

**GREEN VALE HOMES**

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**POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

**GREEN VALE HOMES**

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## 1. Introduction

Green Vale Homes aims to provide a responsive service to its tenants as well as quality homes which are safe and secure. The Company encourages good tenancy relations and believes that all tenants, their families and members of the community have the right to the peaceful enjoyment of their home and immediate environment.

Green Vale Homes believes that none of its tenants should suffer domestic violence or the threat of domestic violence of any kind. No tenant should live in fear of violence from a spouse, partner, former spouse or partner or any member of their household.

The Company is committed to assisting any tenant who is a victim of threatened or actual domestic violence and will consider all appropriate action in addressing the problem.

## 2. Definition

For the purposes of this policy, the definition of domestic violence to be used is set out below:

Domestic violence is the term used to describe the pattern of abuse (such as threats, intimidation, social isolation, financial control and/or physical, sexual, emotional, psychological violence) of one person (usually, but not exclusively, a woman) by another (usually, but not exclusively, a man) with whom they have or have had an intimate or family relationship.

Domestic violence can occur in same sex relationships and it should also be recognised that certain groups may face additional obstacles and/or discrimination when seeking help eg ethnic minorities

Whilst recognising the wider range of experiences of domestic violence, the main focus of this policy concerns violence against women and their children.

## 3. Aims of the Policy

- 3.1 to increase the safety of domestic violence victims and their children through the provision of safe accommodation
- 3.2 to work closely with other Agencies to support victims and their children and to minimise future risks of violence

#### **4. Approach**

Green Vale Homes is committed to taking a non-judgemental and non-questioning approach in all instances when domestic violence is brought to our attention. Domestic violence is often very difficult or impossible to “prove”. Indeed, it is not considered appropriate for the victim to have to “prove” that they are experiencing domestic violence.

Therefore, when a person approaches the Company and advises that they are subject to domestic violence, the Company must act in all instances without questioning and the victim must always be treated in a sensitive and supportive manner.

It is however acknowledged that domestic violence is a complex issue and will be difficult for the Company to offer appropriate support and assistance in isolation of other key Agencies. Therefore, although it will be likely that staff need to ask for details of the circumstances, the victim must be reassured that this is not for “checking/verification” purposes. Rather, it is to ensure that the Company has a full understanding of the situation which will then allow staff, together with the victim, to work more effectively with other Agencies (eg the Police, Health services, Women’s Aid etc) to resolving the problem and assessing/managing future risks.

However, liaison with other Agencies must only be made with the victim’s consent.

Victims usually find it very traumatic to give details of their ordeal, and this is even more apparent if they have to keep repeating the details to different Agencies such as the police, solicitors etc. Therefore, the depth of discussion will have to be assessed on an individual case basis, and where necessary, details should be gathered by liaising with other Agencies. However, this should only be done for the purposes stated above, with the victim’s consent and within remit of confidentiality procedures and Data Protection.

Incidents of domestic violence will be acted on as a matter of urgency by staff. If the victim feels that there is an immediate threat, then staff will make arrangements to discuss the situation straight away, with advice being given over the phone if necessary.

Recognition must be given to the difficulties that a victim experiences in coming forward and therefore matters must always be discussed in confidence and in privacy. The victim should also be offered the

opportunity to discuss the matter with an appropriate member of staff. Whilst this may not always be practically possible straight away, staff will agree who and how quickly this can be done in consultation with the victim.

Advice must include contacting Rossendale Borough Council's Homeless Section if re-housing is a potential issue, including temporary re-housing to a place of safety / refuge, what to do about their tenancy in the short term (should they be a tenant), contacting the Police and/or solicitor and local or national agencies who can give more specialist, independent advice.

## **5. Confidentiality**

Strict confidentiality will be maintained whilst dealing with cases of domestic violence. No information will be passed onto third parties without the permission of the victim. However, there are circumstances when Green Vale Homes is obliged to pass information onto statutory agencies such as the Police or Social Services in cases when a child's safety is at risk.

## **6. Re-housing**

Depending on the nature of the case, staff may make arrangements for the victim to be offered a permanent transfer if:

- suitable accommodation is available within the Company's own resources
- and this can be arranged within the required timescales
- and is considered to be suitable and safe.

If a transfer cannot be arranged directly by the Company, staff will assist the victim in approaching the Local Authority (Housing Aid and Homeless Section) for accommodation under homeless legislation.

## **7. Offers of Accommodation**

There is a need for staff to have a full understanding and awareness of each individual case so that appropriate offers are made if the victim needs to be re-housed. There is often a very difficult balance to be achieved in re-housing a victim of domestic violence – that being to provide the victim with safe accommodation whilst maintaining support links which are often crucial to victims' and their children eg relatives, friends, schools, GPs etc

It must also be understood that there are many myths surrounding the re-housing of victims ie re-housing does not always guarantee that the victim is safe as violent partners are very capable and experienced in tracing them. Some victims therefore choose to “make the break” and move out of the home but not necessarily out of the locality for this reason ie that moving elsewhere will not guarantee their safety anyway and that they need to maintain their network of support.

Therefore, suitability regarding future offers of accommodation must be discussed fully with the victim and other Agencies eg Housing Aid and Homeless, Women’s Refuge etc prior to any offers being made.

## **8. Tenancy Rights**

Staff, in conjunction with the victim, will need to establish the victim’s legal rights prior to any decisions being made about the tenancy, including terminating.

## **9. Arrears**

Victims of domestic violence may of course have rent arrears or other tenancy-related debts. Whilst such debts may have accrued for reasons that are not related to the domestic violence, staff must be aware that the arrears/tenancy debts could be linked to the domestic violence situation eg the violent partner has had control over the finances and did not pay the rent or the violent partner damaged the property and a recharge has been made for which the victim is liable (if a sole or joint tenant).

Therefore, as part of the practical support that staff will give to a victim, they need to discuss the details of any arrears/debts and take a sensible and discretionary approach to any subsequent action. Likewise, arrears/debts should not prohibit any offers of alternative accommodation being made as the victim’s safety is the paramount factor.

## **10. Support / Risk Management**

Recognition must be given to the fact that moving home will not always solve the problem as mentioned above. For example, some victims of domestic violence may consider that it is of a lesser risk to remain in their home, despite the violence, rather than taking the step to move because, by doing so, they may consider that they are increasing the risk to their safety (and their children’s safety). Evidence shows that it is at the point that a victim leaves and /or seeks help that they are most at risk.

Or it may be that the abusive partner has left the home and the victim wishes to remain, at least for the time being.

In instances where moving home is not considered by the victim to be an appropriate response, then discussions should take place with the victim, about accessing support or, (if the violent partner has left), assessing the risk of further violence. Working in partnership with other Agencies will be more effective here ie to agree a risk management plan which could include the installation of a panic alarm or other practical security measures, an injunction etc

#### **11. Holding Perpetrators To Account**

It is policy to take action against perpetrators of domestic violence. If evidence is available, staff will use powers available under the Housing Act 1996 to initiate eviction proceedings. Under these circumstances, it is likely that the Police and/or other Agencies would need to be involved, again with the consent of the victim.

#### **12. Re-housing of Perpetrators**

As part of the Company's commitment to support victims of domestic violence, steps will be taken to minimise the risk of a violent partner being inadvertently re-housed near to the victim. The Company will seek to deal with this by identifying an alleged perpetrator's details on the waiting list and ensuring that subsequent offers are carefully considered.

#### **13. Staff Awareness and Training**

The company also recognises that members of its own staff may themselves be experiencing domestic violence. The Company will ensure that confidential advice and support will be given to any such member of staff, together with practical help and assistance, as outlined above. Staff can confide in another manager (if they would prefer not to discuss this with their direct line manager) or a member of staff in Human Resources or one of the Company's nominated "confidantes" (*Confidential Officers*). All help given must be arranged carefully, with particular consideration to who is contacted, either within the Company or with external Agencies/Organisations, depending on the specific circumstances. For example, a violent partner may be employed by another agency.

Periodic training will take place with staff on this policy as part of the regular programme of training on allocations and policy updates.

#### **14. Review**

This policy will be reviewed, when appropriate in line with the Company's

commitment to continuous improvement, including the need to reflect any revised national guidance and joint strategic planning with local partners.

### **15. Responsibility for this Policy**

Policy Development and Monitoring	Board
Implementation	Head of Housing Management Services

### **16. Associated Documents**

- Allocation and Lettings Policy
- Anti Social Behaviour Procedure section 16 on Domestic Violence
- Tenancy Agreement
- Tenants Handbook
- Housing Act 1996