

## DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY

### Responsible Officer

Director of Customer Services

### Aim of the Policy

The primary aim of this policy is to set out how Phoenix will aim to minimise the risk of harm to residents (and their children) reporting domestic abuse. It also sets out how we will work with other agencies and partners to try to ensure the ongoing safety of victims/survivors of domestic abuse.

Reducing Violence against Women and Girls is one of the strategic priorities for the Safer Lewisham Partnership and as a registered housing provider within Lewisham Phoenix has a responsibility to help achieve that aim.

Lewisham council has adopted the United Nations declaration on the elimination of violence towards women, which defines violence against women as:

'Any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women [or girls], including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty'. United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence towards Women (1993, Article 1).

### Policy Scope

This policy sets out Phoenix's approach to dealing with domestic abuse and applies to all residents.

Domestic abuse is experienced by women and men, within heterosexual and same sex relationships, and between family members. However, all evidence shows that women are far more likely to be the victims, to be subjected to repeat violence, suffer serious injury and to be fearful about further abuse. Whilst this policy applies equally to both men and women, the particular issues for women suffering ongoing abuse are specifically recognised and this is occasionally reflected in the language used.

### The Policy

#### Definition of Domestic Abuse (DA)

The Home Office definition (March 2013) which PCH will adhere to is:

"Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional

“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.”

Note - This definition, which is not a legal definition, includes so called 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, and is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group.

### **Our approach to victims/survivors (v/s)**

Phoenix is victim centred and will take a “believing approach” to all reports of domestic abuse. Therefore, in the first instance the report will be taken at face value and action taken to minimise the risk of harm to the v/s. It is very possible that the first time a v/s reports DA they will do so to PCH; therefore the response provided by frontline services is crucial in ending the cycle of abuse and can effect the v/s’ ongoing trust in agencies.

All cases of domestic abuse will be managed by the Housing Management team who are trained and experienced in dealing sensitively and appropriately with v/s. We will see all v/s within 24 hours of the first report and use a private room. We will provide a sensitive and confidential response.

All residents reporting domestic abuse will have a CAADA DASH (see definitions) risk assessment carried out which will allow the Housing officer to judge the response that is required, it is noted that some of those who report domestic abuse may be minimising the risk and professional judgement should be used to try to ascertain the level of risk.

We will share information between agencies where the assessment against the DASH Risk Identification Checklist meets the local authority threshold for MARAC referrals. This information will only be shared with those agencies attending the meeting.

If there has not been an Independent Domestic Abuse Advocate (IDAA) involved in the case previously we will refer and/or signpost v/s for specialist support.

Safety in a domestic abuse situation can often include a need to move from the home; all available options will be discussed with the victim/survivor. Where temporary accommodation is required we will refer to Lewisham Council. We will also carry out an assessment for extra security measures where required.

Phoenix is committed to safeguarding and will not tolerate any form of neglect or abuse. We have a duty to ensure that action is taken if any of our staff, contractors, partners or volunteers have any concerns that an adult, child or young person is at risk of significant harm or abuse. More information is available in our safeguarding policies and procedures.

## **Our approach to perpetrators**

We will take appropriate enforcement action against perpetrators in cases where we can do so without compromising the safety of the individual, and we will work closely with partner agencies and keep them informed of any action taken.

## **Working in Partnership**

We are committed to continuously improving our response to domestic abuse and work closely with partners at Lewisham Council, the police and DAA services.

## **Monitoring and review**

We assess how our services meet the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance standards and use this assessment to review and improve our services and aim to achieve accreditation.

We will also monitor the delivery of the service to our residents who report domestic abuse through case management and reporting the number of cases opened in monthly key performance indicators.

We will review this policy every three years or sooner if there are changes to legislation or best practice.

## **Legislation**

- The Housing Act 1996
- The Family Law Act 1996
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004
- Police and Justice Act 2006
- The Equality Act 2010
- Anti Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014

## **Reference to other documents and associated policies and procedures**

Including:

- Tenancy Agreement
- Safeguarding Policy

## **Definitions**

<b>Term/acronym</b>	<b>Description</b>
Resident	Includes tenants, freeholders and lessees.
Phoenix	Phoenix Community Housing.
v/s	Victim/Survivor.
MARAC	Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference.
CAADA-DASH	Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse – Domestic Abuse, Stalking, Honour based violence risk assessment.
DAA	Domestic Abuse Advocate.

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