

# **Sovereign Domestic Abuse policy**

May 2024 (ODG, RBP,CPLT, SLT & DAHA Input)  
Review: May 2025

# Domestic Abuse policy

## Scope

This policy applies to all customers who reside in properties owned or managed by Sovereign Housing Association Limited and/or Sovereign Living Limited only. Customers who reside in properties owned or managed by Sovereign Network Homes and its subsidiaries should refer to the applicable policy<sup>1</sup>.

## Why we have this policy

Some of our customers and their families may suffer from domestic abuse. We want to do all we can to support our customers to address their issues in partnership with other agencies.

We'll always take time to understand the effect the abuse is having, making sure that our response is victim-survivor centered. We'll be helpful, sensitive and supportive – providing quick and straightforward advice to reduce the risks they face.

Domestic abuse is a breach of tenancy or lease and where the victims agree we'll take action.

Our policy explains what domestic abuse is, what approach we'll take and how we'll respond to victim-survivor and perpetrators.

Our policy applies to all our customers - tenants and leaseholders.

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<sup>1</sup> Sovereign Housing Association and Network Homes merged on 1 October 2023 to form Sovereign Network Group (SNG). This Policy is not a merged Policy and applies to customers previously associated with Sovereign Housing Association. Integration will take place between October 2023 and April 2025 at which point a merged Policy will come into effect. Sovereign Network Homes and its subsidiaries will follow the applicable Policy.

'Sovereign Network Group' is the trading name of Sovereign Housing Association Limited, a charitable Registered Society under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014, registered with the Financial Conduct Authority No. 7448 and with the Regulator for Social Housing No. 4837. (Registered office: Sovereign House, Basing View, Basingstoke, RG21 4FA.)

# Defining domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between people aged 16 years or over. Who are or have been connected to each other such as married, in a civil partnership, in an intimate relationship or relatives. This applies regardless of gender or sexuality.

Men and women can both be victims of domestic abuse though significantly more women report than men. Domestic abuse can also occur in same sex relationships. Domestic abuse includes psychological, physical, sexual, economic, and emotional abuse, as well as so-called 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage.

Controlling behaviour is a range of acts which make a person subordinate and/or dependent. This involves isolating the victim from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that harms, punishes, or frightens the victim.

Economic abuse is any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on another person's ability to acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or obtain goods or services.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 recognises children as victims of Domestic abuse in their own right if they witness or experience domestic abuse in the home. Where children are experiencing or witnessing domestic abuse this must be reported to Children's Services -often through the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) process.

# Our approach to domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is unacceptable and we'll take firm action against those responsible.

Many victims of domestic abuse don't tell others about the abuse for many years.

So

when they ask for help we'll always:

- make it easy for a victim-survivor to report any incident to us, such as enabling reporting online or through social media
- train our people to spot signs of domestic abuse, to provide guidance and support to victim-survivors
- treat all reports as a priority and respond within one working day
- provide accurate, helpful and supportive advice
- be understanding and sensitive
- think about the impact on them and their family – especially children
- consider any disabilities or cultural issues
- treat reports confidentially (but if we are concerned they or anyone else is at risk of serious harm we'll report the concern to the police or safeguarding team)
- work with other agencies such as specialist support services and the police to make sure our residents are safe
- respect the wishes of the victim, unless this puts them or anyone else at serious risk of harm
- take action against the perpetrator, if they are our resident, to make sure they are accountable for what they have done.

# How we'll respond to reports of domestic abuse

We'll make sure we offer help without making matters worse for the victim or their family.

We'll:

- listen to the person reporting the abuse sympathetically
- protect the identity of each victim-survivor and not disclose their location to a perpetrator
- accept the victim-survivor account and not insist on them providing proof before we respond
- support them in finding advice on the best course of action for them and their family
- not judge a victim-survivor or reduce our service in the future if they decide to stay with the perpetrator. When this is the case we will work with the victims to manage the risks, including making sure safeguards are in place
- agree actions with the victim-survivor, and be clear about what we can and can't do as their landlord
- keep the victim-survivor regularly updated by their preferred method of contact
- offer gender appropriate interviews at a safe location, such as away from the home
- use our legal powers to protect the victim-survivor, such as getting an injunction to keep the perpetrator away from the home
- protect the victim-survivor by carrying out work to improve the security of their home, such as changing locks or fitting alarms.
- provide support to help the victim-survivor to stay in their home or help residents living in our affordable rented properties find a new home if they need to move.
- Where the victim-survivor is an adult at risk of serious harm who meets the care act definitions or a child (including children witnessing domestic abuse in the home) we will need to report our concerns to Social Services – as a Safeguarding concern.
  
- learn from customers experiences and feedback to help us improve our approach

# How we'll respond to perpetrators

Domestic Abuse is a breach of tenancy and we'll:

- support the police and local authority in prosecuting perpetrators by providing evidence. We'll only do this if we have permission from the victim, unless the law makes us do so
- consider temporarily excluding or permanently removing them from our homes where appropriate
- charge them for any damage they've caused to the home.
- refer to perpetrator intervention programmes or other support where available
- share information in line with data protection legislation

Where there is a joint tenancy and a victim is unable to return to their home due to risk of harm we'll take appropriate action to bring that tenancy to an end through the courts. We may also support perpetrators into other accommodation where available and appropriate – to reduce the risk to victim-survivors. Perpetrator guidance is available to teams.

# Working with the police, local authorities and specialist agencies

Whilst we have understanding of DA and staff are able to provide support relating to DA and Housing, specialist services are best placed to support around DA.

So, we will:

- refer those experiencing domestic abuse or the threat of abuse to specialist support, so a risk assessment can be completed and they can gain expert advice, including legal advice
- refer cases to Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) to coordinate the support and protection of the victims and their families.

While we'll always try to get permission from the victim-survivor before we act, we will share information with the police or local authority without a victim's permission if:

- we're concerned that a child or adult is at risk of serious harm
- we have information that could prevent serious harm
- we have information that could help prevent or detect a crime.
- we're required by the law to do this
- share information in line with Data Protection Legislation

When we store or share information we will consider the JAPAN test:

<b>Justified</b>	Is what we're doing justifiable in the circumstances i.e. can we justify the need to collect/store/share/destroy the personal information we are handling?
<b>Authorised</b>	Are we authorised to do this? Or is someone else designated as responsible for managing the recording or disclosure of this personal information?
<b>Proportional</b>	Is what we are doing proportional to the purpose? Could we achieve it by recording or sharing less or no personal information?
<b>Auditable</b>	Have we recorded what we've shared, with whom and why, so there is evidence of our actions?

**Necessary** Is what we are doing necessary or can the end result be achieved in some other way without this disclosure?

### Review

If a customer feels we haven't kept to our Domestic Abuse Policy, they can ask us to review our decisions.

A manager will carry out this review and we'll only do this once.

## Our people

Where our employees have been affected by domestic abuse issues, we'll make sure they have the help and advice they need. Anyone who needs support can contact their line manager or through the Employee Assistance Programme. There is a separate Domestic Abuse Employee Support Policy, available to employees on our intranet.



# Our commitment to residents and employees

At Sovereign, our commitment is to make sure that no individual or group experiences unfair, discriminatory, or prejudicial treatment in recruitment, pay or promotions, housing, or any other service we provide, such as lettings, tenancy advice, repairs or rent collection.

Sovereign strives to be an open, inclusive, and diverse organisation where everyone has a right to be treated with dignity, fairness, and respect. As an organisation we value the diversity and talents of all individuals and the richness that brings to our culture.

We understand the varying needs of our residents and communities and promote equality of opportunity in employment and service provision.

We Deliver appropriate, accessible, and flexible services, being tolerant, understanding and not judging others or their lifestyle choices. We stand up to and challenge prejudice, discrimination, and harassment in all its forms.

We recognise that some people with protected characteristics and intersecting needs experience additional barriers to disclosure or seeking support around Domestic Abuse. We will do our best to identify the needs of these customers, listen and respond in a personalised way.