

Domestic Abuse Policy

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Policy:	Domestic Abuse
Version number:	11.0
Date effective from:	30/04/2025
Policy Owner:	Head of Service
Policy Authors:	Support Manager (VSO/PEO) Operations Manager (Safeguarding)
Accountable Executive:	Executive Director of Customer, People and Engagement
Approved by:	The Executive Team
Equality Assessment:	Yes
Next review of policy due:	Every three years, or as it is deemed appropriate.
Policy Grade:	2
For the full version history of this policy, see the back page	

Please avoid referring to printed versions of this policy.

Printed versions may quickly go out of date – the latest version will be on the Policy Hub or contact the Governance Team. For support and advice regarding the policy, please contact the policy owner.

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1.0 Introduction and Scope

This document outlines our policy in relation to Domestic Abuse and sets out how Gentoo will assist and support any person in one of our properties who are or have experienced Domestic Abuse (DA), this also includes Forced Marriage, FGM and Honour Based Abuse. The Policy operates within our Vision and Values and links to the Safeguarding Adults at Risk Policy and Toolkit, Safeguarding Children Policy and Toolkit, Data Protection Policy, Vulnerability Policy and Community Safety Policy and Toolkit and should be read in conjunction with the following procedures:

- Domestic Abuse Procedure
- Staff Domestic Abuse Policy & Procedure
- Vulnerability Policy & Procedure
- Safeguarding (Children & Adults at Risk) Policies & Procedures
- Community Safety Procedure
- Tenancy Management Policy & Procedure
- Forced Marriage Procedure
- Allocations Policy & Procedure
- Data Protection Policy

Also refer to the following policies and procedures where appropriate to provide support and assistance:

- Hate Crime/Incidents Procedure.
- Malicious Complaints Procedure.
- Illegal Money Lending Procedure
- Anti-Money Laundering Policy & Procedure

Domestic abuse is still largely a hidden crime and measuring the true scale of the issue is difficult. Domestic abuse occurs in all communities regardless of gender, age, disability, gender, race, religion or beliefs, sexual orientation, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity and financial position.

We also recognise that our own colleagues may be experiencing domestic abuse and are committed to supporting them in any way we can. This is addressed in a dedicated policy and procedure.

As a housing provider we are well placed to recognise the signs of domestic abuse. It is essential that we take all reports of domestic abuse seriously and work positively and pro-actively with the victim/survivor and specialist partner agencies to offer support.

In addition, we will seek to assist those who cause harm by perpetrating domestic abuse, who wish to positively change their behaviours by helping them to access support and assistance.

The scope of this policy applies to:

General Needs rented properties	X
Supported Housing	X
Sheltered Housing	X
Leasehold/Shared ownership	X
Rent to Buy properties	X
Market rented properties (domestic)	X
Temporary Accommodation	X
Stock owned but not managed by the Group	X
Communal Areas, including those relating to Leasehold/Shared Ownership properties	X
Commercial Property (offices, depots etc.)	X
Stock managed by Gentoo on behalf of a third party	X
Garages and outbuildings	X

2.0 Our Core Purpose, Vision and Priorities

Our core purpose is to provide safe and decent homes for our customers of today and tomorrow.

Our vision is to provide great homes, strong communities, and inspired people for Sunderland.

The safety of our customers and colleagues will always be our number one priority.

We have identified six further priorities which will guide the delivery of our services. We live our values in everything we do from the boardroom to the front room, to deliver our priorities for our customers.

- We know our customers.
- We provide great homes.
- We help communities to thrive.
- We are a great place to work.
- We spend our money wisely.
- We are well governed.

Our values

Our values are what we stand for and what we want to be known for. They are what makes us, us.

- We care about people.
- We take accountability.

- We shape the future.
- We bring leadership.
- We deliver.

Consumer Standards

We are guided by the Consumer Standards, which describe ways to improve things for people living in Social Housing.

- The Safety and Quality Standard
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safety-and-quality-standard>)
- The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/transparency-influence-and-accountability-including-tenant-satisfaction-measures>)
- The Neighbourhood and Community Standard
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/neighbourhood-and-community-standard>)
- The Tenancy Standard
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tenancy-standard>)

3.0 Regulation and Legislation

The Executive Director (People, Culture & Engagement) will ensure this policy has regard to all legislation, regulation and best practice.

The regulation and legislation applicable to this policy can be found in Appendix 1.

The Policy has been cross referenced with good practice from similar housing organisations via our DAHA (Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance) Membership.

Our Regulator sets out the Neighbourhood and Community Standard which we must meet. Failure to properly discharge these responsibilities could lead to a serious detriment or other judgement from the Regulator if we breach the Standards in place at the time

4.0 Definitions

Statutory Definition of Domestic Abuse

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 part one introduces the first statutory definition of domestic abuse:

Section 1: Definition of ‘domestic abuse’

(1) This section defines ‘domestic abuse’ for the purposes of this Act.

- (2) Behaviour of a person (A) towards another person (B) is 'domestic abuse' if
- (a) A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and
 - (b) the behaviour is abusive.
- (3) Behaviour is 'abusive' if it consists of any of the following:
- (a) physical or sexual abuse
 - (b) violent or threatening behaviour
 - (c) controlling or coercive behaviour
 - (d) economic abuse (see subsection (4))
 - (e) psychological, emotional or other abuse and it does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.
- (4) 'Economic' abuse means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on B's ability to:
- (a) acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or
 - (b) obtain goods or services.
- (5) For the purposes of this Act A's behaviour may be behaviour 'towards' B despite the fact that it consists of conduct directed at another person (for example, B's child).
- (6) References in this Act to being abusive towards another person are to be read in accordance with this section.
- (7) For the meaning of 'personally connected', see Section 2.

Section 2: Definition of 'personally connected'

- (1) Two people are 'personally connected' to each other if any of the following applies:
- (a) they are, or have been, married to each other
 - (b) they are, or have been, civil partners of each other
 - (c) they have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated)
 - (d) they have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been terminated)
 - (e) they are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other
 - (f) they each have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child (see subsection (2))
 - (g) they are relatives.
- (2) For the purposes of subsection (1) (f) a person has a parental relationship in relation to a child if:
- (a) the person is a parent of the child, or
 - (b) the person has parental responsibility for the child.

(3) In this section:

- 'child' means a person under the age of 18 years
- 'civil partnership agreement' has the meaning given by section 73 of the Civil Partnership Act 2004
- 'parental responsibility' has the same meaning as in the Children Act 1989
- 'relative' has the meaning given by section 63 (1) of the Family Law Act 1996.

Section 3: Children as victims of domestic abuse

(1) This section applies where behaviour of a person ('A') towards another person ('B') is domestic abuse.

(2) Any reference in this Act to a victim of domestic abuse includes a reference to a child who:

- (a) sees or hears, or experiences the effect of, the abuse, and
- (b) is related to A or B.

(3) A child is related to a person for the purposes of subsection (2) if:

- (a) the person is a parent of, or has parental responsibility for, the child, or
- (b) the child and the person are relatives

(4) In this section:

- 'child' means person under the age of 18 years
- 'parental responsibility' has the same meaning as in the Children Act 1989 (see section 3 of that Act)
- 'relative' has the meaning given by section 63 (1) of the Family Law Act 1996.

Domestic abuse can come in many forms*, including but not limited to:

- Psychological and Emotional abuse
- Coercive and Controlling behaviour
- Physical abuse
- Technological abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Financial/Economical abuse
- Family and Intergenerational
- LGBTQ+ abuse
- Elder abuse
- Discriminatory abuse (with reference to Forced Marriage)
- Honour-Based Violence and abuse (HBV) *is the term used to refer to a collection of practices used predominantly to control the behaviour of women and girls within families or other social groups to protect supposed cultural and religious beliefs, values and social norms in the so-called name of 'honour'.*

We will work with specialist by and for agencies to offer our customers with protected characteristics the most appropriate, tailored support to ensure their safety and wishes are considered following disclosures of abuse.

5.0 Policy Statement and Reporting

Feeling safe and secure increases the sustainability of neighbourhoods and promotes community cohesion, health and wellbeing and fits with the Groups vision and values.

At Gentoo, we believe that our customers and household members should not live in fear of violence or abuse from a partner, former partner, family member, or another member of their household.

Customers and/or household members reporting domestic abuse to us will be treated in an empathetic, supportive, and non-judgemental way. A referral to our dedicated team of Victim Support Officers will be discussed and offered to anyone making a disclosure of Domestic Abuse.

We will work with statutory and voluntary organisations to support victims and act against perpetrators, where safe and appropriate to do so.

We will follow the relevant Safeguarding policies and procedures if we believe an Adult at Risk or a Child is at risk due to an abusive relationship, bearing in mind that children can now recognised as a victim of domestic abuse in their own right.

Gentoo recognise that domestic abuse is largely a gendered crime and support the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) agenda. However, we also acknowledge that domestic abuse can be perpetrated towards men.

We will provide staff with training, clear guidance, policies and procedures so that they can deal effectively with cases of domestic abuse, use the appropriate tools and powers, and are aware of the wider issues associated with domestic abuse.

6.0 Use of Tools and Powers

Every case of domestic abuse is different, and therefore a flexible approach will be taken according to the wishes and needs of the victim, the severity of the abuse, any additional criminality, shared multi-agency information and the tools and powers available to us.

Perpetrators of domestic abuse can access specialist support if they acknowledge their behaviour, want to change and consent to a referral being made.

7.0 Multi Agency and Partnership Working

Gentoo recognise that dealing with DA is not the sole responsibility of one agency. Multi agency working is an important tool in taking a holistic approach to tackling DA in our communities. We will work with other relevant agencies to combine resources, share information and take a partnership approach to assess risk and effectively safety plan.

Gentoo representatives will attend multi agency meetings specifically held to support and address domestic abuse and victim/survivors safety, including but not limited to:

- MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences)
- MATAC (Multi-Agency Tasking and Coordination)
- MAPPA (Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements)
- Safeguarding Meetings

All meetings are highly confidential. Information is shared and action plans agreed to safeguard the victim and their family, and to ensure that appropriate measures are put in place for the perpetrator.

8.0 Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA)

The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) aim to improve the response of the housing sector to domestic abuse through the introduction and adoption of a standard of good practice, and through undertaking an accreditation process.

Gentoo are founder members of DAHA since its inception in 2014 and have achieved accreditation as required by members every 3years.

9.0 Policy Delivery

Reporting incidents: Domestic Abuse can be reported to us in different ways, including in person, in writing, over the phone, by email, via a third party, text and on our website.

Gentoo will respond to disclosures of domestic abuse in an unbiased, non-judgmental way, victim/survivors are not required to involve the Police or provide crime reference numbers in relation to this. This also applies if they require lock changes, repairs or priority moves because of domestic abuse.

We are committed to the principles of diversity and inclusion throughout the organisation and aim to:

- Meet the needs and choice of people from all backgrounds
- Ensure that our services are relevant, responsive, and sensitive to the needs of our existing and future customers
- Ensure that all sections of the community in which we work have equal access to our services.

Our Domestic Abuse Policy and associated Procedures ensure that customers are treated as individuals with fairness and respect.

An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for this policy.

10.0 Confidentiality, Information Sharing and Data Protection

We will only disclose information to third parties once we have the consent of the victim/survivor to do so. We may, however, have a legal obligation to pass information on, for example to the Police or other relevant agencies.

We will treat all information received in a private and confidential manner, and this policy fully complies with the Group's Data Protection Policy.

11.0 Roles and Responsibilities

Roles	Responsibility
Director of Customer	Is accountable for the effective implementation of this policy and ensuring colleagues involved in its delivery understand their roles and responsibilities
Head of Neighbourhoods/ Head of Safety and Support/Support Manager	Will assist with implementing this policy and ensuring all staff involved in it are trained in our procedures and adequately skilled to implement those.
Housing and Safety and Support Colleagues	Should have awareness of the policy, act accordingly and help in recognising and reporting any safeguarding issues they come across. They should attend Safeguarding meetings where relevant and see cases through to their conclusion.

12.0 Monitoring and Review

All records regarding domestic abuse are held securely on our case management system.

This policy may be subject to an audit in line with the internal audit plan.

The toolkit will be regularly reviewed and updated where appropriate, drawing on external expertise where required.

This Policy is Grade 2 and changes require the approval of the Executive Team.

13.0 Version Control

Version	Reason	Issuer	Date
8.0	Amended format	Sarah Treadwell	09/03/18
8.1	Amended names to job titles and added accountable Exec Director	Sarah Treadwell	13/05/19
9.0	Updated job titles, 'procedure' changed to 'toolkit', removed CAADA reference	Mel Smith	02/06/19
10.0	Forced marriage included in policy	Julie Lister	21/03/21
10.1	Updated core purpose and vision	Catherine Loftus	31/08/23
10.2	Updated & reviewed in line with DAHA recommendations, legislation & process changes.	Lisa Smith & Julie Lister	31/01/25
11.0	Approved by the Executive Team	Chloe Appleby	30/05/25

Appendix 1 – Legislation

This is a general overview and should not be used as a substitute for seeking legal advice in specific cases. If there is any doubt about the law relevant to a particular case, legal advice should be sought from the Legal Team.

The Policy helps fulfil the following legislation:

- Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014
- Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003
- The Crime and Disorder Act 1998
- Criminal Justice Act 2003
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Policing and Crime Act 2017
- Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011
- Hate Crime: The Crime and Disorder Act 1998
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006
- Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986
- Mental Capacity Act 2005
- The Equality Act 2006 & 2010
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- Financial Services and Marketing Act 2023
- The Housing Act 1985, 1988, 1996 & 2004
- Housing and Regeneration Act 2008
- Data Protection Act 2018

Appendix 2 – Forms of Abuse

Psychological and Emotional abuse has a profound impact upon victims and their children. It can leave a victim with little confidence that they can do anything to change the situation. Examples include:

- Creating isolation e.g., not allowing them to see other people, preventing them from making their own friendships, not allowing them to go anywhere on their own, causing them to be depressed and then using this against them.
- Use of threats e.g., threats to kill their family, children, friends, pets; to throw them out and keep the children; to find them if they ever leave; to have them locked up; to tell everyone they are mad.
- Putting them down – humiliating and undermining them in front of others or in front of their children; telling them they are stupid, hopeless, unlovable, that no one would believe them, or that they are a bad parent.

Coercive and controlling behaviour underpins domestic abuse and is explained as a range of purposeful behaviours including intimidation, isolation, emotional abuse, and manipulation. These behaviours are often used as the primary mechanisms for achieving power and control in an abusive relationship and these behaviours reinforce the threat or reality of physical abuse.

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.

Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.”

Technological abuse Perpetrators can use technology or social media as a means of controlling or coercing victims. This could include:

- Using social media to harass the victim
- Controlling emails or social media accounts
- Use of spyware such as tracking apps, hidden cameras
- Using home assistants such as Alexa or Google Home to monitor someone's movements.

Physical abuse can include: hitting, punching, kicking, slapping, hitting with objects, pulling hair, pushing or shoving, cutting or stabbing, restraining, strangulation, choking.

Sexual abuse can include rape and coerced sex, forcing a victim to take part in unwanted sexual acts, refusal to practice safe sex or use contraception, make up sex, threatened or actual sexual abuse of children.

Financial/Economic abuse can include: controlling money and bank accounts, making a victim 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.

Discriminatory abuse (with reference to Forced Marriage) may manifest itself as any of the other categories of abuse, however what makes discriminatory abuse distinctive is it is motivated by oppressive and discriminatory attitudes towards a person's:

- Disability
- Physical appearance
- Learning disability
- Mental ill-health
- Sensory impairment
- Race
- Religion
- Gender/ gender identity
- Age
- Culture
- Sexual orientation
- Appearance

We will work with specialist by and for agencies to offer our customers with protected characteristics the most appropriate, tailored support to ensure their safety and wishes are considered following disclosures of abuse.

Honour-based violence and abuse (HBV) is the term used to refer to a collection of practices used predominantly to control the behaviour of women and girls within families or other social groups to protect supposed cultural and religious beliefs, values and social norms in the so-called name of 'honour'.

It is often carried out by family members, but victims can also come under pressure from the wider community who will seek to support the family in their actions. Honour-based violence and abuse can also include:

- forced marriage
- female genital mutilation

Family and Intergenerational Abuse, we recognise that domestic abuse occurs in family relationships (not to be confused with safeguarding) and can be intergenerational, with the victim's children/siblings/grandchildren etc perpetrating the abuse or becoming victims of such abuse.

More focus is required to address family and inter-generational abuse, and how it differs from partner abuse, for example if the perpetrator is the victim's teenage or adult sibling, child or grandchild.

Careful consideration is required when dealing with family and inter-generational abuse due to the complexities of family composition and safeguarding implications.

LGBTQ+ Abuse, in the past domestic abuse approaches have traditionally focused upon heterosexual partner abuse and more recently have been seen to address abuse in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender relationships.

Individuals in LGBTQ+ can often feel their sexual orientation or gender identity is the reason for the abuse they are experiencing, they may feel that they are because they are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender or that if they weren't, they wouldn't be experiencing it.

As well as physical abuse, perpetrators use coercive and controlling behaviour, pressuring their victim/survivors to keep their identity or relationship secret and isolating them from family, friends, and the LGBT+ community. The perpetrator may also threaten to 'out' the victim to friends, family, religious communities, co-workers, and others as a method of control and pressure the victim/survivor into compliance.

Elder Abuse, research has found that domestic abuse is experienced by both women and men regardless of age, disability and ethnic background. Elder abuse can be even more detrimental to a victim's wellbeing due to problems with mobility, mental health and social isolation.

Older people may have come to accept some aspects of domestic abuse as the 'norm' dependent upon their generation. For example, in the past the male of the relationship may have been the only one to work and was traditionally seen as the breadwinner and thus have control of their finances and limit their partners' access to money, we would now accept this as financial abuse.

Appendix 3 - Useful Contacts

Police	Telephone 101 (non-emergency) or 999 (emergency)
Crisis Team	Telephone 0303 1231145
Sunderland City Council Housing Advice & Homelessness	Telephone 0191 520 5551 / 0800 234 6084 https://www.sunderland.gov.uk/homeless-and-housing-advice
WWIN Advise & support for those affected by domestic abuse including refuge	Telephone 0800 066 5555 (freephone 7 days a week 9am-9pm) Email - enquiries@wwin.org.uk https://www.wwin.org.uk
National DA Helpline Ran by Refuge and Women's Aid	Telephone 0808 2000 247 (freephone 24/7 – 365days of the year) https://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk
The Angel Centre - Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) offers help to anyone aged 16 years and over who have been raped or sexually assaulted. They can help whether you wish to report it to the Police or not.	Telephone 0330 2230099 The service is free and confidential and by strict appointment only.
Galop Supporting LGBT+ people who have experienced abuse	Telephone 0800 999 5428 Email – help@galop.org.uk https://galop.org.uk
Men's Advice Line Help for male victims of DA	Telephone 0808 8010327 Email – info@mensadviceline.org.uk https://mensadviceline.org.uk
ManKind Help for male victims of DA	Telephone 01823 334 244 https://mankind.org.uk
Hourglass Charity focused on the abuse and neglect of older people.	Telephone 0808 808 8141 (24/7) Free text 078 6005 2906 https://wearehourglass.org
Karma Nirvana Help & support for those at risk or experiencing Honour Based Abuse or facing a forced marriage.	Telephone 0800 5999 247 https://karmanirvana.org.uk
Impact Family Services Child to parent abuse Info on child contact, custody etc	https://www.impactfs.co.uk/contact
National Stalking Helpline Suzy Lamplugh Trust	Telephone 0808 802 0300 (09:30 - 20:00, Monday and Wednesday / 09:30 - 16:00, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday) https://www.suzylamplugh.org
Paladin accredited Independent Stalking Advocacy Caseworkers (ISACs)	Telephone 0203 866 4107 Email - info@paladinservice.co.uk https://www.paladinservice.co.uk/
Sunderland Counselling Services Counselling for victims of childhood sexual violence or rape in adulthood.	Telephone 0191 514 7007 (9am-7.30pm Monday, Tuesday & Thursday / 9am-4.30pm Wednesday / 9-4pm Friday) Email – office@sunderlandcounselling.org.uk https://www.sunderlandcounselling.org.uk
Someone Cares Counselling for anyone whose lives' have been negatively affected by experiencing or witnessing any type of abuse including domestic violence, rape, sexual assault & childhood sexual abuse.	Telephone 0191 257 8094 Email – enquiries@someonecares.org https://someonecares.org.uk
Findaway help if you are worried that someone you know is being controlled, scared or hurt by their partner, ex-partner or family member.	Telephone 0300 140 0061 (anonymous phoneline) https://www.wefindaway.org.uk/
Respect Support for perpetrators of DA who want to change their abusive behaviours	Telephone 0808 802 4040 Email – info@respectphoneline.org.uk https://respectphoneline.org.uk
Make a Change/Right Turn Support for perpetrators of DA who want to change their abusive behaviours	Telephone 0300 1240 466 Email – info@rightturn.org.uk https://www.makeachange.uk.net/sunderland