



# Group Policy: Domestic Abuse Policy for Customers

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Approval Body	Social Landlord Operations Committee
Approval Date	13 December 2022

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This policy is available, on request, in different languages and in other formats such as large print, audio format and braille as required.

## 1. Scope

- 1.1. This is a Group policy and therefore applies to all customers of The RCH Group of companies, and members of their households. As at January 2020, The RCH Group consists of River Clyde Homes (RCH) and its subsidiary, Home Fix Scotland Ltd (HFS).
- 1.2. The policy pertains to domestic abuse as defined in section 3.

## 2. Introduction

- 2.1 This policy regards domestic abuse as a gender-based violence issue as such abuse is perpetrated against women and girls because of their gender. This policy is a statement of commitment from the River Clyde Homes (RCH) Group that domestic abuse is never acceptable and will not be tolerated.
- 2.2 Domestic abuse is a pattern of coercive, controlling, threatening, degrading and/or violent behaviour perpetrated by a partner or ex-partner. It is overwhelmingly experienced by women and perpetrated by men. Anyone can be a victim, regardless of social background, disability, age, gender, religion, sexuality or ethnicity. The RCH Group recognises that while domestic abuse mainly affects women, men can also be victims. The RCH Group is committed to supporting all customers and members of their households experiencing domestic abuse.
- 2.3 The policy sets out how the RCH Group will manage the prevention of domestic abuse and its response both in terms of supporting victims and managing perpetrators of domestic abuse. It aims to reduce the risk by working in partnership with other organisations to ensure its staff are well informed and have the support they need to achieve the aims of the organisation.
- 2.4 Some of the following key stakeholders have been involved at the consultation and development stage of the policy and associated procedures and others are responsible for implementation and compliance monitoring:
  - Inverclyde Council
  - Inverclyde HSCP
  - Police Scotland
  - Inverclyde Women's Aid
  - Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA)
  - Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH)
  - Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance
  - Shelter Scotland
  - Inverclyde Violence Against Women Multi Agency Partnership
- 2.5 The RCH Group will meet all legal obligations and comply with legislation in relation to this policy subject. Related legislation includes:

- Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018
- Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2011
- Adults Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007
- Children (Scotland) Act 1995
- Children's Hearing (Scotland) Act 2011
- Forced Marriage etc. (Protection and Jurisdiction) (Scotland) Act 2011
- Protection from Abuse (Scotland) Act 2001
- Housing (Scotland) Act 1987
- Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003

2.6 This policy should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

- Domestic Abuse Procedures for Staff
- Allocations Policy
- S5 Homeless and Women's Aid Referral Process
- Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- Tenancy Sustainment Policy
- Adult Support and Protection Guidance
- Child Protection Guidance

### 3. Definitions

3.1 **Domestic Abuse:** The RCH Group will adopt the Scottish Government definition as follows:

*Domestic abuse (as gender-based abuse) can be perpetrated by partners or ex-partners and can include physical abuse (assault and physical attack involving a range of behaviour), sexual abuse (acts which degrade and humiliate and are perpetrated against their will, including rape) and mental and emotional abuse (such as threats, verbal abuse, racial abuse, withholding money and other types of controlling behaviour such as isolation from family and friends).*

3.2 **Gender Based Violence:** encompasses 'actions that result in physical, sexual and psychological harm or suffering to women and their children or affront to their human dignity including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. It is men who predominantly carry out such violence, and women who are predominantly the victims of such violence.

3.3 **Coercive and Controlling Behaviour:** Domestic Abuse consists of a range of behaviours that undermine the victim and restrict their freedoms, that is more than physical or sexual harm. It is recognised that Coercive controlling behaviours have a long-lasting effect on both the adult victim and children.

## 4. Policy Principles

4.1 In order to achieve improved outcomes for families affected by domestic abuse the RCH Group agrees to the following guiding principles:

### 4.1.1 Partnership

Domestic abuse is a cross-cutting issue and the RCH Group will adopt a partnership approach which will include working with statutory and voluntary organisations, who will accept a shared responsibility, whilst understanding each agency's unique role. We are committed to a shared vision and to united, sustained and effective action across all agencies and disciplines.

### 4.1.2 Prevention

The RCH Group will take a preventative approach to domestic abuse first and foremost. Information will be made available to all residents and in particular highlighted to new tenants. This will include how victims can access advice, support and information relating to this policy. Information will be made available on the RCH website and updated as required. Prevention also includes highlighting consequences for those who perpetrate domestic abuse.

### 4.1.3 Housing Options

For many victims, the housing provider is the first point of contact for accessing help or information about their housing options. The RCH Group will ensure that a specific housing options approach meets the needs of victims and their children experiencing domestic abuse by:

- Preventing homelessness
- Enabling victims and children to remain safely in their homes (if possible)

The RCH Group will give clear housing options information and advice to support victims of domestic and abuse to make informed decisions about:

- Remaining in their homes
- Rehousing if the preference is not to remain in their homes
- Rights to make a homeless application
- Referral arrangements with local services for specialist support
- Refuge accommodation
- Suitable temporary accommodation
- Rehousing the perpetrator

Staff will also:

- Signpost victims to legal advice including local solicitors experienced in domestic abuse and legal aid
- Provide leaflets on domestic abuse as well helpline numbers and contact details of support agencies.

If making a homeless application is the preferred option, The RCH will liaise closely with Inverclyde Council's Homelessness Service and the case manager to ensure all housing and support options are offered.

#### **4.1.4 Actions against Perpetrators**

The RCH Group will work closely with partner agencies when dealing with perpetrators of domestic abuse including Police Scotland. This includes legal action for recovery of possession against a perpetrator, where other members of the household have left the home because of domestic abuse. The RCH Group also commits to sharing information, where legally possible, with Police Scotland to support their actions against perpetrators.

The RCH Group recognises that customers may not wish to leave their home if they are victims of domestic abuse and agree that they should not be asked to leave their home. The RCH Group will aim to re-house a perpetrator of domestic abuse where possible when legal action cannot be taken against them.

#### **4.1.5 Confidentiality**

The RCH Group recognises the sensitivity of information disclosed by victims in relation to domestic abuse and will protect them wherever possible when disclosing information. In order for victims to feel safe and secure when discussing issues relating to abuse, private interview facilities are available to staff when speaking to customers about abuse. The RCH Group will not force anyone to disclose a reason for asking to speak to a member of staff wherever possible or for asking specifically to speak to a female or male member of staff.

The RCH Group will also develop a protocol with partners in relation to information sharing that sets out the importance of confidentiality, restrictions, rights and what, why and how information will be shared with partners.

#### **4.1.6 Consistency**

The RCH Group's approach will be consistent and systematic in order to safeguard victims, respond to perpetrators and minimise service-generated risks. It will achieve this through clear protocols and policies, decision-making, support systems for staff, and staff training. It will ensure that there are clear procedures so that staff respond effectively and confidently and know what action they should take and why.

#### **4.1.7 Support**

The RCH Group will support victims in any way it can in relation to domestic abuse. The RCH Group recognises that separation is often the time of increased risk for victims and will take this into account when supporting them at this time. It also appreciates that support should not end at separation and long-term plans should be put in place to protect victims and children after a period of abuse.

Support will come in many forms and include partner agencies who can provide more specialist advice and support.

#### **4.1.8 Training**

A consistent, holistic approach to domestic abuse through the development of a skilled workforce and robust inter-agency training is essential. A comprehensive training programme is vital and the RCH Group will ensure all staff are trained so they understand and can respond to domestic abuse. The training programme will raise awareness, be skill-based, geared towards responsibilities and will be delivered in partnership with statutory and voluntary agencies.

#### **4.1.9 Information and Advice**

The RCH Group will make information readily available in a range of formats. All information provided will be clear and accessible. Sources of information will include leaflets, posters and online resources via the RCH website detailing where victims can receive support, their housing rights and how they can confidentially contact the RCH Group for support. Advice will be provided as early as possible and on an informed choice basis where victims have full control over what to do next.

#### **4.1.10 Responsibilities – Our Promise to Women**

The following statements set out an overview of the commitment that the RCH Group will make to victims living in our homes who may be experiencing domestic abuse. This applies to all staff members within the RCH Group:

- We will be informed and alert to the signs of domestic abuse in order that we can identify potential issues before they escalate
- We will listen openly to all victims who experience domestic abuse with a non-judgemental approach
- We will keep all information provided to us confidential until a victim gives us permission to share and will only share information with the relevant authorities where we think there is a danger to the victim or their children
- We will work collaboratively with our partners to ensure we provide the best service possible when supporting victims of domestic abuse

- We will provide easy to read, concise information and advice where required in a range of formats
- We will provide victims of domestic abuse with housing options and support them to make an informed decision on their future and help them to achieve this
- We will take a zero-tolerance approach to domestic abuse in our properties against perpetrators of such abuse

## **5. Equality Impact Assessment**

5.1 An EIA has been undertaken. No adverse impact on equality was identified.

## **6. Review**

6.1 This policy will be reviewed in its entirety every 3 years, unless an earlier review is required due to changes in legal, regulatory or best practice requirements, or because monitoring and reporting reveals that a change in policy is required sooner.