



## **The Langstane Group**

### **Domestic Abuse Policy**

Date approved by Leadership Team	10 January 2024
Board of Management / Committee name	Performance Committee
Approval date	5 March 2024
Implementation date	5 March 2024
Review date	March 2027
Version	V2

Version	Date approved	Changes
V1	25-05-2022	New Policy
V2	05-03-2024	<p>Changes following 'Policies not Promises' – a review of Scottish social landlords domestic abuse policies CIH and Women's Aid. The Scottish Government's definition of domestic abuse has been used. Additional information has been added around private interview space and reference as per the guidance to how the Association will deal with perpetrators is noted.</p> <p>Following consultation with Women's Aid certain words have been replaced to strengthen the policy, for example 'affected by domestic abuse' is replaced 'with those experiencing domestic abuse', and the word 'incidents' removed.</p>

## 1. Introduction

Langstane Housing Association is a Co-operative and Community Benefit Society, and a registered social landlord with charitable status.

The Langstane Group (the Group) consists of Langstane Housing Association Limited and its wholly owned subsidiaries.

This policy applies to all members of the Langstane Group.

This policy sets out how the Langstane Group views domestic abuse, the response to domestic abuse and how any reports of such abuse experienced by tenants or members of their households are dealt with. The term 'abuse' covers violence as well as verbal or other forms of abuse.

The Scottish Government's definition of domestic abuse is 'Domestic abuse (as gender based abuse), 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 and with-holding money) and other types of controlling behaviour such as isolation from family and friends'.

In developing this policy, good practice guidance has been followed. The guidance and this policy applies to anyone experiencing domestic abuse including men, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and gender non-binary people (LGBT+)

It can be characterised by a pattern of coercive control often escalating in frequency and severity over time.

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 and is a crime.

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.

Domestic abuse presents one of the highest risks to personal safety and is unacceptable. The tenant or household member will be supported to take action against perpetrators of domestic abuse wherever possible.

## 2. Aims and objectives of the policy

The aims and objectives of this policy are 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 tenants and employees;
- 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 experiencing domestic abuse and prevent domestic abuse by responding rapidly, effectively and consistently to all reports;
- empower those subjected to domestic abuse by providing information on the options available to them; and
- improve the response through effective engagement of appropriate external enforcement and support agencies.

### 3. Links to other strategic documents and policies

The Group's Domestic Abuse Policy is linked to a number of strategic documents and policies in particular but not solely:

- Equality and Diversity Strategy and Policy
- Privacy Policy
- Supporting and Protecting Adults from Abuse and Harm Policy
- Child Protection Policy
- Safeguarding Policy
- Allocation Policy

### 4. Policy

The Langstane Group will deal with all reports of domestic abuse as an emergency. The main contact will be with the Housing Team or the Langstane Housing Support Team. Applying a 'survivor centred' and joint approach from the Langstane Teams, the tenant or household member will be assisted to reach a decision which they feel best secures their safety by:

- reviewing their accommodation,
- discussing the level of assistance they want, and
- supporting the person to report the crime to the police.

All tenants and household members will be encouraged to report domestic abuse to the police, whether they are victims of, or witnesses. All reports of domestic abuse will be dealt with sensitively by Langstane Housing Association.

As part of the commitment to preventing domestic abuse there will be a focus on:

- making all new tenants aware of the Langstane Group's policies relating to rehousing, relationship breakdown and where applicable the implications of joint tenancies;
- publicising this domestic abuse policy to all tenants and employees, highlighting the consequences for perpetrators;
- providing advice and information to victims of domestic abuse.

A 'survivor-centred' approach in dealing with domestic abuse will be adopted, i.e. if a person feels they are experiencing domestic abuse it will be dealt with it under this policy.

All reports will be dealt with in a non-judgemental manner, sensitively and in confidence. This includes ensuring reception staff are aware that victims do not require to disclose or discuss the reason for their visit in a public area. The use of private interview space will be promoted and the offer of seeing a female or male member of staff will be offered.

Any action will only be taken with the tenant or household member's consent. The exceptions to this will be:

- where a child is at risk in any situation, or
- if there is a high risk of serious harm to anyone involved, or
- if there is an obligation in law to disclose information.

This is dealt with under Supporting and Protecting Adults from Abuse and Harm Policy and Child Protection Policy. Where a person is identified as being subjected to domestic abuse, any interaction with them will be guided by best practice principles.

Those experiencing domestic abuse will be encouraged to allow the sharing of 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.

All information provided will be treated with the utmost confidence and only passed to external agencies with proper, informed consent.

A Manager or Director must approve any disclosure that does not have the tenant or household member's consent.

Information will be shared with work colleagues on a strictly 'need to know' basis. Data protection requirements will be adhered to.

It is recognised that every reported case of domestic abuse will be different. Any response will therefore be tailored to the individual circumstances and needs of the tenant or household member.

When a tenant or household member reports domestic abuse all available options will be discussed and considered with them, including:

- facilitating 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;
- reporting domestic abuse to the Police, which may result in criminal action against the perpetrator; and
- liaising with appropriate agencies to provide specialised support.

Wherever possible funding will be accessed to improve the safety and security of the home.

The safety of the person who has been subjected to domestic abuse and their dependents will always be paramount.

An Action Plan setting out further actions will be agreed with the tenant or household member and they will be kept updated with progress.

Tenants or household members who wish to remain in their own homes will be assisted to do so within the terms of the Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Act 2021 and:

- a review of the security of the home will take place. This will include a review of communal stairwell lighting and door entry systems for flatted homes.
- where a lock change is required no re-charge will be made.
- if the property is damaged as a result of domestic abuse, the Langstane Housing Support Team will provide advice and assistance to replace any goods. This may be by sourcing items wherever possible free of charge or by accessing appropriate funding.

Improvements to the safety and security within the home will be dealt with as a priority and matter of urgency.

Damage caused to the fabric of the property will not be re-charged but charges may be brought against the perpetrator where possible.

Where a tenant or household member reporting domestic abuse requires emergency accommodation, the Langstane Group will provide advice and assistance on accessing such accommodation. This may be provided by the local authority or by a domestic abuse organisation. Where appropriate a referral letter will be provided and the employee supporting the tenant may advocate on their behalf.

Where a tenant reporting domestic abuse requests permanent rehousing, the Langstane Group will prioritise their application as a 'management transfer'. In such cases the suspension policy will not be applied. Each case will be reviewed and the action taken determined on a case by case basis. There will normally be a limit on the number of occasions a reasonable offer of alternative accommodation will be made. Typically suitable alternative accommodation will only be offered once under a management transfer.

In line with guidance and in order to keep victims safe the Association will consider the needs of the perpetrator. Each case will be considered individually and a review of the perpetrator's housing requirements will be carried out to ensure they are adequately housed. This may mean working with partner organisations to find alternative housing if the Association is unable to do this.

## **5. Roles and responsibilities**

### **Board of Management**

Board members for Langstane Housing Association approve this policy (via the Performance Committee) and receive annual reports regarding its application. The Board also has a duty to ensure sufficient budget is provided to enable regular training on domestic abuse.

### **Chief Executive**

An overall obligation to ensure the policy is consistently and fairly applied across all services provided by the Langstane Group and sufficient budget is provided to facilitate training.

## **Departmental Directors**

An obligation to ensure the policy is implemented and to facilitate the provision of training to enable employees to recognise and respond to domestic abuse.

## **Managers**

Obligations to ensure relevant employees are fully aware of their responsibilities under the policy, in particular of the importance of reporting any domestic abuse and dealing with these sympathetically and within the full powers of this policy and any legislation in place.

## **Employees**

An obligation to ensure the policy is read and fully understood and employees act on the requirements of the policy

## **6. Monitoring, review and training**

Monitoring will take place by the Leadership and Management Team who will receive anonymised reports detailing domestic abuse cases being dealt with. Board of Management will receive an annual update regarding the number of people dealt with under the Domestic Abuse Policy.

The policy will be reviewed every three years or sooner if there are material changes to legislation that would affect this policy. Training will be provided to front line employees on a regular basis.

## **7. Equality and diversity**

The Langstane Group is committed to promoting equality and diversity across all areas of work. Discrimination or harassment of any kind is not tolerated.

The Association supports the Chartered Institute of Housing's 'Make A Stand' campaign

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