

HFI Policy

Domestic Violence

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Domestic violence is a crime that can have a devastating effect on survivors and their families. This policy has been developed to ensure that:

- serious consideration is given to the safety of survivors and their children
- survivors are dealt with quickly, sensitively and effectively and are signposted or referred to specialist agencies if appropriate
- where appropriate, action is taken against perpetrators of domestic violence

1.2 HFI is committed to providing support to survivors; and, where appropriate, taking action against residents who are known perpetrators of domestic violence.

2.0 Scope

2.1 This policy applies to HFI tenants and leaseholders who are experiencing domestic violence. HFI recognises that men also suffer domestic abuse as well as people in same sex couples, people who are bi-sexual or people in a transgender relationship. The policy will, however, have a positive impact on women, and their immediate families, because they are the overwhelming majority of survivors.

2.2 HFI staff, particularly housing management staff, are responsible for following this policy and the associated procedures.

2.3 HFI employees can obtain confidential and professional advice by contacting the [Employee Assistance Programme](#) either for themselves or on behalf of someone they know. The advice line is open 24 hours a day and is free to all employees.

3.0 Definition

3.1 Islington's definition of domestic violence for monitoring purposes is as follows:

'Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults¹ who are or have been intimate partners or family members² regardless of gender or sexuality.'

3.2 Islington Domestic Violence Strategy 2006-9 describes domestic violence as follows:

'Domestic violence is best understood as a pattern of behaviour which is characterised by the exercise of control and the misuse of power by one person over another within the context of an intimate or family relationship. It is manifested in a variety of ways including, but not restricted to physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse and the imposition of social isolation. Most commonly domestic violence is a combination of a range of abuses and the abuse is likely to be ongoing, repeated and to escalate in severity over time.

Domestic violence is primarily a gender-based crime, consisting of violence by men against women in the overwhelming majority of cases. However, domestic violence occurs in same sex relationships and heterosexual men are also abused by their partners or other family members. Domestic violence is deeply rooted and widespread, affecting as many as one in nine households at any one time. It affects women, children and men from all social, geographic and cultural groups. People from every class, age, race and religion are abused, as are people with disabilities.'

The description reflects the pattern, continuing nature and variety of abuse, and emphasises the misuse of power that underlies all domestic violence.

3.3 HFI has adopted the same definition of domestic violence as the London Borough of Islington in acknowledgement of its commitment to working in partnership with relevant departments within the Council.

¹ An adult is defined as any person aged 18 years or over. Violence involving people under 18 years of age is classified as child abuse and is dealt with by separate policies and legislation. Nevertheless, children and young people are affected by domestic violence. Not only many traumatised by what they witness or overhear; but there is frequently direct child abuse occurring with domestic violence.

² Family members are defined as mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister, and grandparents, whether directly related, in-laws or stepfamily.

4.0 Legal Framework

4.1 HFI recognises and acknowledges its legal duties and obligations under legislation relating to domestic violence. The areas of law that are relevant to this policy are:

- Family Law Act 1996
- Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004
- Civil Partnership Act 2004
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Homelessness Act 2002
- Housing Act 1996

4.2 For details of specific actions that can be taken under the above legislation please read the Safer Islington Partnership's 'No More Domestic Violence' handbook which can be found on the London Borough of Islington's website.

5.0 Equality & Diversity

5.1 The policy aims to ensure that all cases of domestic violence are treated consistently and fairly regardless of race, age, gender, disability, religion or belief and sexual orientation.

6.0 Health and Safety

6.1 HFI recognises its responsibility for ensuring the health and safety of all its employees and will endeavour to meet its legal obligations under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and any other relevant legislation. Equally, HFI expects all staff to take responsibility for their own safety and for the safety of others.

6.2 HFI recognises that the potential risk of violence and aggression towards staff in performing their duties will be high in certain instances. In order to reduce risk staff are expected to participate in risk assessments during one to ones and personal development reviews, and to follow health and safety procedures; particularly when working outside the office.

7.0 Policy Statement

7.1 HFI's role is to work closely with other organisations and agencies to ensure that survivors are offered a professional and sensitive service that identifies potential risks and takes appropriate action to minimise those risks. In the main this means that HFI will:

- refer or signpost clients and their families to specialist services such as women's aid;

- help survivors to make contact with other agencies, with their consent;
 - provide advice and information on a range of related issues, for example, rehousing options;
 - use legal remedies available to us to take action against perpetrators, with the permission of the survivor
- 7.2 HFI will provide support and advice to survivors and we are committed to keeping information confidential unless we are legally required to do otherwise e.g. in the interest of child protection. We will maintain client confidentiality and will only share information with specialist agencies with the client's permission.
- 7.3 HFI will work closely and effectively with the Housing Aid Centre and other agencies in order to provide a flexible range of options to help people to live in safety and security. Where it is safe for a survivor, HFI will work with all relevant agencies to help them to continue to live in their home, and will take action against the perpetrator wherever possible.
- 7.4 The objectives of this policy are to:
- Ensure that HFI deals with reports of domestic violence fairly and consistently
 - Take reports of domestic violence seriously
 - Treat reports of domestic violence sensitively and in confidentiality
 - Make referrals to other statutory or voluntary organisations, in particular to work more closely with SOLACE in providing support to survivors
 - Seek permission from survivors before taking action except where it is justifiable to take action without a survivor's consent e.g. where a very high risk of violence has been assessed or where children are involved
 - Take action against alleged perpetrators, where appropriate
 - Provide accessible information in Plain English and in formats that meet the needs of residents from Islington's diverse communities
 - Monitor cases in terms of equality and diversity
 - Ensure that relevant staff receive training to enable them to carry out their duties effectively and confidently
 - Assess the needs of vulnerable tenants to ensure that appropriate support is identified and made available
 - Work in partnership with statutory and voluntary agencies to support survivors and minimise the number of cases of domestic violence

7.5 HFI will meet the above objectives in the following ways:

7.5.1 Training

HFI will ensure that relevant staff receive ongoing training to enable them to provide consistent, sensitive and professional support to survivors of domestic violence. The training and management support given to staff will empower them to take appropriate action at any stage of the process. Training will include:

- Domestic violence awareness
- Issues for children and young people
- Encouraging and responding to disclosure of domestic violence
- Risk assessment for domestic violence and risk management
- Referrals within the context of a co-ordinated community response to domestic violence

7.5.2 Service Commitments

Survivors can expect:

- A member of staff to make an appointment to carry out a more detailed interview, if necessary, within 24 hours or 48 hours if a translator/interpreter is required
- Repairs that occur as a result of domestic violence to be carried out in accordance with HFI's Repairs Policy
- HFI to make appropriate referrals to Home Shelter, specialist Floating Support or the Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy Service (IDVAS)
- To receive further information, normally at the interview, providing details of help that is available
- To be given advice of appropriate action that HFI can take
- To be interviewed by a female or male officer as requested

7.5.3 Monitoring

All cases of domestic violence will be recorded and monitored to ensure appropriate action is taken based on information provided by residents including recording referrals made to other agencies.

Senior Managers and Board members are responsible for ensuring the effectiveness of the policy; and for ensuring that it is regularly reviewed.

7.5.4 Legal Action

HFI will consider possible legal remedies and, where appropriate, take legal action against tenants in breach of their tenancy due to domestic violence.

7.5.5 Multi-Agency Partnership

HFI supports aim three of the Islington Domestic Violence Strategy: 'Improve co-operation and joint action across the key partnership agencies in order to facilitate safe and consistent policy and practice responses to survivors and perpetrators of domestic violence ensuring that the needs of all members of Islington's diverse communities are considered.' HFI will remain

- an active partner in the Domestic Violence Project Team
- an operational member of the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)

7.5.6 Re-housing

Whether a survivor chooses to remain in their home or to move because they are experiencing domestic violence, HFI will work with the Housing Aid Centre or other agencies to support them by providing advice on the full range of housing options available depending on their circumstances. HFI will also make an appropriate referral to specialist agencies such as the Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy Service and Women's Aid Floating Support services.

Tenants should not be advised to relinquish their tenancies before they have secured an offer of a new tenancy.

7.5.7 Service Improvements

In order to improve our service to survivors and as part of the case closing process, HFI will ask survivors of domestic violence what they thought of the service they received. This is in line with one of the performance indicators used in the National Domestic Violence Action Plan and will be achieved by using appropriate methods.

7.5.8 Dealing with Perpetrators

It is our policy to take legal action against HFI residents who are known perpetrators of domestic violence. Decisions on what action to take will be appropriate to the individual's circumstances e.g. consideration will be given to appropriate action against perpetrators who may themselves be vulnerable.

8.0 Complaints

- 8.1 If anyone is not satisfied with the way that HFI dealt with their case, they should write to or contact their Area Housing Office where their complaint will be investigated.

9.0 Further Reading

9.1 For further information and guidance on domestic violence and other forms of anti-social behaviour; the following documents can also be referred to:

- Islington's 'No More' Domestic Violence handbook for service providers in Islington
- Anti-social Behaviour Procedures
- Domestic Violence Procedures
- Witness Support Policy
- Transfer Policy

10.0 Review Period

10.1 This policy will be reviewed periodically in order to ensure it remains relevant and up to date. The suggested review period is every three years or as required by regulatory or legislative changes.