

Title of policy:	Domestic Abuse Policy (customers)
Version:	1.5
Purpose:	To providing a responsive flexible service to those suffering from or experiencing domestic abuse in the home
Updated:	January 2025
Next review:	January 2027
By:	Head of Supported Housing

Introduction

North Star are committed to providing an excellent responsive flexible service to customers experiencing domestic abuse.

The Home Office has domestic abuse high on its agenda and in response to this, in 2014 has introduced a Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme along with Domestic Violence Protection Notices and Orders to further protect potential and current victims of Domestic Abuse. With this in mind North Star believe in adopting a multi-agency approach to ensure that all necessary and available steps are taken in supporting those experiencing domestic abuse.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 sets out clear commitments to raise awareness of domestic abuse and further improve the effectiveness of the justice system in providing protection for victims. The bill strengthens support to victims of domestic abuse which includes children.

North Star are committed to working with multi agency approaches inclusive of local authority safeguarding teams and the police in our approach to Domestic Abuse.

We specifically work with specialist services which include Harbour, Wearside Women In Need (WWIN), Changing Lives and we also work in partnership with the honour based violence and forced marriage project (HALO). Partners of HALO have been working together to develop a framework including practical changes ahead of the recent criminalisation legislation.

Definition of Domestic Violence or Abuse

The following is a definition of domestic abuse: “Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial, coercive and controlling and emotional or honour based) between adults aged 16 or over, who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender”.

Intimate partners will apply to those in a relationship, whether married or not.

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

Examples of Domestic abuse can include:

Coercive controlling behaviours	An act or pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation, intimidation. Giving the perpetrator power over the victim – Coercive control is a criminal offence in it's own right.
Psychological/emotional abuse	Could include abuse about gender, race, religion, age, humiliation, bullying or intimidation, verbal violence or threats, isolation, degradation, restricting contact with friends or relatives. Stalking via social networks.
Physical Violence	Slapping, pushing, kicking, wounding, causing harm with weapons, attempted murder or murder.
Sexual violence	Rape and non-consenting sex acts.
Financial Violation	Denial or rights of restriction of personal freedom, i.e. with-holding money.
Forced marriages	When an individual faces physical pressure to marry (e.g. threats, physical violence or sexual violence) or emotional and psychological pressure (e.g. being made to feel like you're bringing shame on your family).
Female Genital Mutilation	Comprises all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.
Honour Based Violence	A form of domestic abuse which is perpetrated in the name of so called 'honour' . The honour code which it refers to is set at the discretion of male relatives and women who do not abide by the 'rules' are then punished for bringing shame on the family.
Economic Abuse	Behaviours interfering with an individuals ability to acquire, use and maintain economic resources such as money, transportation and utilities.

Whilst domestic abuse can occur regardless of a person's gender there has been a noted increase in recent years of recorded instances of reported domestic violence and abuse. In a crime survey for England and Wales 5% of adult (6.9% women and 3% men) aged over 16 experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2022. This equates to approx. 2.4 Million adults (1.7million female and 699,000 men) The number of police domestic abuse recorded crimes has risen by 7.7% compared to the previous year.

Aims of the Policy

The overall aim of the Domestic Abuse policy are to:

- Support those who are experiencing domestic abuse
- Raise awareness of domestic abuse and its impact.
- Raise awareness of services we engage with in the wider community.



- Ensure that all the staff of North Star understand the important role they can play in tackling domestic abuse and to provide a consistent approach across the business.

It is important for the organisation to be proactive and promote services so they are accessible and victims of domestic abuse know they can get support.

North Star is committed to providing support and assistance to its clients and within the constraints of its resources and within the terms of legal precedent.

The support may include referrals to specialist agencies and independent advice or counselling or signposting to specialist help lines and services.

All cases of domestic abuse will be dealt with on an individual basis and in a confidential manner unless we are required by law or because of child protection or vulnerable adult issues (Safeguarding) to share information. All cases of domestic abuse where there are children residing in the household should be treated as a safeguarding issue and should be dealt with via the Group's safeguarding policies and procedures.

Our Approach

North Star takes the safety of its customers seriously and are committed to assisting individuals experiencing domestic abuse. We recognise that domestic abuse can happen to anyone regardless of their gender.

Where an instance of domestic abuse is disclosed the person experiencing the abuse will have an officer from the group appropriately allocated (i.e. same sex worker if requested) within 24 hours of the report being made. The officer will ensure the person experiencing the abuse is in a safe environment to disclose the information required.

North Star acknowledges that a person deciding to report domestic abuse may experience shame, guilt or embarrassment. Therefore we will take a non-judgemental and unconditionally supportive approach.

Where an individual wishes to make contact with the police, staff from North Star will assist the person in doing so.

We will deal with information in a confidential manner, only disclosing information where safeguarding issues occur in relation to children or vulnerable adults.

Victims of domestic abuse will be advised or signposted to services provided by Harbour, Wearside Women in Need, Changing Lives, **My Sister's place** or HALO.

If requested the allocated officer will contact the services on behalf of the person suffering domestic violence or abuse, arrange appointments and travel as appropriate. We will also provide out of hour's emergency national and local help line numbers and provide victims with a discreet advice leaflet.

We will provide information on how to access emergency accommodation if the individual's safety is in question.

Front line staff will receive training on domestic abuse issues to ensure a consistent, appropriate and empathetic approach.

We will have trained dedicated domestic abuse champions available to support staff who may have received a disclosure of domestic abuse from a customer.

Under no circumstance will we ask victims to prove they have experienced domestic abuse.



We understand it can sometimes take more than one attempt for a victim of domestic abuse to end a relationship. In these instances we will act in a non-judgemental manner, ensuring that the information and assistance remains available for a future date whenever the victim feels ready to leave the relationship.

Service Promise - Customers

We will promote a zero tolerance to domestic abuse. As a landlord North Star are committed to the reduction and prevention of domestic abuse.

Tenancy Issues

North Star will not tolerate perpetrators of domestic abuse. A clause within the organisations tenancy agreements highlights that we may take action against any perpetrator of domestic abuse remaining in the property after the victim has left. The safety of the victim will always remain paramount and this course of action will only be taken after considering all the facts of each individual case and in full consultation with the victim.

Some examples of behaviours that will be addressed:

- Inflicting violence or threatened violence against another person living with you or living elsewhere.
- Harassment or the carrying out of mental or sexual abuse which makes anyone who lives with you leave the home.

Action which may be considered include:

- Injunctions
- possession proceedings
- exclusion orders
- Enforcement of tenancy conditions

Any action considered will be proportional and risk-assessed in consultation with the victim and via multi agency working where appropriate.

Generally no contact will be made with the person responsible for the violence/abuse. However, we may need to contact that person with regards to tenancy issues. The safety of the victim must always be considered prior to this course of action. Staff must at all times consider their own safety too and adhere to lone working policies and procedures.

Target Hardening

If a victim wishes to remain in their home we can provide assistance with measures to improve security within the home. We prioritise spend within our maintenance budget to fund this work. This can include:

- Reinforcing windows
- Fitting burglar alarms
- Fitting shatter proof film to windows
- Fitting additional locks

We can do this in conjunction with the Police, Community Safety teams and specialist domestic violence projects.



We have a Service Level Agreement with Middlesbrough Council which gives explicit consent for target hardening measures to be installed to ensure victims receive a fast response.

Rehousing

Alternative security and legal routes to housing will be explored; however a victim will never be forced to take these options.

North Star tenants who are fleeing domestic abuse may be offered a priority move to a property on a like for like basis if they are unable to remain in their tenancy. This will prevent homelessness and reduce risk.

If it is not possible to prevent homelessness we will contact the relevant local authority and arrange for them to meet the victim as a priority. Where necessary we will request consideration for emergency accommodation. For women or women and children emergency accommodation usually consists of refuge services. In the instances of emergency accommodation for men this will usually be on the basis of B&B accommodation, however through our partnerships and networks we will seek signposting to gender specific services.

Related Legal Framework for Information and Consideration

DVDS – Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme – Clare’s Law

Domestic Violence Protection Orders – Legal

Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003

Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act 2004

Gender Equality Duty 2007

Domestic Abuse Act 2021

Document Control

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