

## Domestic Abuse Policy

### 1. Aim

- 1.1. This policy sets out the approach of Onward Homes Limited (“Onward”, “we”, “us”) to handling Domestic Abuse. Onward is committed to tackling all forms of Domestic Abuse. We will work to support victims of Domestic Abuse and consider swift and appropriate enforcement action against perpetrators, using legislation and the relevant terms of our Tenancy Agreements. Onward recognises that Domestic Abuse cuts across social class, economic status, ethnicity and cultural background and can have a social, financial and health impact on victims.
- 1.2. Domestic Abuse is recognised as a distinct category of safeguarding, and this policy aligns with Onward’s approach to tackling safeguarding.
- 1.3. Onward is committed to working with Local Authorities and partner agencies to keep our customers safe from harm and to tackle Domestic Abuse.
- 1.4. Our approach will ensure that:
  - 1.4.1. We raise awareness of Domestic Abuse within Onward
  - 1.4.2. The needs, interests, and Human Rights of adults at risk are always respected and upheld.
- 1.5. A proportionate, timely, professional, and ethical response is available to any adult experiencing or at risk of Domestic Abuse.

### 2. Scope

- 2.1. This policy applies to all Onward customers and their households, including visitors to any of our premises. The policy applies to all adults who may be experiencing, or at risk of, Domestic Abuse.
- 2.2. This policy applies to all Onward colleagues, board members, managing agents, volunteers, agency staff and contractors carrying out work on behalf of Onward.

### 3. Definition of Domestic Abuse

- 3.1. Onward adopts the statutory definition of Domestic Abuse as defined in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021:

*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.*

*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;*
- (e) psychological, emotional or other abuse;*

*and it does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.*

*“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.*

*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).*

#### **4. Our approach to handling Domestic Abuse**

- 4.1 Onward will take appropriate action to reduce the risk of Domestic Abuse. We will robustly case manage all reports, assessing risk, working with partner agencies, making a plan of action, and taking appropriate action against perpetrators.

#### **5. Initial report and risk assessment**

- 5.1 Residents, representatives, members of the community, our partners, and other agencies, can report Domestic Abuse to Onward either by phone, online, or in writing.
- 5.2 Onward’s own colleagues may also identify ASB and Hate Crime and can report it internally.
- 5.3 Onward will review all reported incidents of Domestic Abuse and will consider the risk in each case.
- 5.4 We will acknowledge all cases of Domestic Abuse within 1 working day, in line with our most serious instances of anti-social behaviour and hate incidents.
- 5.5 We will complete a risk assessment and in all relevant cases we will liaise with the local Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC).

#### **6. Managing Domestic Abuse Cases**

- 6.1 Onward’s Safer Neighbourhoods Team will manage cases of Domestic Abuse. We will take a victim-centred approach, agreeing a clear action plan. We will liaise with all relevant partner agencies and will take account of any risk assessments shared with us.
- 6.2 In cases of Domestic Abuse within a joint tenancy, the perpetrator remains a joint tenant until steps are taken to end or transfer the joint tenancy. In these situations, customers should speak to us to discuss their options which may involve seeking independent legal advice.
- 6.3 We will support customers to remain safe in their home, using target-hardening tools to make their home more secure.
- 6.4 We will carry out any multi-agency safety plan actions assigned to us by a local MARAC.
- 6.5 We will support all victims of Domestic Abuse and their household members. Examples of support may include support on budgeting, identifying benefits, translation services, signposting to other support agencies, speaking to an Onward colleague of the same gender.

6.6 We will consider action, including legal action, to deal with perpetrators of domestic abuse. We will work with the police and other agencies to support any action that they might take.

## **7. Recognising Disability Impact**

7.1 Onward recognise that people with long term illness or disability are at increased risk as victims of Domestic Abuse. People with drug, alcohol and/or suffering from Mental Health issues are at higher risk of being affected by Domestic Abuse. We will take these factors into account when risk assessing all reported cases of Domestic Abuse.

## **8. Safeguarding Responsibilities**

8.1 The Care Act 2024 identifies Domestic Abuse as one of the ten primary categories of abuse. When Domestic Abuse is disclosed, we will be clear about confidentiality and our safeguarding obligations. It is preferable to get consent when making referrals for victims of Domestic Abuse and sharing information with external agencies. However, referrals can be made without consent for high-risk cases to MARAC without consent. Onward Homes has a separate Safeguarding Policy for adults and children.

8.2 Domestic Abuse is also cited within the Serious Crime Act 2025 which refers to domestic violence and abuse as any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, 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. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:

8.2.1. psychological

8.2.2. sexual

8.2.3. financial

8.2.4. emotional

8.3 A new offence of coercive and controlling behaviour in intimate and familial relationships was introduced into the Serious Crime Act 2015. The offence will impose a maximum 5 years imprisonment, a fine or both. The offence closes a gap in the law around patterns of coercive and controlling behaviour during a relationship between intimate partners, former partners who still live together, or family members, sending a clear message that it is wrong to violate the trust of those closest to you, providing better protection to victims experiencing continuous abuse and allowing for earlier identification, intervention and prevention.

## **9. Training and Support for Colleagues**

9.1 Onward will provide awareness, policy and procedure training, including refresher training, for relevant staff including contractors. Onward will ensure training is provided to all relevant staff on accurately recording cases and ensuring they are passed to the relevant team to manage.

## **10. Complaints**

10.1 If a reporting party is unhappy with Onward's handling of a report of Domestic Abuse, they can make a complaint to us. Such complaint will be dealt with in line with the

Complaints Policy. If the customer remains unhappy after exhausting our complaint process, they are entitled to make a complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service.

## **11. Equality Diversity and Inclusion**

- 11.1 Onward provides accessible services and makes reasonable adjustments for those with protected characteristics or additional needs. We treat customers fairly and with respect regardless of gender, race, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation and marital status, publish information in accessible formats, and collect equalities data to inform monitoring and review.

## **12. Communication**

- 12.1 Onward will publish this policy on the Onward website along with linked policies.

## **13. Data Protection and Information Sharing**

- 13.1 Onward treats all information received in confidence, consistent with our legal responsibilities as a Data Controller to comply with relevant data protection legislation and to ensure compliance with Onwards data protection related policies and procedures.
- 13.2 In certain circumstances Onward may be required to share personal data with other statutory agencies. Where practical, we will consult with relevant individuals prior to the information being shared, however there will be instances where Onward has a statutory duty to share information without the individual's consent e.g. if there is any reason to suspect children are at risk or for the prevention and detection of crime. An assessment will be made in each case to decide which information is necessary to be shared, referring to our data protection specialists for further guidance as required.

## **14. Legislation and Regulation**

- 14.1 Key legislation includes the following:
- 14.1.1. Domestic Abuse Act 2021
  - 14.1.2. Serious Crime Act 2015
  - 14.1.3. Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014
  - 14.1.4. Care Act 2024
  - 14.1.5. Equality Act 2010
  - 14.1.6. UK General Data Protection Regulation 2021
  - 14.1.7. Data Protection Act 2018
  - 14.1.8. Housing Act 1985
  - 14.1.9. Housing Act 1996
  - 14.1.10. Mental Capacity Act 2005
  - 14.1.11. Human Rights Act 1998
  - 14.1.12. Neighbourhood and Community Standard 2024

- 14.2 We will comply with the Neighbourhood and Community Standard of the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing, within the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023.
- 14.3 We will endeavour to comply with any new legislation in respect of Domestic Abuse that is introduced whilst this policy is in effect.

**15. Responsibility and Monitoring**

- 15.1 We will undertake surveys, and/or audits to assess the effectiveness of this policy.
- 15.2 Onward’s Director of Neighbourhoods is responsible for overall adherence to this policy. Onward’s Head of Housing Services is responsible for operational implementation of this policy.
- 15.3 Onward’s Senior Leadership Team will receive periodic reports on performance in relation to Domestic Abuse.
- 15.4 Onward reserves the right to review and amend this policy prior to the next review date. This could include circumstances such as legislative change and/or an operational change within Onward.

Linked documents:	ASB and Hate Crime Policy Safeguarding Adults Policy Vulnerabilities and Reasonable Adjustments Policy Neighbourhood Management Policy Lettings Policy Complaints Policy Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS – also known as Clare’s Law)
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