

Landlord Service – Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDA-SV) Policy

**1. Introduction**

1. This document sets out the way in which the Vale of Glamorgan Council Housing Team will respond to VAWDA-SV and support tenants affected by these issues.
2. The objectives of this Policy are:
  - To provide a consistent and swift approach to reports of VAWDA-SV
  - Act as a reference document for housing staff and tenants to deal confidently and effectively with reported incidents of VAWDA-SV
  - To contribute to the strategic objective of reducing the impact of VAWDA-SV on those who are affected and support them to live free from fear. This includes taking a proactive approach to tackling perpetrators in order to reduce future incidents of VAWDA-SV within our properties.
3. This Policy covers all tenants living in properties owned and managed by the Vale of Glamorgan Council, this includes; tenants living in general needs properties, shared accommodation, sheltered housing, temporary accommodation and the Ty Iolo Hostel.
4. We recognise that VAWDA-SV often has complex housing consequences and as a responsible landlord, we aim to give priority to, and to protect the housing status of those at risk.

**2. Definitions**

1. Domestic violence and abuse is defined by Welsh Government as:

“Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to

- Psychological
- Physical
- Sexual
- Financial
- Emotional

Domestic abuse essentially involves the misuse of power and exercise of control by one person over another with whom there is or has been a close relationship. Any incident or patterns of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 years or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality is considered to be domestic abuse.”

2. Violence against women has been defined by the United Nation as:

“Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. The term violence against women is used to describe violence perpetrated against a woman because she is a woman, being recognised internationally as a violation of human rights.”

*UN General Assembly 2006*

### **3. Policy Statement**

1. Domestic abuse essentially involves the misuse of power and exercise of control by one person over another. The council recognises that domestic abuse can be any form of physical, emotional, psychological, financial or sexual abuse.
2. VAWDA-SV can occur within all kinds of close, personal relationships. In most cases the relationship will be between partners (heterosexual and same sex). Domestic abuse has a disproportionate effect on women, but we recognise that men can also experience domestic abuse and sexual violence. Domestic abuse can also be between parent and child or between siblings.
3. Domestic abuse and sexual violence can happen to anyone, regardless of social background, disability, age, gender, religion, sexuality or ethnicity. The Council is committed to supporting victims of VAWDA-SV regardless of their gender or sexuality.
4. This policy includes issues of concern to black and minority ethnic (BME) communities such as so called ‘honour killings’.
5. VAWDA-SV can have a devastating impact on individuals and their families. The housing needs of people made vulnerable, homeless or at risk of losing their home as a result of domestic abuse can be complex. This is particularly relevant where there is a joint tenancy in place between the victim and perpetrator. Therefore as a housing provider we recognise that we have a key role in assisting the victim to remain safe, maintain their home or in supporting them to access appropriate accommodation.
6. The Council realises that many acts of VAWDA-SV are crimes and those that commit these acts should answer for their behaviour. We understand that domestic abuse is rarely a one-off event; it may get worse as time goes on. Often the abuse will have occurred on a number of occasions before the victim seeks help or others become aware of the issue.
7. We believe that no one should live in fear; the Council takes VAWDA-SV seriously and is committed to providing a sensitive and confidential response to tenants approaching us for assistance. We are committed to doing everything in our power to help support victims; providing a well co-ordinated and comprehensive service that focuses on early intervention and the rights of the victim.

8. We understand that to best support victims and tackle perpetrators it is key to work with our partners in a multi-agency setting. For children living in homes where domestic abuse occurs they will also be considered as victims and this will be raised as a child protection concern.
9. Due to the complex nature of domestic abuse many victims and their children will have a wide variety of needs which may involve multiple agencies and sectors. Research has shown that better outcomes are achieved for the victim and children when an integrated approach from all agencies is taken.
10. Council officers will be aware of the need for strict confidentiality when dealing with victims of VAWDA-SV. Maintaining confidentiality is of utmost importance; staff will be aware of the protocols for information sharing, consent and confidentiality.

#### **4. What we will do**

1. When we deal with VAWDA-SV, we will:

##### **Communicate**

2. Enable tenants to report VAWDA-SV directly to us in a number of different ways including –
  - Directly to council staff members either in local offices or whilst out in our local communities
  - In writing and via email or on-line facilities
  - Over the telephone either to C1V or directly to other staff members
  - We will also proactively contact tenants where we have reason to believe that there has been issues connected to VAWDA-SV
3. We provide information and advice in the format and language accessible to tenants
4. We ensure that tenants have the opportunity to opt for a staff member of the same gender to speak to and to deal with their case. We also aim to ensure that we invite a specialist support agency to attend any appointments as appropriate.
5. Ensure that those affected by VAWDA-SV know that they can meet staff in confidence at Council offices or at an agreed choice of safe venue.
6. Tenants will be advised that in cases where staff have no serious safeguarding concerns, we will maintain the victim's confidentiality and only disclose or share information with the consent of the individual.
7. Agree the method of contact that the victim wishes us to use to stay in contact with them; this can include via a specialist support agency, for example a Women's Refuge provider.

8. Be committed to monitoring the case and agreeing the intervals at which the victim will be updated by the member of staff dealing with their case, whilst ensuring this does not put the victim in any further danger or risk. This includes putting information markers on our tenancy records so we are aware of anyone who has been or potentially been a victim of domestic abuse. Alerts will be reviewed annually as part of our case monitoring system.
9. VAWDA-SV is traumatic. All Housing staff will complete VAWDA-SV Awareness training to ensure when dealing with a reported incident staff remain sensitive and non-judgemental towards the victim.
10. We recognise that some people, because of the control that has been exerted over them by the perpetrator, may find it difficult to make important decisions over their futures. Victims may therefore turn for advice on more than one occasion. No pressure will be put on victims to make decisions or take up a particular option whilst the same standard of customer care should therefore be given irrespective of the number of times that a victim asks for help or advice.

## **Support**

11. When we are made aware of incidents of VAWDA-SV or if we have reason to believe someone is experiencing abuse within one of our properties, we will provide the victim with the contact details of agencies who can offer further advice and support, as well as making referrals on their behalf (with consent), this may include to the Housing Solutions Service within the Vale Council, Supporting People and specialist support providers including Atal Y Fro, BAWSO, Dyn Project or SARC (sexual assault response coordinator). Tenants will also be provided with the 24hr Live Free from Fear help line numbers which is 0808 8010800 or via email at [info@livefearfreehelpline.wales](mailto:info@livefearfreehelpline.wales)
12. If the victim would like support, this will be arranged through supporting people
13. Specialist services are able to offer support to the victim and others affected by VAWDA-SV, including children. They will work with the whole family as appropriate including engaging with the perpetrator to tackle abusive behaviours.
14. We will offer advice and assistance in cases where emergency accommodation is required:
  - The Vale's Housing Solutions Team will facilitate access to temporary accommodation; it is always the aim to find space in a refuge rather than other forms of temporary accommodation to ensure the accommodation provided is appropriate and safe
  - The Housing Solutions Team will initially make a referral to a specialist local VAWDA-SV service, this may include –  
  
Atal-Y-Fro, who manage the Women's Refuge and dispersed accommodation

The Dyn Project, which provides accommodation for males experiencing domestic abuse

- In cases where accommodation is not available locally, advice will be sought from the Live Free from fear helpline which can assist with finding refuge accommodation throughout the U.K.
15. Provide advice on and access to improved security, such as target hardening, within the victim's home where appropriate via the Sanctuary Scheme.
  16. Encourage victims to take part in support programmes to encourage self-empowerment and prevent repeat victimisation, this includes support through the Community Investment Programme to gain skills needed to build a life free from fear. Victims can also be referred to an organisation that offers advocacy services.
  17. If financial issues, debt or welfare benefit changes are identified a referral will be made to our Money Advice Service to provide the appropriate support.
  18. We will signpost the victims to relevant organisations so they are able to seek advice on a range of criminal and civil remedies, including injunctions and possession proceedings where appropriate. We will also assist victims to take their own legal action where necessary.
  19. We will support witnesses throughout the investigation and any further action. This may be through referrals to specialist services

## **Respond**

20. When we receive information to indicate that a tenant or someone in their home is the victim or VAWDA-SV we will make every attempt to get in touch with them to ensure the appropriate support is offered.
21. Carry out a risk assessment and safety planning to provide support for the victim and any dependent children within the household. This will be completed by a specialist trained Neighbourhood Manager or the Housing Management Team will arrange for a specialist support agency, such as Atal Y Fro to attend jointly to complete the risk assessment. Tenants who have experienced domestic abuse will also be asked if they would prefer the assessment to be completed by a person of the same gender. The Housing Management Team will arrange any translation or additional support as required to complete the assessment.
22. Where we have significant safeguarding concerns or a specialist risk assessment indicates that the victim is considered high risk a referral will be made to MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference). This will be completed with the victims consent unless safeguarding concerns outweigh the need for consent.

23. Where there are concerns identified linked to so called “honour based violence”, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, advice will be sought from specialist services such as BAWSO to ensure all safety issues are managed correctly. This will include notifying Children’s Services, Schools and the Police in order for appropriate multi-agency safety measures to be put in place.
24. Agree an action plan with the victim, monitor the situation and review at a frequency agreed with them. This will include submitting the relevant safeguarding referrals. If additional support is required the Senior Neighbourhood Managers and VAWDA-SV Champion within the team will be able to provide additional support in completing an action plan. This will include considering target hardening measures, emergency contact details and alternative accommodation such as a women’s refuge.
25. Work with partner agencies to ensure co-ordinated services to prioritise the victims and any children’s safety
26. In cases where the domestic abuse risk identification does not meet the threshold of a MARAC referral, with the agreement of the victim, we will organise a multi-agency meeting to ensure support is received from all relevant agencies.
27. We will take firm action (where evidence is available) against anyone responsible for domestic abuse. We will work with partner agencies, such as Safe Vale where necessary and keep them updated of any action taken.
28. Report incidents to the Police on behalf of victims or support victims in doing so, with their permission, where they feel too intimidated to report incidents themselves.
29. Ensure all our staff complete VAWDA-SV awareness training and have an up-to-date knowledge of specialist services available within the area
30. Ensure that all officers check OHMS records before conducting any home visits so they are aware of any potential issues related to VAWDA-SV, including known perpetrators who may pose a risk to those visiting the property.
31. Monitor domestic abuse across our stock, to allow us to identify persistent perpetrators, monitor the success of our actions, and also the satisfaction levels of victims and witnesses. This can also help us assist victims by prioritising’s areas or individuals affected by repeated antisocial behaviour, as well as responding to issues affecting diverse communities.
32. Research suggests that those experiencing domestic abuse may have complex needs and some may utilise coping strategies, including alcohol and substance misuse. In these cases and / or where victims are vulnerable or have mental health issues, we are able to refer to the Supporting People Team or specialist support services for additional support.

33. Where a perpetrator of anti-social behaviour subsequently reports to be a victim of domestic abuse, we will take into account all circumstances, but our priority will be to ensure the safety of the alleged victim whilst other investigations are completed.
34. Through the legislation introduced in the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 we will be able to target the perpetrators of domestic abuse for eviction where there are joint tenancies, enabling the victim to remain in their tenancy if they wish to.
35. Any repairs, which are required as a result of violent incidents, where practicable, will be completed as emergency works within 24 hours. Where this is not practicable, they will be carried out as soon as possible and this will be communicated clearly to the individual or their support worker.

## **5:0 Equality and Diversity**

5:01 We will apply this policy consistently and fairly and will not discriminate against any person on grounds of their race, colour, ethnicity or national origins, religion, sexual orientation, disability, gender, age or any other matter that may cause a person to be treated with injustice.

5:02 We will treat everyone fairly based on their individual needs.