

OPS012 - Domestic Abuse Policy

MONITORING FORM	
Department	Housing
Department Director	Operations
This policy is applicable to	Housing Management
Author / Owner	Housing Manager
Original Version approved by & date	9/10/2019
Date of last review	9/10/2019
Version number	V1
Date of minor modification	
Period of Review	3yrs
Date of next review	October 2022
Internal /external consultees (if required)	

CONTENTS

	Page Number
1. Introduction	3
2. Aims of the Policy	4
3. Responsibilities	4
4. Policy Framework	5
5. Equality & Diversity	7
6. Availability of Policy	7
7. Monitoring & Reporting	7
8. Complaints	7
9. Other relevant policies and procedures	7
10. Policy Review	7

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This policy sets out how Weslo Housing Management (Weslo) 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. The term 'abuse' covers violence as well as verbal or other forms of abuse.
- 1.2. Weslo believes that domestic abuse presents one of the highest risks to personal safety and is unacceptable. Weslo will therefore take the strongest action possible against perpetrators of domestic abuse where it has the power to do so and with the consent of the victim.
- 1.3. Weslo will deal with all reports of domestic abuse as an emergency and respond to them within 24 hours. Applying a 'survivor centred' approach we will assist the victim to reach a decision which they feel best secures their safety by:
 - reviewing their accommodation
 - enabling the level of assistance they want, and
 - taking action against the perpetrator which the victim and we feel is most appropriate.

Definition

- 1.4. Weslo will 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. Source: National Strategy to Address Domestic Abuse in Scotland, Scottish Partnership on Domestic Abuse, Edinburgh, November 2000.
- 1.5. Controlling behaviour is a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by:
 - isolating them from sources of support;
 - exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain;
 - depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape; and
 - regulating their everyday behaviour.
- 1.6. Coercive behaviour is an act or pattern of acts of assaults, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish or frighten the victim.
- 1.7. Domestic violence and abuse can manifest itself through the actions of immediate and extended family members via unlawful activities, such as forced marriage, 'honour based abuse' and female genital mutilation.

Extended family members may condone or even share in the pattern of abuse. Any such actions are not acceptable, whatever form they take.

2. AIMS OF THE POLICY

2.1 By adopting this policy Weslo aims to:

- improve overall safety and wellbeing by recognising that domestic abuse is a serious crime which has an adverse impact on the health of individuals, families and communities;
- increase awareness and understanding of this issue amongst residents and employees;
- encourage residents and employees to report domestic abuse;
- facilitate early identification of domestic abuse and offer supportive and effective intervention to reduce the risk of harm;
- improve the safety and welfare of adults and children affected by domestic abuse and prevent further incidents by responding rapidly, effectively and consistently to all reports;
- empower victims by providing information on the options available to them;
- improve the response to victims through effective engagement of appropriate external enforcement and support agencies;
- create a consistent approach for recording and monitoring incidents of domestic abuse;
- inform colleagues of best practice when responding to domestic abuse;
- ensure that all staff are clear regarding their roles in tackling and responding to issues around domestic abuse. Equality & Diversity.

2.2. Weslo will ensure that any action taken under this policy complies with our Equality & Diversity policy.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1. Board

- to ensure that Weslo has approved and implemented a policy on domestic violence and abuse that complies with current regulations and guidance.
- To monitor compliance with the policy, through receipt of relevant reports.

3.2 Management

- Chief Executive: To ensure all employees and Board Members are aware of the policy and their responsibilities under it.
- Director of Human Resources: To co-ordinate the provision of any training required to enable employees to recognise and respond to incidents of domestic violence or abuse.
- All other Directors: To ensure that relevant employees are fully aware of their responsibilities under the policy, in particular of the importance of reporting any incidents or pattern they become aware of.

- Employees: to ensure that they are aware of their responsibilities under this policy, and that they implement the policy and procedure when appropriate.

4. POLICY FRAMEWORK

- 4.1. Weslo encourages all tenants and household members to report domestic abuse, whether they are victims of, or witnesses to, such incidents. We will deal with all reports of domestic abuse with sensitivity.
- 4.2. Prevention; as part of our arrangements to prevent domestic abuse we will:
 - make all new tenants aware of Weslo's 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 information within Weslo's office.
- 4.3. Survivor-centred approach; Weslo will adopt a 'survivor-centred' approach in dealing with domestic abuse, i.e. if a person feels they are experiencing domestic abuse we will deal with it under this policy.
- 4.4. Weslo 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.
- 4.5. Weslo 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. Where a person is identified as the victim of domestic abuse, any interaction with them will be guided by best practice guidelines.
- 4.6. Confidentiality - Victims will be encouraged to allow Weslo to share information with other agencies, including the Police and local authority departments, to ensure that the full range of civil and criminal action can be pursued and appropriate assistance provided. However all information provided by the victim will be treated with the utmost confidence and only passed to external agencies with their proper, informed consent.

The exceptions to this will be:

- where we consider a child is at risk in any situation, or
 - if there is a high risk of serious harm to anyone involved, or
 - if we are obliged by law to disclose information. A Manager or Director must approve any disclosure that does not have the victim's consent.
- 4.7. Information will be shared with work colleagues on a strictly 'need to know' basis. We will adhere to all current data protection requirements

- 4.8. Weslo recognises 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;
 - referral to our in-house domestic abuse advocate (Housing Manager);
 - reporting incidents to the Police, which may result in criminal action against the perpetrator;
 - where appropriate, legal action against the perpetrator by Weslo. 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.
- 4.9. **Assistance for victims** – Weslo will take a proactive and sympathetic approach. Each case will have its own challenges and so the type and level of assistance offered will be finalised by the Assistant Housing Management, failing whom the Housing Manager.
- 4.10. **Remaining in the property** - Weslo will advise victims who wish to remain in their own homes of any local 'sanctuary' schemes (i.e. funds available to improve the security of their existing accommodation). We will set aside dedicated discretionary funds for victims, to assistance them in rebuilding their lives and homes.
- 4.11. Weslo will offer assistance to those experiencing domestic abuse by not recharging them for lock changes and damages due to the domestic abuse. Where appropriate we will charge such costs to the perpetrator.
- 4.12. **Emergency rehousing** - Where a resident reporting domestic abuse needs emergency accommodation Weslo will provide advice and assistance on accessing such accommodation provided by the Local Authority or by a women's refuge. We will provide a referral letter where appropriate and advocate on our tenants behalf.
- 4.13. **Permanent rehousing** - Where a resident reporting domestic abuse requests permanent rehousing, Weslo will advise their local authority partners that their application needs to be prioritised in line with the applicants needs and the allocations 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, typically it will only be offered once.
- 4.14. Weslo 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.

4.15. **Action against perpetrators** - Weslo 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.

4.16. Subject to data protection requirements, we will share information with other relevant agencies so that serial perpetrators are identified and dealt with appropriately.

5. EQUALITY & DIVERSITY

This Policy will always be carried out in accordance with Weslo's Policy of Equality & Diversity which aims to promote diversity, fairness, social justice and equality of opportunity by adopting and promoting fair policies and procedures.

6. AVAILABILITY

This policy is available on the Weslo website, to Board and staff members and any other key stakeholders. Copies are available free of charge. A summary of this policy can be made available in other formats and languages.

7. MONITORING & REPORTING

This policy will be reviewed regularly to ensure compliance with applicable legislative changes, changes within the organisation and best practice.

8. COMPLAINTS

Anyone wishing to make a **formal** complaint about the services provided by the organisation should do so as per our complaints procedure.

9. OTHER RELEVANT POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

This Policy relates to:

- Equality of Opportunity and Diversity Policy and Procedure.
- Tenancy Management Policy and Procedures.
- Allocations Policy.
- Rechargeable Repairs Policy and Procedure.
- Termination and Void Management Policy and Procedure.

10. POLICY REVIEW

10.1. This policy will be reviewed every three years, or sooner if legislation or best practice changes requires it.