DOMESTIC ABUSE FOR HOUSING POLICY
BEDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

1. Introduction

BBC Policy Aims and Commitment

Bedford Borough Council believes that Domestic Abuse is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

We take all reports of domestic abuse seriously and our officers will always treat victims/survivors with respect and dignity and empower them to make informed decisions. We use a safety-led approach and will always work with the victim/survivor to make sure any actions taken improve their personal safety and housing security ensuring that outcomes are right the first time.

We believe perpetrators (those committing the abuse) are responsible for their own behaviour and that they should be held to account for the consequences of their actions.

Policy aims are captured in the Bedford Borough Housing and Domestic Abuse Pledge below.

Scope

This policy provides guidance for:

- Victim/survivors of Domestic abuse that need housing support from Bedford Borough council
- Housing staff who are supporting victim/survivors of Domestic Abuse eligible for housing assistance under the Housing Act 1996.
- Please note that appropriate signposting for assistance from partner organisations will be made available for those that are not eligible.

This policy links to other Bedford Borough Council polices and strategies as detailed in Appendix 1.

A range of legislation applies to this policy as detailed in appendix 2

Housing and Domestic Abuse Pledge

Bedford Borough Council pledges to:

1. Promote the housing help that is on offer to encourage you to come forward if you are a victim/survivor of domestic abuse.
2. Create a safe space to talk and a trained housing professional will listen to you with a non-judgemental and believing approach
3. Always prioritise safety for you and any children
4. Empower you to make decisions that are right for you
5. Explore suitable housing options with you.
6. Explain our processes and decisions clearly and in a timely manner
7. Work with partners and other organisations to connect you to additional support
8. Hold perpetrator to account wherever possible
9. Seek feedback on our services and take action to continually improve.
10. Provide mandatory domestic abuse training for staff

2. Defining Domestic Abuse

Domestic Abuse, as defined in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021[1] includes (but is not limited to):

Abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:	Other forms of domestic violence and abuse:
• physical or sexual abuse • violent or threatening behaviour • controlling or coercive behaviour • economic abuse • psychological, emotional, or other abuse	• so called 'honour' based violence • female genital mutilation (FGM) • forced marriage • stalking and harassment • image-based abuse

Domestic abuse includes behaviour that consists of a single incident or part of an ongoing pattern of behaviour.

Personally connected is defined in the act as people who:

- Are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other
- Are due to be, are currently, or have been, married or civil partners to each other
- Are, or have been, parents of the same child or children
- Are relatives (the act gives further detail on this such as extended family or in-laws or parents to adult children)

See the DA Act Domestic Abuse Act 2021 for further detail on the statutory definition.

What is Domestic Abuse?

Domestic abuse is when someone you know or have a relationship with hurts, controls, or frightens you.
This can happen in different ways, not only physical harm.

It may include:

- **Physical abuse** – hitting, pushing, or damaging your belongings
- **Sexual abuse** – any sexual activity without your agreement
- **Emotional abuse** – making you feel scared, isolated, or not good enough
- **Controlling behaviour** – stopping you from seeing people, making your own choices, or living your life freely

[1] Domestic Abuse Act 2021

- **Money (economic) abuse** – controlling your money, work, or access to basic needs like food or transport
- **Stalking or harassment** – repeated unwanted contact that makes you feel unsafe, including through phones or online
- **'Honour'-based abuse** – abuse linked to family or community expectations
- **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)** – a serious form of harm and against the law

Understanding Coercive Control

Coercive control is a common and serious form of abuse and it is a crime
It is when someone repeatedly acts in a way that makes you feel controlled, dependent, isolated, or afraid.

This can include:

- Stopping you from seeing friends or family
- Controlling your money or daily activities
- Watching where you go or who you speak to
- Putting you down or making you feel worthless
- Threatening to harm you, your children, or themselves
- Damaging your belongings
- Pressuring or forcing you to do things you do not want to do
- Trying to control your thoughts or decisions in an unfair way.
- Lying, twisting the truth, or make you feel guilty so that you do what they want.
- Makes you doubt your own thoughts, feelings, or memories.
- For example, they may say something did not happen when it did, or tell you that you are "overreacting" or "imagining things."
- Over time, this can make you feel confused, lose confidence, and feel like you cannot trust yourself

The Domestic Abuse Act

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places duties on Local Authorities and other Partner agencies to protect and support victims and survivors of Domestic Abuse.

It also recognises that children who witness Domestic Abuse are direct victims themselves, and services must be put in place to protect them.

Many forms of abuse are a crime, including:

- harassment
- assault
- criminal damage
- attempted murder
- rape or sexual assault
- false imprisonment
- threats to kill
- controlling and coercive behaviour
- image-based abuse non-fatal strangulation & suffocation

3. How to contact us for help

If you are in immediate danger police support should be requested by ringing 999.
In non-urgent situations, the police can be called by ringing 101.

If you are a victim/survivor of Domestic Abuse and need housing help please contact us for advice and support as soon as possible on:

01234 718058,

or in person at the

Bedford Borough Hub, **2 Horne Lane, Bedford, MK40 1RA**.

Our opening hours are:

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday: 9am-5pm

Wednesday: 10am-5pm

In an emergency outside of these hours, please call **01234 267422.**

You also can report domestic abuse through interaction with any of our council services.

4. What to expect from us

A customer services officer will listen sensitively and with empathy as you tell us about your situation and the help that you need.

- We take all reports of domestic abuse seriously and handle any disclosures confidentially in a way that is non-judgmental and does not place you at greater risk. Please see appendix 4 for our data protection statement.
- We will keep consistent, accurate and relevant records. We will share these, with your permission, so that you do not have to keep repeating the details unnecessarily.
- We will not share any information without your consent, unless required to do so by law, or unless the information is necessary to protect a child or an adult at risk.

The customer service officer will arrange an appointment with a trained housing specialist in a private interview room to create a safe space to talk. You may be asked to bring documents such as ID or tenancy agreements to the appointment. However, if you cannot safely get hold of such documents this will not prevent you accessing our help.

Please let us know any reasonable adjustments you may need such as a:

- An Independent interpreter and/or translation service
- Wheelchair accessible space and documents, a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter.
- Housing Officer of a preferred gender.
- We will make every attempt to ensure diversity of needs are met.

We aim to book appointments within 5 days, but in cases of domestic abuse where an urgent move may be required for safety reasons, we will see you on the same day.

The initial appointment will be held with someone who has specialist training, using a trauma informed approach. In the housing appointment, our first priority is to ensure that your living arrangements are safe. This will consider your personal circumstances and level of risk. Our aim is to prevent your homelessness where possible. If you are homeless as a result of being a victim of domestic abuse we will treat your case as priority need, as set out in section 189 of the 1996 Housing Act.

The housing officer may support you to:

- Remain in your current property where it is safe to do so to prevent your homelessness. This could include (but not limited to) improving security on

your house, advising about legal rights such as an occupation order, liaising with the police and specialist partners.

- Help you to secure or source alternative accommodation of your choice such as with friends or family if safe and suitable to meet your needs
- Provide you with suitable temporary accommodation. This may include either refuge, hotel or self-contained housing depending on availability and need.
- We will only use bed and breakfast or hotel accommodation for a short stay (no more than 3 nights) if there is no suitable alternative available.
- We will support you to access benefits to help with any costs.
- We aim to accommodate within the Borough where possible to keep close ties you may have (e.g. support networks, employment, schools for the children, or medical provision) unless unsafe to do so.

Your housing officer will have a conversation with you about your current situation and understand what is needed to keep you safe. This is a risk assessment using a checklist called DASH ('Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour Based Violence Risk Assessment'). If a recent DASH (within the last two weeks) already exists, then consent will be sought to share this, rather than ask you to repeat the process. This assessment will help us prepare safety plans and advise you the options available.

- If the DASH risk assessment identifies your situation as high risk, a referral to MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) will be made and you will be offered an Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA).
- Otherwise, with your consent, we will make a referral into local domestic abuse services to provide support.
- If there is a child, children or vulnerable adult living within the home where there is abuse, we have a legal duty to follow safeguarding procedures. Referrals into children's/adults services are made, as appropriate.

Please see Bedfordshire Domestic Abuse Partnership website for a list of services.

During the initial appointment the housing officer will also have a conversation with you to explore longer term safe and settled housing options. Impartial advice will be given about

- Your tenancy rights,
- Affordability, benefits and grant eligibility.
- Support available for renting in the private sector
- Accessing social housing
- Any other relevant housing matters.

The officer will also make enquiries to establish any duties owed to you under the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. This

includes checking your eligibility for support. For more information see Shelter Legal England - Eligibility for homeless assistance - Shelter England

We will not contact your perpetrator or any family member that you identify as a risk, in the course of our enquiries.

Finally, the housing officer will create a Personal Housing Plan with you. This agreement will set out actions that we will take and actions that you will take to address your housing need.

After this initial appointment the housing officer will explain next steps and then keep in touch with you as regularly, typically fortnightly as a minimum. Your housing hfficer will agree with you the safest way and times to contact you.

5. Social housing and domestic abuse

Bedford Borough Council believes no one should have to experience or live in fear of domestic abuse in any form and your home should always be a safe space.

Bedford Borough Council operates in accordance with National Legislation (see appendix 2)

Our social housing allocations scheme[2] gives priority to domestic abuse victim/survivors. As such, Victim/Survivors are exempt from the local connection criteria on the Social Housing Allocations Scheme.

Bedford Borough Council will also open a statutory homeless case from anyone that has applied to join the housing register that is suffering Domestic abuse unless a customer chooses explicitly to opt out.

Bedford Borough council provides support and works in partnership with agencies to provide the safest and best options for housing for DA survivors. Our aim is where possible to avoid homelessness for families**.**

In emergency cases, our Allocations scheme (Bedford Borough Allocation Scheme 2026) states that:

- Applicants that have an immediate need for new accommodation due to an emergency or exceptional circumstance, such as needing to flee violence and would be in immediate and serious danger if they were to remain in their current accommodation, will be awarded the highest priority Band reflecting emergency needs.
- Each case (and any available supporting evidence pertaining to the risk) will be considered and determined on its individual facts and merits.

[2] Allocations Scheme April 2021

- Under this Band applicants will be given one offer of suitable accommodation in a location that is removed from the immediate risk.

6. Coordinated Community Response

Working in partnership is key to tackling domestic abuse.

Bedford Borough Council leads and chairs the Bedford Multi Agency Risk Assessment conference (MARAC) responding to and managing high-risk domestic abuse cases.

We closely with adults and children's services and other internal departments to provide holistic support.

We work in partnership with our local registered social and supported housing providers through formal protocols to ensure joint early intervention to help victim and survivors of domestic abuse.

We are committed to developing reciprocal arrangements with regional neighbouring councils.

We work proactively, and in partnership with other agencies. These include (but not limited to):

- The criminal justice system, including probation and the police.
- Education
- Local voluntary sector partners
- Local domestic abuse specialist services
- Health providers including substance misuse services
- Charitable partners working with migrants, refugees and those with 'No Recourse to Public Funds'
- Specialist accommodation and advice services for local minority groups

Bedford Borough Council works with our partners to raise awareness about domestic abuse via engagement activities, social media and providing training internally and externally.

7. Perpetrators of domestic abuse

Where possible we will seek justice for the victim/survivor and to hold the perpetrator to account. This can include referral to our local behaviour change programmes to reduce harm and prevent re-offending

Our main concern and duty are to the safety of the victim/survivor and that of their child/ children. For this reason, any action taken against the perpetrator will be firstly discussed and a with the victim/survivor to minimise any harm or consequence to their personal safety or housing security.

If the perpetrator has been identified and it is safe to do so we will report to the police or the community safety team. Their details will be recorded on our relevant case management systems.

8. Equalities

Bedford Borough Council holds a public Sector Equality duty under the Equalities Act 2010 for those with protected characteristics: as race, sex, sexual orientation, disability, age, religion, gender reassignment, marital status and pregnancy. This policy has due regard to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations

We recognise that victims and survivors of domestic abuse may face overlapping forms of discrimination and disadvantage based on protected characteristics and/or other factors such as socio-economic status. This can compound their experiences of abuse and creates additional barriers to support.

We aim to ensure our services are inclusive and equitable and work in partnership with local specialist agencies to meet the intersecting needs of victim/survivors that we work with.

9. Glossary

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC): This is a group of highly skilled professionals representing the local police, health, child protection, housing practitioners, Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs), probation and other specialists from the statutory and voluntary sectors. It is co-ordinated by the Police. An Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) presents the case on behalf of

the victim and the representatives work together to increasing the safety of the victim and create a co-ordinated action plan.

DASH risk assessment: The Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour Based Violence (DASH) Risk Assessment has been used by the UK's Police Force since March 2009. This has been further developed and is now used by all professionals working with victims/survivors of domestic abuse. The risk assessment makes sure everyone asks the right questions and can accurately assess levels of risk. If the risk threshold is met, cases are then referred to the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)

IDVA- Independent Domestic Violence Advocate: An Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) is a specialist professional who supports victim / survivors of domestic abuse by providing safety planning, advocacy, and coordinated support across criminal justice and safeguarding systems.

BDAP- Bedfordshire Domestic Abuse Partnership is a multi-agency collaboration that brings together local services and organisations to coordinate efforts in preventing domestic abuse, supporting survivors, and holding perpetrators accountable.

Appendix 1

Local policies and strategies

- Bedford Borough Council Corporate Plan Corporate Plan Report
- Domestic Abuse Strategy 2026-2031 Domestic abuse | Bedford Borough Council
- Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024-2029
- Joint local health and wellbeing Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Housing Strategy 2021-2026 download
- Staff Domestic Abuse Guidelines
- Safeguarding Children: Safeguarding Bedfordshire - Bedford Borough Safeguarding Children Partnership Reporting Concerns
- Safeguarding Adults: Welcome and Introduction Report abuse | Bedford Borough Council
- Anti-Social Behaviour council web pages: Help to resolve anti-social behaviour (ASB) | Bedford Borough Council
- Bedford Borough Allocations scheme 2021: Allocations Scheme April 2021

Appendix 2

National Legislation and Strategies

- Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- Housing Act 1996 Parts 6 and 7
- Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014
- Care Act 2014
- Mental Capacity Act 2005
- Children Act 2004
- Family Law Act 1996
- Equality Act 2010
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Protection of Freedoms Act 2012
- Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004
- Crime and Disorder Act 1998
- Crime and Security Act 2010
- Serious Crime Act 2015
- Modern Slavery Act 2015
- Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007
- Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 and the Regulator of Social Housing new Consumer Regulations
- National VAWG Strategy : Freedom from Violence and Abuse (2025)
- Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) (Clare's Law) The Council will also have regard to all relevant statutory guidance including:
- Domestic Abuse: Statutory Guidance
- Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities
- Allocation of accommodation guidance for local authorities
- DAHA Whole Housing Approach
- Working together to safeguard children – statutory guidance on multi agency working to help, protect and promote the welfare of children.
- Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) Statutory Guidance

Appendix 3

Local and National Support

Local support:

Bedfordshire Domestic Abuse Partnership: This website has an up-to-date directory of all local (and national) Domestic Abuse services

https://bedsdv.org.uk/

National Support

A list of national support agencies which can also be found on the refuge website:[3]

- The National Domestic abuse Helpline: Call the **National Domestic Abuse Helpline** for free 24 hours a day on 0808 2000 247, **live chat to the National Domestic Abuse Helpline team** 10am – 10pm Monday to Friday or **fill in a contact form to request a call back from the Helpline team.**
- Emergency services: 999
- Men's Advice Line – specialist support for male survivors: 0808 8010327 **mensadviceline.org.uk**
- Galop – specialist support for LGBT+ survivors: 0800 999 5428 **galop.org.uk**
- Karma Nirvana – support for honour-based abuse: 0800 5999 247 **karmanirvana.org.uk**
- National Stalking Helpline: 0808 802 0300 **suzylamplugh.org**
- Revenge Porn Helpline: 0345 6000 459 **revengepornhelpline.org.uk**

Support for Black, Asian and ethnically diverse women

- Foreign and Commonwealth Office Forced Marriage Unit supports people who are trying to stop a forced marriage and women who need help leaving a marriage she has been forced into 020 7008 0151 **www.gov.uk/guidance/forced-marriage**
- The Refugee Council provides free advice and information to asylum seekers and refugees in UK: **refugeecouncil.org.uk**
- Immigration Advice Service: 0333 305 9272 **iasservices.org.uk**
  Asylum Aid offers free, independent legal advice and representation to asylum seekers 020 7354 9264 **asylumaid.org.uk**
- Southall Black Sisters supports Asian and African-Caribbean women experiencing any kind of gender-based violence: 0208 571 0800 **southallblacksisters.org.uk**

[3] Information for professionals - Refuge

- Jewish Women's Aid Helpline is a confidential, non-judgemental, listening service
  0808 801 0500 **jwa.org.uk**
- Somalian Women's Centre offers advice and information for the Somali community living in and around Ealing on housing, immigration, nationality and asylum, education, employment and welfare rights | 020 8752 1787
- Shakti Women's Aid supports women experiencing domestic violence in Scotland
  0131 475 2399 **shaktiedinburgh.co.uk**
- The Kiran Project provides a range of services for Asian women experiencing domestic violence
  020 8558 1986 **kiranss.org.uk**
- Chinese Information and Advice Centre offers free legal advice and support including to women experiencing domestic violence | 020 7692 3697 **ciac.co.uk**
- BAWSO provides services and support for women experiencing all forms of gender-based violence in Wales | 0800 731 8147 (Helpline) **bawso.org.uk**
- JAN Trust works to combat poverty, discrimination, abuse and social exclusion among women including refugees or asylum seekers | 0208 889 9433 **jantrust.org**

Appendix 4

Data Protection

Bedford Borough Council will process personal data in accordance with UK data protection legislation, including the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. Personal information collected in relation to this policy will only be used where it is necessary and lawful to do so, for the purposes of providing support, safeguarding individuals, and fulfilling the Council's statutory duties.

Information will be handled securely and processed for the purposes of delivering a statutory housing service. This may include contact for feedback purposes to continually improve how those services are delivered. Information will only shared with appropriate staff or partner agencies where there is a lawful basis, for example to protect individuals at risk, prevent harm, or where required by law

Further information about how the Council uses personal data, including individuals' rights, is available in the Council's Privacy Notices on our website.