

DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY

1 POLICY STATEMENT

- 1.1 Fabrick Housing Group is committed to providing a high quality service to the victims of domestic abuse. We are actively involved in a number of multi-agency domestic abuse arrangements and firmly believe that no one agency can work effectively in isolation and that robust multi-agency working is the right approach in tackling domestic abuse.
- 1.2 It is recognised that domestic abuse can take place in the following circumstances:
- Within heterosexual relationships;
 - Within same sex relationships;
 - Between various members of the household e.g. son/daughter being violent towards parent.
- 1.3 Research shows however, that in the majority of cases, women report the highest proportion of domestic abuse incidents.
- 1.4 Applicants who seek advice due to domestic abuse will receive good quality advice and information to assist them in making informed choices about their future. This will be achieved through a holistic multi-agency approach.
- 1.5 We will ensure that no individual group or community is socially excluded or disadvantaged in accessing these services.

2 REFERENCE MATERIAL

2.1 External

Legislation and Regulation

- Crime and Disorder Act 1998;
- Data Protection Act 1998;
- Homelessness Act 2002
- Homeless Strategy;
- Lettings Policy;
- Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003;
- Housing Act 2004;
- Family Law Act 1996;
- Children Act 1989.

Guidance

- KLOE 7: Allocations and Lettings;
- KLOE 8: Homelessness;
- KLOE 6: Tenancy and Estate Management.

2.2 Internal

Business plan/corporate objectives

Partnership Working

We will also aim to provide good quality homes with improved security to help reduce crime and anti-social behaviour, through the following policies and procedures:

- Anti-social behaviour policy and procedure;
- Equality and diversity strategy;
- Homelessness strategy;
- Tenancy Management policy and procedure;
- Respect Agenda;
- Sub-regional lettings policy;
- Vulnerable Persons policy.

3 DEFINITIONS

3.1 We have adapted the following definition of domestic abuse “any incident of threatening behaviour, abuse or violence (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender of sexuality.

3.2 Examples of domestic abuse can include all or some of the below:

Physical violence or threat of physical violence.	Slapping, pushing, kicking and stabbing, attempted murder or murder.
Sexual violence.	Rape and non consensual sex acts.
Emotional or psychological violence.	Intimidation, isolation, verbal violence, humiliation, degradation, threat of violence not allowing friends or relatives to visit or phone, destruction of belongings, threat of legal sanctions e.g. deportation, custody of children etc.
Financial violence	Denial of rights or restriction of personal freedom e.g. withholding money or medical help.

4 POLICY CONTENT

- 4.1 We will, where possible and practicable, ensure that victims of domestic abuse are interviewed by officers of the same sex. Women and men fleeing domestic abuse will also be referred to specialist support agencies within the Local Authority area.
- 4.2 All relevant frontline staff will receive training on domestic abuse issues on a regular basis to ensure a consistent and sympathetic approach.
- 4.3 Erimus and Tees Valley Housing attend the multi-agency risk assessment conference within Middlesbrough (MARAC) to ensure that information is shared with relevant agencies in order to effectively minimise the risk for domestic abuse victims and identify solutions through this multi-agency approach.
- 4.4 Examples of behaviour that will be addressed:
- Inflict violence or threaten violence against any other person living with you or living elsewhere;
 - Harass or carry out mental or sexual abuse which makes anyone who lives with you leave the home.
- 4.5 Erimus and Tees Valley Housing tenants who are fleeing domestic violence may be offered a management let to a property on a like-for-like basis if they are considered at risk to remain in their tenancy or given additional priority on the sub-regional choice based lettings scheme.
- 4.6 Objectives
- 4.6.1 Erimus and Tees Valley Housing will continue to work in partnership in order to deliver an excellent service to people fleeing domestic abuse. Partnership agencies in Middlesbrough include My Sisters Place, Middlesbrough Domestic Violence Forum, Middlesbrough Police, and harbour and through a multi agency approach at MARAC.
- 4.6.2 All employees dealing with domestic abuse will be trained on the importance of maintaining confidentiality to ensure the safety of the applicant. Officers will only involve or share information with other agencies after explaining this to the applicant if and when this is required, unless:
- We are required to do so under the Child Protection Act, or
 - We are required to do this by law.
- 4.6.3 If an interpreter is required this will be arranged with the language line, to ensure confidentiality.

- 4.6.4 To ensure men and women fleeing domestic abuse are empowered to make their own decisions about their future they will be offered a range of information, support and housing options. This information will be, wherever possible, provided within the surroundings of the local support unit.
- 4.6.5 Erimus and Tees Valley Housing aim to deal with all domestic abuse cases as a priority, efficiently and sensitively. This will be achieved through partnership working, compliance with the legislative framework, adopting good practice initiatives and by training officers to a high standard in this service area.
- 4.6.6 Alternative security through and legal routes to housing will be explored, however, a victim will never be forced to take these options if s/he does not feel safe.
- 4.6.7 We will not ask victims to prove that they have experienced abuse.
- 4.6.8 No contact will be made with the person responsible for the abuse in relation to the investigation. However, Erimus and Tees Valley Housing may need to contact the alleged perpetrator with regards to tenancy issues. The safety of the victim would be considered prior to this course of action.
- 4.6.9 Applicants fleeing domestic abuse can be offered emergency accommodation; this will usually be a refuge for women fleeing domestic abuse. Men fleeing domestic abuse may be offered a hostel. Bed & Breakfast accommodation will be used as a last resort if no other suitable temporary accommodation is available.
- 4.6.10 Staff will receive regular training and awareness in key areas so that abuse is recognised. This includes forced arranged marriages and honour crimes.
- 4.7 Information and Support
 - 4.7.1 Victims of domestic abuse will be provided with an information pack providing useful contacts for other relevant agencies, together with the homeless out of hours contact number. This includes a number of agencies working with people fleeing domestic violence for both males and females offering an advice line, floating support and emergency refuge for women.
 - 4.7.2 Assistance will be provided to applicants who need help in completing the application form, including those who have language or literacy difficulties and those with special needs e.g. applicants with a physical disability, major medical needs and older/vulnerable people. Vulnerable customers will be identified from the questions on the application form or during office or telephone interviews with applicants or staff. Home visits will be arranged with applicants who have

difficulty in accessing the scheme. Officer safety will be considered prior to a home visit being arranged.

- 4.7.3 Erimus and Tees Valley Housing will ensure that all policies and procedures are fair, accountable and provide equality of opportunity around gender, ethnicity, age, disability and sexuality.

5 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

- 5.1 A full equality needs impact assessment has been completed on this policy. Erimus and Tees Valley Housing will ensure that all policies and procedures are fair, accountable and provide equality of opportunity around gender, ethnicity, age, disability and sexuality.

6 CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT AND CONSULTATION

- 6.10 Consultation on the Domestic Abuse policy has been undertaken with Erimus staff, residents, service users, stakeholders and partner organisations. External domestic abuse agencies were provided with a copy of the policy and an opportunity to provide feedback. All feedback has been incorporated into the policy.

7 MONITORING AND REVIEW

7.1 Monitoring

- 7.1.1 Monitoring results will be used to inform future policy reviews in this area. All reviews will consider whether:

- The current policy adheres to legislative and regulatory requirements and reflects current good practice;
- The aims and objectives of the policy being met;
- The current policy outcomes meet the needs and aspirations of our diverse customer base;
- Service users are aware of and understand the policy and believe it to be consistent and fair;
- The policy provides sufficient choice for customers;
- The service offers value for money;
- Partnership arrangements are working effectively.

Overall monitoring and review of the policy will be undertaken in consultation with:

- Staff groups;
- Board members;
- Existing and future service users;
- Resident and community groups;
- Partners, local voluntary agencies and other statutory services as relevant.

7.2 Review

- 7.2.1 This policy will be reviewed every two years or in-line with legislative or regulatory changes.
- 7.2.2 The Group Director of Operations will be responsible for ensuring that reviews of this policy are carried out.
- 7.2.3 Tenant representative groups will be involved and consulted in any review of this policy in-line with Erimus Housing's policy on tenant participation and consultation.

8 RESPONSIBILITY

- 8.1 It is the responsibility of the Chief Executive and senior officers to ensure that:
- All staff are aware of Erimus and Tees Valley Housing's policies;
 - All staff are trained on the policies;
 - Monitoring records are maintained in accordance with Erimus and Tees Valley Housing's
 - Customers are adequately informed of the policies;
 - Appropriate action is taken against employees whose actions are inconsistent with this policy.
- 8.2 The Group Director of Operations retains the overall responsibility for the implementation of this policy.
- 8.3 The service head is responsible for the operational delivery of this policy and the associated procedures. This includes responsibility for monitoring and review, staff awareness and training, policy development and communication to customers.