



# **DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY**

May 2021

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### Our Vision

Excellent housing in vibrant communities.

### Our Values

#### Respect

We see the positive in everyone, especially our tenants. We treat everyone fairly, regardless of age, race, gender, sexuality or background. We ask for opinions even if we know we might not like what we hear. And we address people's concerns in any way we realistically can.

#### Integrity

What we say in public is the same as what we say behind the scenes. If we say we'll do something, we mean it. Our tenants can count on us to solve their problems and make sound decisions.

#### Aspiration

We want the best for all our current and future tenants. We're not afraid to strive for things that won't be easy – or try things that haven't been done before. We seek out opportunities and welcome change. If it doesn't turn out as planned, we learn and improve again. And then we try again.

### Our Strategic Objectives

- A) Building and sustaining popular neighbourhoods
- B) Creating and supporting greater life opportunities for all
- C) Developing greener spaces and community wellbeing
- D) Being a dynamic and listening community partner
- E) Treating people equally and with respect

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This policy sets out how Queens Cross Housing Association (QCHA) views domestic abuse, and how we will respond to and seek to deal with any reports of such abuse affecting tenants or members of their households. QCHA recognises that our staff may also experience domestic abuse and the principles of this policy equally apply
- 1.2 Since June 2018 we have been signed up to the Chartered Institute of Housing's *Make a Stand pledge*, and this policy is part of our commitment to take action to support tenants and our staff who are victims of domestic abuse.

## **2. Scope**

- 2.1 This policy is applicable to anyone working for or on behalf of Queens Cross Housing Association – board members, employees and contractors' employees – to be aware of the possibility of domestic abuse whether relating to tenants and/or members of their household; or colleagues. Where this is observed or suspected it should be reported directly to Debbie Milne, Neighbourhood Manager (Lead on ASB/Hate Crime and Domestic Abuse) or alternatively the line manager who will forward the report on for action and monitoring.

## **3 Definition of Domestic Abuse**

- 3.1 We use the Scottish Government definition of domestic abuse, which is:

*Domestic Abuse, as gendered based violence, can be perpetrated by partners or ex partners and can include physical abuse (assault and physical attack involving a range of behaviour), sexual abuse (acts which degrade and humiliate women and are perpetrated against their will, including rape) and mental and emotional abuse (such as threats, verbal abuse, racial abuse, with-holding money and other types of controlling behaviour such as isolation from family and friends. It can be characterised by a pattern of coercive control often escalating in frequency and severity over time.*

## **4. Key Principles**

- 4.1 QCHA encourages all tenants and household members to report domestic abuse, whether they are victims or witnesses. We will treat all reports of domestic abuse seriously and will deal with this sensitively in the strictest confidence.

### **4.2 Prevention**

We aim to prevent domestic abuse happening in the first place, therefore we will:

- make all tenants aware of our policies relating to rehousing, relationship breakdown and where applicable the implications of joint tenancies;
- publicise this domestic abuse policy to all tenants and employees, highlighting the consequences for perpetrators
- provide advice and assistance

## 4.2 Survivor-centred approach

QCHA adopts a 'survivor-centred' approach in dealing with domestic abuse.

- We will deal with all reports in a non-judgemental manner and in confidence.
- We will not require victims to take legal action or to contact the Police before we provide assistance.
- We will only take action with the victim's consent. The exception to this general rule is where we consider a child is at risk in any situation or if there is a high risk of serious harm to anyone involved.

## 4.3. Options for action

It is recognised that every reported case of domestic abuse will be different. Our response will therefore be tailored to the individual circumstances and needs of the victim. When a tenant or household member reports domestic abuse all available options will be discussed and considered with them, including:

- making arrangements for their immediate personal safety;
- reviewing and where possible improving the safety and security of their existing accommodation, to enable them to remain there safely;
- reporting incidents to the Police, which may result in criminal action against the perpetrator;
- where appropriate, take legal action against the perpetrator

The safety of the victim and their dependents will be our priority. An Action Plan setting out further actions will be agreed with the victim, and we will regularly contact the victim and keep them updated with progress.

Detailed are examples of support we can provide:

### **Remaining in the property**

We will offer assistance to tenants who choose to remain in their home where it is safe to do so and will work in partnership with support organisations (eg Womans Aid, Police Scotland). We can assist to undertake a range of measures to help victims feel safer in their home such as fitting external lighting, additional door locks and security chains. We will not recharge tenants for lock changes or any damage caused as a result of domestic abuse. Where appropriate we will charge such costs to the perpetrator.

### **Emergency rehousing**

If required, we will provide advice and assistance on accessing emergency accommodation provided by GCC Homeless Service or by a women's refuge. We will provide a referral letter where appropriate and advocate on our tenants behalf.

### **Permanent rehousing**

Any requests for permanent rehousing as a result of domestic abuse will be prioritised under our allocation policy. In such cases the suspension policy will not be applicable and we will review and determine the action to be taken on a case by case basis. There will normally be a limit on the number of occasions we will offer this.

#### 4.4 **Multi-agency approach**

We will adopt a multi-agency approach in dealing with victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse, to ensure the safety of the victims, meet their needs, co-ordinate available resources, access specialist services, take action against perpetrators and share best practice.

#### 4.5 **Action against perpetrators**

We will work with the Police and other external agencies in dealing with perpetrators of domestic abuse. Action against perpetrators will depend upon individual circumstances. This may include legal action for recovery of possession against a perpetrator, where other members of the household have left the home due to domestic abuse.

### 5. **Responsibilities**

#### 5.1 Responsibilities for this Policy are:

- The Depute Director of Housing is the strategic lead for implementation and review of this policy
- The Neighbourhood Manager (Lead on Domestic Violence) is responsible for the operational implementation of this policy including monitoring, reporting and training
- Members of the Leadership Team are responsible for ensuring that staff adhere to this Policy
- All employees of the Association are responsible for maintaining accurate records of information.

### 6. **Monitoring and Review**

#### 6.1 This Policy will be subject to a review every three years, or sooner in the event of any relevant legislative or regulatory changes or best practice guidance.

### 7. **Related Policies and Documents**

Tenancy Sustainment Strategy

Allocation Policy

Anti Social Behaviour Policy

Employee Terms & Conditions – offers safe leave to support employees who have suffered domestic abuse and allows them to seek help / support for themselves and their families

## Legislation & References

Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018

Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2011

Equally Safe, Scottish Government Strategy 2016: Scotland's strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls.

Clare's Law (giving woman and their families the right to know if a partner has a violent past

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