

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE POLICY

### Background

According to Home Office statistics, domestic violence accounts for a quarter of all recorded violent crime in England and Wales. 150 people are killed every year through domestic violence. 50% of women in touch with mental health services have had violent or abusive relationships. 16% of all homelessness circumstances are caused by domestic violence. Thames Valley Housing acknowledges that through its contacts with customers, it can play an important role in supporting victims of domestic violence and is committed to tackling domestic violence.

When dealing with Domestic Violence, staff should also be aware of the umbrella Anti-Social Behaviour, Racial Harassment and Hate Crimes Policies and procedures.

This statement is aimed at staff and stakeholders of TVH. Summary statements, for customers, will be made available.

### Definition

The Home Office has defined domestic violence as "Any violence between current and former partners, in an intimate relationship, wherever and whenever it occurs. The violence may be physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse". Whilst different organisations have defined domestic violence slightly differently, TVH adopts the Home Office definition.

The Association operates in a victim centred manner when dealing with victims of domestic violence. This means, the starting point is one where the victims perceptions are believed. The Association believes that action should be taken against the perpetrator although will listen to the victims when deciding what action should be taken. Victims of domestic violence extends to children and others closely affected.

### Strategy

The strategy of TVH is aligned to the strategy of Central Government:

- Prevention
- Protection
- Support

TVH is however realistic, and accepts it needs to work in partnership with other specialist groups, to deliver its wider (Domestic Violence) strategy.

### Prevention

The Association will publicise its stance and commitment to tackle and try to prevent domestic violence. By doing this, the Association contributes to a wider strategy to change public attitudes to domestic violence, where it should be seen as unacceptable and a criminal offence. Acknowledging this, TVH will

exploit opportunities to contribute to wider strategies to advocate and publicise systems tackling domestic violence.

By publicising its view, the Association will also focus attention tenants and leaseholders by supporting victims, thereby helping to prevent repeat violent incidents. The Association will also produce fact sheets and will refer victims to specialist agencies.

### Protection

The Association believes it needs to work with specialist support agencies and the police to properly co-ordinate its response at a strategic and operational level, to domestic violence. The Association will seek to join exchange of information protocols to control the exchange of sensitive and personal information (see Confidentiality Policy) to better co-ordinate support services.

Dedicated budgetary provision is made to support victims of domestic violence. This money is aimed at target hardening but can be used flexibly to support victims of domestic violence. Indicatively, in conjunction with the police and local authorities, the Association will create 'safe rooms' for those at risk of domestic violence. By creating 'safe-rooms', the Association will also help prevent homelessness, by reducing the need for victims to leave the family home.

The Association will work with victims of domestic violence to utilise court orders so victims gain the support and protection of the legal system. Indicatively, officers will seek injunctions available through the Anti-Social Behaviour legislation, but could exploit non-molestation injunctions. Possession action can also be started upon a perpetrator in possession of a home after the victim has left, as a result of domestic violence.

### Support

The Association acknowledges significant underreporting of domestic violence and that victims often suffer repeated attacks before reporting or seeking help. To this extent, the Association encourages reports of domestic violence and will provide training to staff, to help them identify violent relationships at an early stage. Most importantly, training will help to identify times when victims are most at risk of domestic violence.

Targets are set to increase reporting every year. By increasing the numbers of (mainly) women or report violence, the earlier support and help can be offered. The Association will facilitate and provide a range of options to support victims rebuild their lives after suffering domestic violence. Victims of domestic violence are prioritised for rehousing through the transfer system and arrears are not necessarily a barrier to those being moved on grounds of domestic violence.

The Association will exploit opportunities to forge strategic and operational partnerships with refuges and other support providers to enhance provision,

normally for women, needing a safe place. The Association will also look to forge closer working relationships with support providers/outreach services to co-ordinate services to victims of domestic violence.

The Association commits to providing a single point of contact for victims of domestic violence – the case worker will build a relationship with and confidence of the victim

Victims of domestic violence will also be provided with clear service standards, which will be reviewed periodically with service users. Performance will be monitored against these service standards.

## **Performance Monitoring**

The Corporate Plan ensures an ongoing commitment towards policy review. Regular reviews culminate in Board scrutiny, at policy level. In addition to policy development, the Board also monitors trends on a quarterly basis. The nature and format of this reporting is also kept under review.

A strategic review is also on-going through the Executive Group and the Directorate Managers Groups. The most serious cases are reviewed by senior management on at least a quarterly basis to ensure consistency across the organisation/directorates.

Central logging of all cases is undertaken and the log regularly checked to identify trends and wider strategic issues. Equally, where possible, reports are made to local authorities where appropriate, to map incidents and to plan strategically across its area.

Headline statistics are available through the Thames Valley Housing Association Website ([www.tvha.co.uk](http://www.tvha.co.uk)). Additional performance monitoring can take place through the Resident Consultative Group meetings upon request.

Detailed targets will be developed in conjunction with service users and performance monitored to promote a framework of performance management.

## **Disability Discrimination**

Specific care should be taken in cases where perpetrators fall within the remit of the Disability Discrimination legislation which require disabled people are not treated less favourably because of their disability. This is applicable to perpetrators and victims. Officers are however "justified to bring possession action so as to not danger the health and safety of any other person (including the disabled person)".

## **Publicity**

The Association believes its policy should be widely publicised so that all stakeholders will understand the values of the organisation.

## **Training**

The Association believes staff who could be involved in cases of Domestic Violence should be properly inducted and trained so they can properly provide services. This is also kept under review using the capability dictionary applicable to every post.

## **Review**

The policy will be reviewed by either the Client Services and Policy Manager or Head of Housing Management in accordance with the Resident Consultation Strategy in 2006/7.