



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL



Approved by
Tenant Volunteers

Wokingham Borough Council
Domestic Abuse Policy
Housing Service | May 2025



This is the Domestic Abuse Policy
for the Wokingham Borough
Council Housing Service.

If you need a copy of this
publication in another format,
please contact the number below.

0118 974 6000



Accessible Formats

English	Arabic	Hindi	Punjabi	Telugu	Urdu	Chinese Mandarin	Polish
<p>Copies of this policy may be obtained in large print, Braille, on audio cassette or in other languages. To obtain a copy in an alternative format please telephone 0118 974 6000.</p>	<p>تتوفر نسخ من هذه السياسة في طبعات كبيرة أو بطريقة بريل أو على شرائط صوتية أو بلغات أخرى. وللحصول على نسخة بأحد التنسيقات البديلة، يرجى الاتصال بنا على رقم الهاتف: 974 6000 .0118</p>	<p>इस नीति की प्रतिलिपि या बड़े प्रिंट में, ब्रेल में, ऑडियो कैसेट के रूप में या अन्य भाषाओं में प्राप्त की जा सकती है। वैकल्पिक प्रारूप में प्रतिलिपि पाने के लिए, कृपया 0118 974 6000 पर फोन करें।</p>	<p>ਇਸ ਨੀਤੀ ਦੀਆਂ ਕਾਪੀਆਂ ਵੱਡੇ ਅੱਖਰਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ, ਬ੍ਰੇਲ ਵਿੱਚ, ਆਡੀਓ ਕੈਸੇਟ 'ਤੇ ਜਾਂ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤ ਕੀਤੀਆਂ ਜਾ ਸਕਦੀਆਂ ਹਨ। ਕਿਸੇ ਵਿਕਲਪਿਕ ਫਾਰਮੈਟ ਵਿੱਚ ਇੱਕ ਕਾਪੀ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ 0118 974 6000 'ਤੇ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।</p>	<p>ఈ పాలసీ కాపీలను పెద్ద ప్రింట్లో, బ్రైయిల్లో, ఆడియో క్యాసెట్లో లేదా ఇతర భాషలలో పొందవచ్చు. ప్రత్యేకమైన ఫార్మాట్లో పొందడానికి దయచేసి 0118 974 6000 కు టెలిఫోను చేయండి.</p>	<p>اس پالیسی کی نقلیں بڑے حروف، بریل، آڈیو کیسٹ کی صورت میں یا دیگر زبانوں میں بھی حاصل کی جا سکتی ہیں۔ متبادل فارمیٹ میں نقل حاصل کرنے کے لیے برائے مہربانی 0118 974 6000 پر ٹیلیفون کریں۔</p>	<p>本政策副本能以大字版、盲文版、录音带或其他语言的形式提供。如需获取其他格式副本，请致电 0118 974 6000。</p>	<p>Egzemplarze tej polityki są dostępne w wersji z dużą czcionką, w języku Braille'a, na kasetach magnetofonowych lub w innych językach. Aby otrzymać egzemplarz w innym formacie, należy zadzwonić pod numer 0118 974 6000.</p>



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This Policy has been subject to consultation, proof-reading, ease of reading and sign off with the following:

- All relevant service managers in the Housing Service
- Assistant Director of Economy and Growth
- The Domestic Abuse Partnership Board
- The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA)
- The Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel (TLIP)
- Tenant Volunteer Strategy Group
- Tenant Volunteer Communications Group
- Tenant Volunteer neighbourhoods Group
- Tenant Volunteer Chairs Panel





Policy Summary

We believe that no person should live in fear of violence or abuse. This policy sets out the commitment of the Housing Service to take efficient and effective action to deal with all reports of incidents of domestic abuse. It explains how we provide support tailored to the needs of the individual, working in partnership with specialised agencies to provide a coordinated response.

If you feel you are in immediate danger, call 999.

If your situation is not urgent, call the police on 101.

You can report domestic abuse to us through any contact you may have with us, including through the Wokingham Borough Council website, by telephone, by email, in person, or in writing.

If you are an existing Council Tenant, you can contact Housing Management using the following:

Phone: 0118 974 6000, Option 4, Option 4

Email: housing@wokingham.gov.uk

Website: [Wokingham Borough Council Tenant Services' Website](#).

If you are experiencing domestic abuse and do not feel safe to remain in your home or current accommodation, you can contact the Housing Needs and Options Team. This is regardless of whether you are a homeowner, private tenant, Housing Association tenant, Council Tenant, living with friends or family or rough sleeping. We will discuss your circumstances and talk through the options available to you. It is likely that we will offer you a homelessness assessment.

Phone: 0118 974 6000, Option 4, Option 3

Email: housing.needs@wokingham.gov.uk

Website for homelessness self-referrals: Housing Jigsaw – <https://live.housingjigsaw.co.uk>

We aim to improve the safety of people affected by domestic abuse and prevent further incidents by encouraging earlier reporting and responding rapidly. We take all reports of domestic abuse seriously and employ staff trained to deal with reports of domestic abuse. We'll always treat people experiencing domestic abuse in a sympathetic, supportive and non-judgemental way.

We take a zero-tolerance approach to domestic abuse and will hold perpetrators of abuse to account. Our approach is survivor-centred and we'll take into account the views and ongoing safety of the individual when deciding the most appropriate course of action.

If you have any queries about this policy or our approach to domestic abuse, you should contact the Housing and Domestic Abuse Specialist, who oversees our response to domestic abuse, with support from other employees.



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**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**



Domestic Abuse Policy

1. Purpose.

1.1 We believe that nobody should live in fear of violence or abuse. This policy sets out the Housing Management Team and the Housing Needs and Options Teams commitment to take efficient and effective action to deal with all reports of incidents of domestic abuse. It explains that we'll take all reports of domestic abuse seriously and provide support tailored to the needs of the individual, working in partnership with specialised agencies to provide a coordinated response. It also explains what actions will be taken if you need to leave your home or current accommodation due to domestic abuse.

2. Scope.

2.1 This policy applies to all residents of Wokingham Borough Council, regardless of tenure. It also applies to anyone who Wokingham Borough Council places into emergency or temporary accommodation or to any person who approaches Wokingham Borough Council for homelessness assistance. We have a separate Employee Domestic Abuse Support Policy for employees experiencing domestic abuse.

2.2 The Domestic Abuse Act and this policy defines domestic abuse as any of the following:

- physical or sexual abuse;
- violent or threatening behaviour;
- controlling or coercive behaviour;
- economic abuse;
- psychological, emotional or other abuse.

2.3 This definition includes modern day slavery, coercive control, honour-based abuse, forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

2.4 Within this definition, economic abuse means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on a person's ability to do either of the following:

- Acquire, use or maintain money or other property.
- Obtain goods or services.

2.5 It doesn't matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or part of an ongoing pattern of behaviour.



2.6 For the definition and policy to apply, both people must be aged 16 or over and personally connected. Personally connected is defined in the act as people who:

- are married to each other;
- are civil partners of each other;
- have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement is still in place);
- have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement is still in place);
- are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other;
- are, or have been, parents of the same child or children;
- are relatives.

2.7 Children aged under 18 are also recognised as survivors in their own right if they see, hear or experience the effects of the abuse or are related to the survivor or the perpetrator.

2.8 Anyone can be affected by domestic abuse, regardless of age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief.

2.9 If a tenant or homelessness applicant tells us about abuse in other circumstances, such as abuse by a carer, we'll consider this under our Wokingham Borough Council's Safeguarding policy.

2.10 Further details of the regulatory and corporate context are set out in Appendix 1.

3. Dealing With Reports of Domestic Abuse

3.1 We take all reports of domestic abuse seriously. Domestic abuse is a serious crime and we'll always treat people experiencing domestic abuse in a sympathetic, supportive and non-judgmental way. We'll make sure anyone can report domestic abuse to us, providing interpreters and translating information into other languages or formats as needed.

3.2 If you are an existing Council Tenant, you can report domestic abuse to Housing Management:

- Phone – 0118 974 6000, option 4, option 4
- Email – housing@wokingham.gov.uk
- www.wokingham.gov.uk/housing-and-tenants/tenant-services/





3.3 If you are experiencing domestic abuse and do not feel safe to remain in your home or current accommodation, you can contact the Housing Needs and Options Team. This is regardless of whether you are a homeowner, private tenant, Housing Association tenant, Council Tenant, living with friends or family or rough sleeping. We will discuss your circumstances and talk through the options available to you. It is likely that we will offer you a homelessness assessment.

Housing Needs and Options:

- Phone – 0118 974 6000, option 4, option 4
- Email – housing.needs@wokingham.gov.uk
- Website – <https://live.housingjigsaw.co.uk/>



3.4 If you report a case of domestic abuse, the Housing Needs and Options Team will respond within one working day and will liaise with you about the next steps. If you are not safe to remain in your home or current accommodation, we may recommend that you leave your home. If you decide to leave, then we will support you to access safe accommodation that is appropriate for your needs.

3.5 Your housing options may include:

- Making a homelessness application
- Applying to go on the housing register
- Securing a place in refuge
- Looking for privately rented accommodation

It might be that you do not wish to leave your home, in which case our Homelessness Prevention Officer can discuss measures that would allow you to remain in your home safely. This could include a referral to our Home Refuge Scheme who can provide additional security measures, or signpost to services who can help you access legal remedies such as injunctions.

3.6 If we believe you are homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days because it is not safe for you to remain in your home or current accommodation, we will have a legal duty to either prevent you from becoming homeless or a legal duty to relieve your homelessness. We will develop with you a personalised housing plan which details the reasonable steps that you and us will take to secure suitable accommodation for you and your household members. The steps included in your plan will be sensitive to your wishes, with your safety being a primary consideration.



- 3.7 If you have become homeless as a result of domestic abuse, or it is not safe for you to remain in your home or current accommodation because of domestic abuse, regardless of your tenure, we will provide you with emergency or temporary accommodation. This may include refuge accommodation, accommodation within our own temporary stock or an out of borough emergency accommodation placement. A placement outside of the borough may be necessary but this decision is based on risk information as well as your wishes and needs.
- 3.8 You do not need to have a local connection to a local authority to approach for assistance if you are homeless or are threatened with homelessness due to domestic abuse. This means we can assist you if you do not currently live or work or have family connections in the borough. This also means that if you do have a local connection to Wokingham but wish to present as homeless due to domestic abuse to another local authority, you can do this.
- 3.9 If you do not have recourse to public funds, you may not qualify for homelessness assistance. However, the Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse Concession (MVDAC) supports those who have entered or stayed in the UK as a spouse, unmarried partner, same-sex or civil partner of a British Citizen, or settled citizen and this relationship has permanently broken down due to domestic abuse. The Housing Needs and Options Team can signpost you for support to apply for this, which would enable you to access public funds and advise, whilst you prepare and apply for indefinite leave to remain, or make alternative arrangements.
- 3.10 If you are experiencing domestic abuse and do not feel safe to remain in your home or current accommodation outside of Wokingham Borough Council's opening hours (Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm) then please contact our Out of Hours service on 0800 212 111 who will be able to assist and can provide you with emergency accommodation if required. You will be advised to contact the Housing Needs and Options Team the following working day. We will also contact you so that we can discuss your circumstances and talk through the options available to you. It is likely that we will offer you a homelessness assessment.
- 3.11 We employ staff who are specially trained to deal with reports of domestic abuse. Our domestic abuse lead is the Housing and Domestic Abuse Specialist, who oversees our response to domestic abuse, with support from other employees.



- 3.12 Once you have reported domestic abuse, we'll offer you a meeting and/or assessment with a trained employee. We'll always consider your situation and preferences when selecting the employee. For example, we'll offer the option of meeting with an employee of the gender requested by you.
- 3.13 We'll agree the method of contact you wish us to use when communicating with you. This includes talking to us over the phone, through an online video call, at our offices or another safe venue.
- 3.14 We'll carry out a risk assessment using a Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour Based Violence Risk Identification Checklist (DASH 2009 risk model), which is a UK-wide accredited form used by us and partner organisations to plan how we'll support the survivor and any children.
- 3.15 We may refer you to the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC). This is a meeting attended by agencies only, to discuss cases of domestic abuse that professionals consider to be high risk. The purpose of the MARAC is to share information and discuss options for increasing the safety of the survivor.
- 3.16 We'll base our support on the survivor's individual needs. We recognise that not all people see themselves as victims and we'll make sure that these labels aren't associated with you. We'll always be sympathetic and supportive.

4. Action

- 4.1 We take a zero-tolerance approach to domestic abuse and will hold perpetrators of abuse to account. We'll be clear that domestic abuse is never the fault of the survivor or their children.
- 4.2 Our approach is survivor-centred and we'll take into account their views and ongoing safety when deciding the most appropriate course of action. We'll make sure the survivor is always aware of our response.
- 4.3 We'll use the full range of remedies as appropriate, taking into account the needs of each individual case. We'll advise about possible courses of action, both to respond to the immediate situation and to deal with it longer term. We won't pressure survivors to take legal action but will offer advice if it is something they wish to pursue. This may include helping the survivor by getting legal advice about a non-molestation order or tenancy enforcement, which may include possession proceedings.



4.4 We'll provide relevant advice and help, including information about alternative housing, additional security measures in the home and suitable support from specialist organisations, such as: Cranstoun Domestic Abuse Service; Flag DV; Aurora New Dawn.

4.5 We recognise that housing is one of the main factors why survivors don't leave abusive relationships. If you fear for your immediate safety, we'll work in partnership to consider your housing options. This could include emergency or temporary accommodation or a permanent relocation if there is no prospect of a safe return.

In accordance with our Allocations Policy: if you are an existing Council or Housing Association tenant and you need to leave your current home due to domestic abuse, we have a duty to ensure that you are offered alternative social housing.

If we accept the Relief Duty or main housing duty for you and your case is discussed at MARAC, you will be awarded Band 1 on our housing register, which is priority need.

If your case has not been heard at MARAC, however you've had to leave your home due to domestic abuse and we accept the Relief Duty or main housing duty for you, you will be awarded Band 2 on our housing register.

4.6 There may be circumstances where, for urgent operational, safeguarding or high-risk cases, there may be a need to make an offer of housing outside of the criteria set out in the Allocations policy. These cases will be discussed at the Exceptional Circumstances Panel.

4.7 If you need to move home, we'll work with you to identify areas that will minimise the risk of future abuse. This can include support for any financial issues that may cause a barrier in sourcing alternative accommodation. We'll also continue to take action against the perpetrator where relevant.

4.8 A significant number of adults or children who experience domestic abuse will also require safeguarding. Employees are trained to be aware of this and to make safeguarding referrals as needed to make sure people are protected. This is in line with Wokingham Borough Council's Safeguarding Policy.

4.9 We'll keep all cases involving domestic abuse under review until the survivor is satisfied it's been resolved. If we take a homelessness application from you and make a decision on your case or discharge our duty to you, you have a right to request a review of this decision and you will be advised in any decision letter that we issue you how to do this.



4.10 Whilst we are working with you and after concerns have been resolved we'll provide support for survivors, their families and witnesses to make sure they feel safe in their home and the community in which they live.

5. Working in Partnership

5.1 We work in collaboration with relevant agencies when responding to incidents of domestic abuse. We'll take account of each person's circumstances and the different courses of action that may be possible and appropriate.

5.2 We keep an up-to-date list of a range of local and national agencies which may be able to offer advice or support depending on survivors' circumstances.

5.3 Wokingham Borough Council will maintain strong partnership working with local agencies and will share information through the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC), and Thames Valley Police. We'll continue to be an active member of the Community Safety Partnership and use that to influence strategic decision-making regarding support services available in the communities where our customers live.

5.4 We'll refer survivors for tenancy sustainment support if they are existing tenants and require support with their finances, we will refer to other support services for survivors who require financial support who are not Council tenants. We'll also signpost to organisations for legal advice as appropriate. See link to the Wokingham Borough Council directory of support services below:

<https://directory.wokingham.gov.uk/kb5/wokingham/directory/advice.page?id=4s95ZjtdxCs>

5.5 We'll work in partnership with appropriate agencies to support or signpost perpetrators of domestic abuse who recognise and want to change their behaviour.

5.6 We respect customers' right to privacy and will act in line with our Data Protection Policy. We'll never force anyone to share any information they don't want to.

5.7 When working with other organisations we may need to share some information about the case and the individual. We'll only share information with the survivor's permission, unless there is a risk to the safeguarding of children or a vulnerable adult and it is a duty of care. In addition, agencies such as the police may request personal data about our customers as part of their own ongoing investigation.



In these cases, the Housing and Domestic Abuse Specialist, Service Manager Housing Needs and Options, and Service Manager Housing Management and Refugee Services will assess the sharing of data on a case-by-case basis, in line with our Data Protection Policy.

6. Awareness of Domestic Abuse

6.1 We'll widely publicise information to raise awareness about domestic abuse, telling our customers how to get help if they need it and the type of response they can expect from us. We'll tell customers about the support we provide around domestic abuse when they move into their Wokingham Borough Council home. We'll also support national campaigns to increase awareness.

6.2 We'll carry out a rolling programme of employee training to make sure domestic abuse is always at the forefront of our minds. Our employees are trained to spot signs of domestic abuse when working in homes or having conversations with customers. They are aware of how to act and report any concerns confidently and sensitively, such as through our Whistleblowing (Confidential Reporting).

7. Feedback

7.1 We value the views of our customers and ask for feedback about the service we provide. We'll do this in a number of different ways, including through working groups and informal conversations.

7.2 We'll listen to feedback and use it to improve the way in which we work when dealing with domestic abuse.

8. Equalities Considerations

8.1 We have completed an equality impact assessment for this policy.

8.2 We will make sure our services are accessible. This includes providing a variety of ways to report domestic abuse and arranging interpreters and translating information into other languages or formats as needed. This is to make sure that we do not create additional barriers and that everyone can access our service in the way they need.

8.3 We recognise that survivors' experiences of domestic abuse may in part be defined by their background, for example, economic status, gender, sexual orientation, ability, age, religion, ethnic group or immigration status. We will recognise this intersectionality and understand that certain individuals may face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. We will consider the individual needs of each survivor when tailoring our approach.



8.4 Although domestic abuse can affect anyone, certain people may be disproportionately affected or particularly vulnerable and some groups are affected by specific forms of domestic abuse. We also understand there are cultural and other barriers to reporting domestic abuse. We'll take all of this into account in the support we provide.

8.5 We will train employees to understand how domestic abuse differently affects individuals and work in partnership with specialist providers to take action and make sure survivors get the right support. We will partner with and support local organisations with all relevant experience and understanding in order to better support survivors' needs.

9. Policy Consultation, Approval, and Review

9.1 This policy will be reviewed every three years. We'll regularly review best practice, changes to legislation and feedback from our employees and customers, reviewing this policy as required more frequently to improve the way we work.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Policy Context, Corporate Strategy

Legislation: This policy supports the following legislation: • Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003; • Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014; • Care Act 2014; • Crime and Security Act 2010; • Data Protection Act 2018; • Domestic Abuse Act 2021; • Domestic Abuse Crime and Victims Act 2004; • Equality Act 2010; • Housing Act 1996; • Homelessness Reduction Act 2017; • Local Government Act 1972; • Policing and Crime Act 2009; • Protection from Harassment Act 1997; • Serious Crime Act 2015.

Related policies: This policy is linked to the following policies: • Domestic Abuse Workplace Policy and Guidance; • Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021 – 24 detailing our strategies and approaches to domestic abuse. • Allocations Policy; • Tenant Handbook; • Sheltered Tenant Handbook; • Tenancy Policy; • Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021 – 2024; • Pan Berkshire multi – agency procedure for Safeguarding; • Berkshire Safeguarding Adults Policies & Procedures.



Appendix 2: Support Services Directory

- **Cranstoun Domestic Abuse Service:** 0118 402 1921
<https://cranstoun.org/help-and-advice/domestic-abuse/dass-wokingham/>
- **Hourglass – support for elder victims of abuse:** 0808 808 8141
<https://wearehourglass.org/hourglass-services>
- **Kaleidoscopic – support for adults and children:** kaleidoscopicuk@gmail.com
<https://www.kaleidoscopic.uk/contact/>
- **Wokingham Borough Council Directory of Support Services:**
<https://directory.wokingham.gov.uk/kb5/wokingham/directory/advice.page?id=4s95ZjtdxCs>