home

- Accessing alternative accommodation via all housing options available at the time.

12. Funding security measures and sanctuary schemes

Housing providers should have a facility to provide emergency lock changes and other security measures within a 24-hour time frame where appropriate to do so. Costs should not be recharged to the victim if there is evidence of domestic abuse or the matter has involved the police.

Sanctuary schemes exist to help victims of domestic abuse feel safe and secure when they choose to remain in their own homes, by improving the security with professionally installed security measures. The scheme is not an immediate response to the problem, but a long-term solution to prevent homelessness and improve a victim's quality of life.

Housing providers will work in conjunction with partner agencies on a case-by-case basis to ensure that every sanctuary provision is tailored to meet the needs and circumstances of the individuals involved. They should consider carrying out the proposed improvements to security using their own resources or contractors.

Identifying funding for sanctuary schemes, either solely or jointly with other agencies is part of the housing provider's responsibility.

The Devon sanctuary scheme protocol 2013 has been produced jointly by the Devon housing options partnership and Devon and Cornwall police. This could be a useful document to consult and provides a single point of contact within each of the ten Devon Local Authority housing departments. A copy of the Devon sanctuary scheme protocol can be downloaded from the Devon Strategic Housing Group website at www.dshg.org.uk and is located within the Devon and Cornwall Housing Options Partnership page.

13. Dealing with perpetrators

Housing providers should adopt a clear policy for dealing with perpetrators of domestic abuse. This should include housing applicants, existing tenants and non-tenant occupants.

In particular, tenancy agreements should clearly read that any form of domestic abuse will not be tolerated and that enforcement will be considered.

In reviewing existing tenancy agreements, housing providers will aim to include a clause that specifies Grounds 12 (breach of one or more terms of the tenancy) and 14 (nuisance) of Schedule 2 of the Housing Act 1988 (as amended 1996) and ground 17 (false information) where a tenant has not disclosed a history of domestic abuse, as grounds for possession in cases where domestic violence and abuse has been evidenced.

An example clause could be:

“You must not use or threaten to use violence or abuse, including psychological abuse, against any other person living with you, nor against their children. If you do, and that person has to leave the property because of violence, or threats of violence or abuse against them, we may take steps to evict you from your home and will have no responsibility to re-house you”.

Staff should never contact a perpetrator about the alleged abuse as this may put the victim and any children at greater risk. However, if the perpetrator does contact the provider, staff should:

- Be aware of confidentiality and the victim's safety, and not disclose any information that may jeopardise this
- Not act as a go-between
- Where appropriate and in conjunction with other specialist agencies aim to assist the perpetrator in changing their behaviour by enrolment in perpetrator programmes
- Where appropriate advise the perpetrator that the consequences of their actions may mean they are not eligible for further housing via Devon home choice.

Should a perpetrator make a counter claim of domestic abuse a report should be logged and the case investigated. It is particularly important to make links with partner agencies when investigating the case and to base decisions on evidence.

14. Evaluation

Housing providers will carry out an evaluation of their service when a case is closed. Someone not involved in the case should conduct the evaluation over the phone. The evaluation should be used to improve the service.

15. Reviews and monitoring

The participating partners will review this document on an annual basis, or sooner if any changes to legislation affecting the document are implemented.

Each participating partner will take responsibility for this document and for arranging the annual review meeting, by rotation.

Domestic abuse leads should monitor their organisation's compliance with practical suggestions offered in this code of practice.

Partners should record and monitor domestic abuse cases reported to them.

Partners will provide the name of their domestic abuse lead and update a nominated person if the details change.

16. Participating registered housing providers

- Astor Communities
- Cornerstone

- DHC
- Magna Housing Group
- North Devon Homes Ltd
- Plymouth Community Homes
- Sanctuary Housing
- Sovereign Housing Association Ltd
- Spectrum Housing Group Ltd
- Tamar Housing Society
- Tarka Housing
- Teign Housing
- West Devon Homes
- Westcountry Housing

17.Certification

Devon registered housing providers

Domestic Abuse Code of Good Practice

By signing below, the participants accept and will adopt the statements included in this code of good practice and agree to maintain the specified standards.

Participating organisation	
Domestic abuse lead's name	
Job title	
Signature	
Date	

One signed copy of this certificate should remain as part of the document and held by the participating housing provider, and one returned to the reviewing organisation.

Review date	August 2014
Review undertaken by	DCH