

OXFORD CITY COUNCIL

HOUSING SERVICES

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE POLICY

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Oxford City Council

Housing Services

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE POLICY

Housing Services Business Unit

The Housing Services Business Unit provides tenancy and property management services for Oxford City Council's residential properties and garages, and their tenants and leaseholders. It maintains registers of applicants for Council housing, and allocates new tenancies to those applicants in greatest housing need. Through its Elderly Services Section, the Business Unit provides for the maintenance of the communal areas of the sheltered housing schemes, an Alarm Control Centre and Mobile Warden Service for vulnerable sections of the community. Through its Housing Needs Team it assists people with the highest housing need, including those who meet the criteria for statutory homelessness as laid out in the Housing Act 1996, by assessing all applications and placing those who fulfil the criteria into temporary accommodation until they are offered permanent accommodation.

Oxford City Council's Vision

Oxford City Council's vision guides all the work we do in Housing Services.

This policy sets out guidelines that are in line with our vision.

Oxford City Council's vision is to build pride in our City. We are committed to achieving this vision by:

- Improving the Council's performance - We aim to provide services that the people of Oxford can rely on, services that get things right the first time. We will develop a service culture that is open and responsive to the needs of our customers. We will ensure that all our customers can access our services easily and on equal terms.
- Working more closely with partners to develop and deliver shared goals for the City - We believe that the Council, as the democratically elected body for Oxford, should play a focused and creative role in the life of the City. We will do this by working closely with the communities in our City and learning from them.

One of Oxford City Council's key strategic priorities to achieving the vision is to make Oxford a safer City. People cannot enjoy their City if they do not feel safe in their homes or on their streets. The Council will tackle anti-social behaviour. We will work with other bodies, especially the police, to reduce crime and the fear of crime.

What is Domestic Violence?

Oxford City Council has adopted the Home Office's definition of domestic violence: Any violence between current and former partners in an intimate relationship, wherever and whenever the violence occurs. The violence may include physical, sexual, emotional or financial abuse. (Home Office Multi-agency Guidance for Addressing Domestic Violence 2000) The Council recognises that domestic violence occurs across society regardless of age, gender, race, sexuality, wealth and geography. It involves abuses of power and controlling behaviours:

- Physical behaviours such as assault, indecent assault, rape, destruction of property and threats.
- Non-physical behaviours such as destructive criticism, pressure tactics, belittling, breaking trust, isolation, oppressive control of finances and harassment.

The physical manifestations of domestic violence are criminal offences; the non-physical forms may also amount to offences, under the Protection from Harassment Act. (Home Office Multi-agency Guidance for Addressing Domestic Violence 2000)

Domestic violence impacts upon children, the whole family and the community.

The frequency and/or severity of abuse often escalates over time, sometimes only ending with the death of the victim.

Research shows that domestic violence:

- claims 150 lives each year ($\approx 79\%$ women, $\approx 21\%$ men)
- accounts for almost a fifth of all violent crime
- has more repeat victims than any other crime (on average there will be 35 assaults before a victim calls the police)

Domestic violence impacts on the health and welfare of children and young people. Children are often aware of what's happening and they are likely to be affected by the fear, distress and disruption to their lives. There is also an overlap between abuse of women and abuse of children. Where the safety and welfare of children are a concern we will deal with it in accordance with Oxford City Council's Child Protection policy (currently being updated).

Why do we have a Domestic Violence Policy?

To respond to our customers needs

As stated in Oxford City Council's vision we are committed to being responsive to the needs of our customers and to ensuring that all our customers can access our services easily and on equal terms. Domestic violence often has consequences for the housing situation of those affected and they will therefore turn to Housing Services for help. Through this policy we can ensure that all staff in Housing Services adopt a common approach to giving advice, guidance and assistance to customers.

Work effectively in partnerships

Domestic violence is a complex issue – it affects not only housing issues, but also finances, children etc. People from ethnic minority groups, elderly people, people with disabilities, mental health problems, drug or alcohol dependency might have special needs. It is therefore essential that we work together with other agencies where appropriate and with the Council's Domestic Violence Co-ordinator.

Legal obligations/statutory duties

The council has statutory duties:

- to act in accordance with the European Convention of Human Rights (Human Rights Act 1998, particularly Articles 2 and 8);
- to provide for the well being of its citizens (Local Government Act 2000);
- to do all it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in its area (Crime and Disorder Act 1998);
- to assist people fleeing domestic violence with finding suitable accommodation (Part VII of the 1996 Housing Act);
- to secure alternative accommodation for those who are accepted as homeless through domestic violence (Part VII the Housing Act 1996);
- to protect children and young people (Children Act 1989, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1991);

Policy Statement

We believe

- that every person has a right to be safe from fear and abuse;
- that domestic violence is unacceptable and should not be tolerated;
- that violence in relationships is an abuse of power as well as likely to be a criminal offence;
- anyone experiencing domestic violence should be supported and protected from further abuse.

We will

- provide a supportive and enabling environment which encourages people to report domestic violence;
- provide information and advice to increase the safety of those experiencing domestic violence;
- as a landlord take action against perpetrators who are Council tenant where possible;
- put the customer's safety first and ensure confidentiality;

- respect the choices of the customer;
- explore possible options for survivors of domestic violence, such as added security to their homes if they wish to stay put, or re-housing if they do not wish to stay in their homes;
- provide temporary accommodation where necessary to those fleeing domestic violence;
- signpost survivors to relevant agencies and positively support action against alleged perpetrators;
- provide training for all staff on domestic violence issues;
- provide support to Housing staff who work with people experiencing domestic violence.

Key Principles

We will adopt a 'survivor-centred' approach to people experiencing domestic violence. Our aim is to empower them by advising them of their options and giving guidance so they can make their own decisions.

Safety and confidentiality are paramount. Oxford City Council will only involve other agencies or divulge information with the consent of the customer, unless required to do so by law or unless that information is necessary for the protection of people at risk.

Service provision – what customers can expect

We will arrange for you to speak to a member of staff in private and in a safe environment.

If possible we will arrange for you to speak to a member of staff who is of the same sex or ethnic origin if you feel more comfortable with this.

If required we will arrange for an interpreter or signer. We will always use a professional interpreter or signer.

We will listen to you and give you time to explain your situation.

We will advise you of your options and let you make your own decisions.

We will provide temporary accommodation to persons at risk of domestic violence if necessary whilst the Council investigates the circumstances.

If required we will refer you to the Domestic Violence Housing Support Worker based in Neighbourhood Renewal..

Where we cannot help we will refer you to other agencies.

Monitoring domestic violence cases

All cases should be recorded on a domestic violence monitoring form, i.e. all approaches to the service as a result of domestic violence. Line managers should send a copy of the Domestic Violence reporting form to the Policy & Performance Manager and to the CANAcT team each quarter.

The Domestic Violence Co-ordinator, the Domestic Violence Housing Support Worker and representatives for the Housing Needs team and Tenancy Services will meet on a quarterly basis to monitor current domestic violence cases and agree on ways forward for difficult cases.

Reviewing policy

This policy will be reviewed annually. It will also be reviewed if there is a change in legislation.

Literature List

Domestic Violence: Break the chain multi-agency guidance for addressing domestic violence (Home Office)

Relationship breakdown: A guide for social landlords (DETR)

British Crime Survey 2002/03

The provision of accommodation and support for households experiencing domestic violence in England (ODPM 2002)

Safety and Justice: The Government's Proposals on Domestic Violence (Home Office)

Homelessness – Code of Guidance for Local Authorities (ODPM 2002)

Reducing domestic violence ...What works? Accommodation provision (Policing and Reducing Crime Unit, Home Office Research 2002)

Reducing domestic violence ...What works? Meeting the needs of children (Policing and Reducing Crime Unit, Home Office Research 2002)

Loves me, loves me not (leaflet published by Home Office 2002)

www.crimereduction.gov.uk/dv01.htm

www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime/domesticviolence/index.html