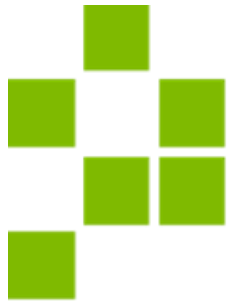


Domestic Abuse Policy



Sandwell
Metropolitan Borough Council

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Owner	<i>Jim Brennan</i>		
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Purpose	<i>This policy sets out Sandwell Council's approach to preventing domestic abuse and putting in place frameworks that identify vulnerable tenants. It also sets out our approach to supporting those residents in our housing service who are survivors/victims of domestic abuse.</i>		

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1. Purpose

- 1.1 This policy outlines how Sandwell Council's Housing service will provide assistance and support to individuals who are experiencing, or at risk of, domestic abuse.
- 1.2 The policy also details how the council, through collaboration with victims and other support agencies, will work to ensure the safety and security of domestic abuse victims and their families, while also taking action to address and support perpetrators.

2. Scope

- 2.1 This policy applies to all current or prospective tenants of Sandwell Council, as well as all council staff involved in responding to domestic abuse cases within the Housing service.

3. What is Domestic Abuse to Sandwell Council?

- 3.1 Sandwell Council defines domestic abuse as any pattern of controlling, coercive, or threatening behaviour, violence, or abuse between individuals aged 16 or over, who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. This includes physical, psychological, sexual, financial, emotional abuse, harassment, stalking, and online abuse. Domestic abuse is typically a pattern of controlling behaviour, often escalating over time, and may continue after separation.

3.2 Key Definitions:

- **Coercive Control:** A pattern of threats, humiliation, intimidation, or other abusive behaviours used to control a victim's actions and isolate them from support.
- **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM):** A non-medical procedure causing harm to female genitalia.
- **Financial Abuse:** Controlling behaviour that uses financial means to limit a victim's freedom, such as misusing money or restricting access to resources.
- **Forced Marriage:** Pressuring someone into marriage through threats or violence. This is illegal.

- **Harassment and Stalking:** Persistent unwanted attention, including threats, following, or damaging property. These are criminal offences.
- **Honour-Based Violence:** Abuse or violence used to defend or protect perceived family or community "honour."
- **MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference):** A meeting of professionals to share information on high-risk domestic abuse cases.
- **Online Abuse:** The use of technology to stalk or control victims, such as tracking, spying, or threatening online.
- **Physical Abuse:** Any unwanted physical contact, including hitting, kicking, or strangling.
- **Psychological/Emotional Abuse:** A pattern of manipulation and intimidation that damages the victim's sense of self-worth, including criticism, isolation, and control over finances or actions.

4. Policy Statement

4.1 Our policy

In Sandwell, we are committed to ensuring that no individual lives in fear of violence, abuse, or harassment from a partner, former partner, or any member of their household or family.

All reports of domestic abuse made to the council will be handled with empathy, respect, and without judgment. Any disclosure of abuse will be treated with the utmost seriousness, and appropriate advice and support will be provided as a matter of priority.

As part of our commitment, Sandwell Council will:

- Ensure that individuals experiencing domestic abuse have immediate access to the relevant support services.
- Work in partnership with victims of domestic abuse and other agencies to provide coordinated support for those currently or previously affected.
- Ensure that children and young people impacted by domestic abuse are provided with timely access to appropriate services.

- Provide clear guidance to victims on how to access legal protections, including civil and criminal law services, to help prevent further abuse.
- Take appropriate safeguarding measures if there is a concern that a child or vulnerable adult is at risk due to domestic abuse.
- Direct perpetrators of domestic abuse to support services that aim to prevent the reoccurrence of abusive behaviours and reduce risks to victims and their families.

4.2 Responding to disclosures of domestic abuse

The following principles will guide the handling of disclosures of domestic abuse:

- Specialist support and advice will be available from the Housing Solutions Team and/or Black Country Women's Aid (BCWA) at any stage when engaging with a victim of domestic abuse.
- A same-sex officer will be offered to ensure the victim feels comfortable during discussions.
- Safety and confidentiality are fundamental to all services provided to individuals experiencing domestic abuse. Consent will be sought before disclosing any information. However, disclosure without consent may be necessary for the protection of vulnerable individuals, including children, or if required by law. Confidentiality will only be breached when absolutely necessary.
- Children should not be present during discussions where detailed information about domestic abuse is being shared.
- If a victim chooses not to act on the advice provided, officers will remain supportive, non-judgmental, and will encourage them to seek assistance or report any safeguarding concerns at any time in the future.
- Officers will acknowledge that evidence may not always be immediately available. In such cases, the victim's account will be accepted without insisting on proof.
- Following any disclosure of domestic abuse, a trained officer will conduct a Domestic Abuse, Stalking, and Honour-Based Violence (DASH) risk assessment. Consent will be obtained for referrals to Black Country Women's Aid, and such referrals will be actioned where consent is provided.

- Where victims choose to remain in their homes, additional security measures may be implemented to mitigate risks and ensure their safety. Sandwell Council participates in the Sanctuary Scheme, a collaborative initiative with the police, Fire and Rescue Service, and major Registered Social Landlords, designed to support individuals at risk of domestic abuse.

4.3 Housing Needs

In cases of domestic abuse, individuals may, where safe to do so, remain in their current home. However, temporary sanctuary or emergency accommodation may be required in certain circumstances.

The Tenancy Management Team will assess the situation and agree on the most appropriate course of action. Safeguarding measures will be implemented to ensure the safety of those affected, and referrals will be made to specialist support services for domestic abuse.

If rehousing is deemed necessary, the Tenancy Management Team will determine if the individual meets the criteria for Band One priority under the Housing Allocations Policy. Band One priority can only be awarded by a Housing Solutions Operations Manager.

In urgent cases requiring temporary accommodation, an officer from the Housing Solutions Team will contact the individual to assess housing needs and provide support. If refuge accommodation is required, arrangements will be made on the individual's behalf.

4.4 Perpetrator accountability

Sandwell Council acknowledges that perpetrators of domestic abuse are fully responsible for their actions and will take all necessary steps to hold them accountable. In accordance with relevant legislation and safeguarding protocols, the Council will use the powers and tools available to address the behaviour of perpetrators effectively.

The safety of survivors is paramount, and the Council will ensure that actions taken against perpetrators do not increase the risk of harm to those affected. In cases where appropriate, the Council will

engage with services and initiatives designed to hold perpetrators accountable and support them in addressing the root causes of their behaviour. This may include referral to specialist interventions that focus on rehabilitation and behaviour change.

4.5 List of Local Contacts and Services in Sandwell

In Sandwell, a wide range of support services are available for individuals experiencing domestic abuse, as well as for those concerned about someone who may be affected. In addition to the resources outlined below, further information and guidance can be accessed through the [Domestic Abuse](#) section on our website

Support in Sandwell:

- [Black Country Women's Aid](#) provides a range of services and support to **men and women** experiencing domestic abuse. You can call them **24 hours a day** on **0121 552 6448**.
- They provide a full range of services including access to emergency accommodation, access to legal advice, court support, counselling, rape and sexual violence services.

Housing:

- For advice on housing including ways to keep safe in your home, re-housing or obtaining a place in a refuge you can call our Housing Options service on 021 368 1166.
- For help to find emergency accommodation outside normal office hours call 0121 569 6883 or visit the [housing section of this website](#).

West Midlands Police:

- [West Midlands Police](#) is committed to addressing all reports of domestic abuse with the utmost seriousness.
- In case of an **emergency**, always dial 999. For **non-emergencies**, please contact the police at 101.

4.6 List of National Organisations and Charities

Help for women

- [Refuge](#) offers women and children a range of support services.
- [Rights of Women](#) works to attain justice and equality by informing, educating and empowering women on their legal rights.
- [Women's aid](#) is the key national charity working to end domestic violence against women and children.

Help for men

- [The Men's Advice Line](#) is a confidential helpline for all men experiencing domestic violence by a current or ex-partner. This includes all men, in heterosexual or same-sex relationships.
- [Mankind](#) offer support for male victims of domestic violence or domestic abuse.

Help for children and young people

- [The Hideout](#) is a space for children and young people to understand domestic abuse, and how to take positive action if it's happening to you.
- [This is abuse](#) - find out more about abuse, seek help and have your say.

LGBT+ help

[Galop](#) offer support for LGBT+ people experiencing domestic violence or abuse.

Forced marriage and honour based violence

[Karma Nirvana](#) is a registered charity that supports victims and survivors of forced marriage and honour based abuse.

Female genital mutilation

[The FGM National Clinical Group](#) are a UK based registered charity dedicated to working with women who have been affected by FGM and other difficulties.

Help for your pets

[RSPCA Pet Retreat](#) Advice and pet fostering services for families fleeing domestic abuse.

General support and advice

- [The Citizens Advice Bureau](#) helps people resolve their legal, money and other problems by providing free, independent and confidential advice.
- [Community health services](#) - find community and voluntary health services near you.

5. Development of Policy

- 5.1** Sandwell Council recognises that effective communication is key to preventing domestic abuse. As part of this commitment, we will consult with our residents on a draft of this policy. Residents will have the opportunity to provide feedback both online and in person.
- 5.2** By inviting residents to share their input, Sandwell Council aims to deepen its understanding of domestic abuse. This will also enable us to better connect with vulnerable members of our community.
- 5.3** We are committed to providing clear and transparent information, ensuring that all relevant details are easily accessible to residents on our website.
- 5.4** We will collaborate closely with our Domestic Abuse team to ensure that this policy aligns with other domestic abuse policies across the council, as well as with national standards and guidelines.

6. Related Documents

- 6.1** The following documents should be considered in conjunction with this policy:
- [Antisocial Behaviour \(ASB\) Policy](#)
 - [Safeguarding Policy and Procedures](#)

- [Dealing with Disclosures of Domestic Abuse Procedures](#)
- [Sandwell Council's Domestic Abuse Strategy](#)
- [Housing Allocations Policy](#)
- [Sandwell Neighbourhoods Domestic Violence and Abuse Directory](#)
- [Domestic Abuse Guidelines for Council Employees](#)

7. Legal Framework

7.1 This policy will comply with the following applicable laws and legislation:

- Housing Act 1996
- Family Law Act 1996
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Human Rights Act 1998
- General Data Protection Regulation Act 2018
- Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014
- Homeless Reduction Act 2017
- Equality Act 2010
- Care Act 2014
- Clare's Law/Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme
- Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004
- Female Genital Mutilation Act 2004
- Crime and Security Act 2010
- Domestic Abuse Act 2021

8. Equality and Diversity

8.1 Sandwell Council will ensure equal and fair access to our services; we will do this by taking into consideration the individual needs of our tenants, their family or other persons living with them. We will ensure that individual needs are considered throughout the Neighbourhood Management process and make reasonable adjustments where necessary.

8.2 The Council will treat people fairly and with dignity and respect.

- 8.3 All staff are trained in Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion to embed understanding about where we may need to adapt normal policies, procedures, and ways of working to accommodate resident's individual needs. This is mandatory training which is monitored by our Learning and Development Team. Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Framework also meets our duties under the Equality Act 2010.
- 8.4 The draft Equality Impact Assessment completed for the Good Neighbourhood Management Policy has identified no negative impacts, with positive impacts identified for some protected characteristics as this Policy will promote understanding and good relations within neighbourhoods.

8.5 Intersectionality

Sandwell Council recognises the concept of Intersectionality. This policy will be mindful of and respond to how groups' and individuals' social and political identities result in unique combinations of discrimination and privilege.

8.6 Reasonable Adjustments

Sandwell Council will support the needs of our diverse residents by making reasonable adjustments to our Domestic Abuse processes, which could be a physical change or change in work practices to avoid any disadvantage to a resident in accessing this policy.

Examples of reasonable adjustments include:

- We will provide information in appropriate alternative formats (e.g. large print).
- We will risk assess and re-prioritise duties through considering the vulnerabilities or individual needs of the household where identified.
- We will use plain language.
- This policy is published on our website, and residents can do the following:
 - Change colours, contrast levels and font size.
 - Zoom in up to 300% without text spilling off the screen.
 - Access the policy from a smart phone, tablet, laptop, or PC.

Customers can also request that we make any other reasonable adjustments in the following ways:

- in person
- in writing for example by email, by post, text
- by telephone
- by a family member when we have been given permission to do so; and or
- a member of staff may suggest for one to be made, when they are aware it will support the customer needs.

For more information, please refer to Sandwell's [Reasonable Adjustments Policy](#).

9 Monitoring and Review

9.1 All information used in the writing of this Policy is up to date and in accordance with current legislation.

9.2 This Policy will be reviewed periodically or sooner if there are significant changes in legislation, management, a major incident or if it is no longer suitable.

10 Policy Document Version Control

Version	Date	Description	Updated By	Approved By
0.1	November 2024	First draft of document produced	Rebecca Fisher	
0.2	March 2025	Second draft	Louis Bebb	
0.3				