

Domestic Abuse Policy

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Approved by:	Customer Services Management Team
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1 Overall purpose

This policy sets out the guiding principles for the direction that Leeds Federated will follow in respect of domestic abuse.

The Domestic Abuse Policy supports Leeds Federated's vision of 'Building Futures Together' and is aligned with the following objectives of the Association:

- Objective 1: Sustain**
- Objective 2: Engage**

2 Context

The Social Housing White Paper states "a home should provide safety, security and dignity". It further states our responsibility as a housing provider to have a clear policy on our approach to tackling domestic abuse.

This policy defines domestic abuse and outlines the approach we will take when domestic abuse is reported or identified.

Leeds Federated recognises that Domestic Abuse impacts a significant number of lives. In 2021 – 2022, 2.3 million adults experienced domestic abuse in England and Wales; 35% of cases took place within a joint tenancy, or shared accommodation with the abuser.

We recognise that our staff or contractors are often the only professionals who may enter the home of someone who is being abused.

We recognise the impact domestic abuse has on individuals and families and the need to take reports seriously and act accordingly.

3 Background

Leeds Federated does not tolerate domestic abuse and we recognise the importance of supporting customers whilst also ensuring that any action we take is done with their consent.

This policy outlines our person-centred approach, which ensures that we create a culture where customers who have experienced or witnessed domestic abuse feel supported when making a report.

We will collaborate with external partners when managing cases of domestic abuse.

This policy applies to all customers, all staff, board members and contractors, sub-contractors and agents working for Leeds Federated.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the

- Domestic Abuse Procedure
- Safeguarding policy and procedure
- Antisocial Behaviour policy and procedure
- Transfer policy and procedure
- Domestic Violence Policy for staff

4 Introduction

As an organisation we recognise that domestic abuse is a widespread problem that cannot be ignored, and we promote the right for everyone to live their life free from fear, intimidation, violence and abuse and therefore:

- We will treat all reports of domestic abuse seriously and as far as possible, confidentially
- We will help refer people to appropriate agencies to ensure they access the support they need
- We will make referrals when there are concerns that involve children or vulnerable adults
- We encourage staff to use their professional curiosity if they suspect there to be an issue and not just take things at face value

5 Domestic Abuse Policy

Definition

Domestic abuse is the behaviour of a person towards another person if they are both aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other and the behaviour is abusive.

The Home Office defines domestic abuse in two parts;

- The first criteria states that both the person who is conducting the behaviour and the person to whom the behaviour is directed towards must be aged 16 or over. Abusive behaviour directed at a person under 16 would be dealt with as child abuse rather than domestic abuse.
- The second criteria states that both persons must be “personally connected.”

People are considered to be “personally connected” if:

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

Domestic abuse can impact on a child who sees, hears, or experiences the effects of the abuse. Such are victims of domestic abuse where they are related to or under parental responsibility of either the abuser or the abused.

Types of Domestic Abuse

We have listed broad categories which capture a range of different abusive behaviours, including physical, emotional, and economic abuse. We have specifically included economic abuse to demonstrate that it is a distinct type of abuse.

Physical Abuse

Can include hitting, punching, kicking, slapping, hitting with objects, pulling hair, pushing or shoving, cutting, or stabbing, restraining, spitting, strangulation, choking.

Sexual Abuse

Includes any sexual acts to which a person has not consented to or is not able to consent to, the refusal to practice safe sex or the refusal to use contraception.

A child under 16 cannot consent to sexual activity and therefore any such acts constitute as a criminal offence.

Controlling or Coercive Behaviour

Can include

- monitoring the victim/survivor’s daily activities and behaviour.
- the victim/survivor’s access to money (see Financial abuse).
- Isolating the victim/survivor from friends, family or professionals.
- Refusing to interpret for the victim/survivor.
- Denying access to medication.
- Using substances to control the victim/survivor through dependency.
- Using children to control the victim/survivor, for instance threatening to take the children away.
- Threatening to expose sensitive information.

Harassment or Stalking

Can include

- Following the victim/survivor.
- Contacting or attempting to contact the victim/survivor through any means.
- Monitoring the victim/survivor on the internet, such as tracking someone's location.
- Loitering in a public space.
- Watching or spying on a person.

Financial or Material Abuse

Financial abuse includes -

- stealing or denying access to money or possessions,
- fraud,
- exploitation,
- coercion into lending money,
- misuse or misappropriation of property,
- controlling money and bank accounts,
- making a victim/survivor account for all their expenditure,
- running up debts in a victim's name,
- allowing no say on how monies are spent,
- refusing to allow them to study or work.

Emotional or Psychological Abuse

Making someone feel unhappy, humiliated, afraid or devalued by others, threats of harm or abandonment, isolation or withdrawal from support network or services.

Discriminatory Abuse

May manifest itself as any other category of abuse however what makes it discriminatory is related to a persons

- age
- gender
- gender assignment status
- ethnicity
- religion
- sexual orientation
- disability
- cultural backgrounds
- appearance

Online abuse

Online platforms are increasingly used to perpetrate domestic abuse. Online domestic abuse can include behaviours such as:

- the monitoring of social media profiles or emails

- abuse over social media such as Facebook or Twitter
- the sharing of intimate photos or videos without consent
- the use of GPS locators or spyware

The definitions are not exhaustive and other behaviours may be considered abuse and will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Warning Signs

General warning signs of domestic abuse

People who are being abused may:

- Seem afraid or anxious to please their partner
- Go along with everything their partner says and does
- Check in often with their partner to report where they are and what they are doing
- Receive frequent, harassing phone calls from their partner
- Talk about their partner's temper, jealousy, or possessiveness

Warning signs of physical abuse

People who are being physically abused may:

- Have frequent injuries, with the excuse of "accidents"
- Frequently miss work without explanation
- Dress in clothing designed to hide bruises or scars (e.g. wearing long sleeves in the summer or sunglasses indoors)

Warning signs of isolation

People who are being isolated by their abuser may:

- Be restricted from seeing family and friends
- Rarely go out in public without their partner
- Have limited access to money, credit cards, or the car

Warning signs of psychological abuse

People who are being abused may:

- Have very low self-esteem, even if they used to be confident
- Show major personality changes (e.g. an outgoing person becomes withdrawn)
- Be depressed, anxious, or suicidal

Impact of Abuse on a Third Party

Abuse may also affect someone indirectly. For instance, a customer who has previously experienced domestic abuse, witnessing the abuse of a neighbour may be significantly impacted.

We will signpost those affected indirectly for support. We will consider an internal transfer for a customer affected in this way, where the abuse continues, and the direct victim/survivor does not engage in support.

Responding to reports

We may receive reports from a range of sources such as, the person living with abuse, the perpetrator, the police, contractors or other third-party agencies.

We will treat all reports of domestic abuse seriously, sympathetically and in confidence (although in certain cases this may not be possible if we are obliged to inform other agencies due to the nature of the abuse). We will explain this to the person reporting.

We will treat cases independently, and take appropriate action depending on the situation, ensuring that any action is victim/survivor led.

It might be that more information is needed. This is true especially where it has been brought to our attention by a third party or where it is suspected that domestic abuse is taking place due to noise reports or repeated repairs.

We will seek professional advice from relevant agencies in cases where we need additional direction as to the best way to resolve the matter for the victim/survivor.

When an individual experiencing domestic abuse discloses this to a member of staff, we will listen and focus on the choices of the individual. The Domestic Abuse procedure will be followed to ensure the individual can access appropriate support and to ensure we safeguard vulnerable individuals.

Action against Perpetrators

We will take appropriate action against a perpetrator as long as doing so does not compromise the safety of the person who is experiencing abuse. We will collaborate closely with partner agencies to keep them informed and take their guidance on the most appropriate action to take.

We may consider rehousing the perpetrator if in doing so it allows the victim to remain in their home and it is deemed to be the safest way to remove the perpetrator from the immediate area.

This is not intended to reward abusive behaviour but in giving them a home it might reduce their need to return to the previous address where the abuse was taking place. This will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Domestic Abuse against staff or by Staff

Leeds Federated will do what it can to support victim/survivors and their families of domestic abuse. Information on where support can be obtained is promoted throughout the office and individuals are encouraged to seek specialist help.

We will support affected staff on an individual basis to help them gain the support that they need and ensure their safety and wellbeing.

Staff who are responsible for causing domestic abuse may face criminal or disciplinary action. Action taken will be based on the nature of their conduct and the extent to which staff, members of the public or customers are affected. Staff should refer to the Domestic Abuse Policy for Staff and speak to a manager or colleague if they have any suspicion or concerns regarding this matter.

We will meet our statutory safeguarding requirements in line with our existing policies and procedures where there are safeguarding concerns about a vulnerable resident or customer (refer to Safeguarding Policy).

6 Communication Plan

Leeds Federated will:

- Ensure that all staff are aware of the policy and any changes through staff induction and team meetings.
- Ensure that all visiting staff are aware of their responsibility to make reports of concerns of, or identified domestic abuse and are clear on the action they may need to take.
- Ensure that customers are advised of any relevant policy reviews through general communication methods.

7 Implementation

The Customer Services Management Team are responsible for ensuring that this policy is implemented and reviewed.

It is the responsibility of all Leeds Federated staff to ensure that their work is conducted in accordance with this Policy. This will ensure that the Domestic Abuse Policy is delivered consistently.

Training sessions will be delivered for staff to ensure they are confident in identifying and responding to reports of domestic abuse. Refresher sessions will be delivered on a yearly basis.

This Policy will be reviewed every three years or earlier if necessary to ensure it is meeting its overall purpose and supporting the objectives of the Corporate Plan.

The policy applies to all staff, including senior managers, paid staff, volunteers, agency staff, students and anyone working for or on behalf of Leeds Federated.

8 Monitoring, evaluation and reporting

Leeds Federated will monitor, evaluate, and report on the activities undertaken to deliver this Policy through:

- Staff supervision and management (e.g., 1:1s, team meetings, feedback)
- Monitoring any learning outcomes from Safeguarding cases in relation to this process
- Balanced Scorecard meetings

- Annual safeguarding report to the Operations Committee

9 Equality Analysis

An Equality Analysis for the policy has been completed.