



Ashfield District Council
Domestic Abuse Policy
2023

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1. Policy Statement

This policy sets out how Ashfield District Council is committed to supporting residents who are affected by domestic abuse and prevent further incidents by encouraging earlier reporting and responding to any disclosures promptly and sensitively.

We believe that domestic abuse presents as one of the highest risks to personal safety and is unacceptable. No one should live in fear of violence, abuse or harassment from a partner, former partner, or any member of their household or family.

We recognise that a large proportion of Council Employees, contractors and those working on behalf of the Council are in regular contact with residents across the District, either on the telephone, in our offices or in their homes, and are in a position where they may be able to identify signs of domestic abuse and offer appropriate help. Alternatively, a resident may make a disclosure that they are a survivor of domestic abuse, and our staff must be able to deal with that disclosure appropriately.

2. Aims of policy

2.1 Ashfield District Council supports survivors of domestic abuse no matter what their gender, age, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, background and home situation. Individuals experiencing, or affected by, domestic abuse will be supported according to their needs.

2.2 We aim to:

- Prevent homelessness and address the housing needs of those who experience domestic abuse
- Increase awareness and understanding of this issue amongst residents, employees and other Council members
- Encourage residents and employees to report domestic abuse
- Facilitate early identification of domestic abuse and offer supportive and effective intervention as well as challenge abusive behaviour
- Respond swiftly, effectively and consistently to all reports of domestic abuse with the aim of improving the safety and welfare of those affected by it
- Empower victims by providing information on the options available to them, including information on external support agencies
- Ensure that all staff are clear regarding their roles in responding to issues around domestic abuse and are trained to deal with any disclosures

2.3 We will:

- Ensure that anyone affected by domestic abuse can access appropriate support as a matter of priority
- Ensure that our staff are trained to deal with disclosures of domestic abuse effectively
- Support people who are experiencing abuse, or have experienced abuse, by working in partnership with them and other support agencies
- Ensure that where children or young people are affected by domestic abuse, they too have access to services as soon as possible. This may include making

safeguarding referrals if we believe that a child, or a vulnerable adult, is at risk due to an abusive relationship

- Signpost victims to where they can access help with the use of civil and criminal laws, to offer them protection and to prevent further abuse
- Signpost perpetrators of domestic abuse to agencies who can offer them support, in order to prevent the abuse reoccurring
- Support victims to make decisions around their housing needs, whether they wish to remain in their home or to move to a new home.

3. Scope of Policy

3.1 This policy applies to all residents of Ashfield regardless of their housing situation or protected characteristics.

4. Definition of domestic violence and abuse

4.1 Domestic abuse is defined 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

4.2 This definition also includes honour-based violence, Female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage.

5. Our approach

5.1 Anyone reporting domestic abuse to Ashfield District Council will be treated in a sympathetic, supportive and non-judgmental way. We will encourage all residents and household members to report domestic abuse, whether they are victims of, or witnesses to, such incidents. Any disclosure of abuse will be taken seriously, and advice and assistance will be given as a priority.

5.2 Any staff member who comes into contact with those affected by domestic abuse will be a supportive first point of contact. They will have received training in domestic abuse, in recognising the signs and how to deal with any disclosures appropriately.

5.3 We will adopt a multi-agency approach in dealing with victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse to ensure the safety of the victims and to meet their needs, to co-ordinate available resources, allow access to specialist services, take action against perpetrators and share best practice.

5.4 We will work collaboratively by engaging support from different areas from both within the Council and also working with outside organisations such as housing associations, private landlords, Nottinghamshire Police, social care, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and specialist domestic abuse support where appropriate and where consent has been given.

5.5 If we consider a child or vulnerable person is at risk in any situation or if there is a high risk of serious harm to anyone involved, then a safeguarding referral to social care or phone call to police will be necessary whether consent is given or not.

5.6 We will report incidents to the police on behalf of individuals or support them in doing so (with their permission), where they feel too anxious or scared to report the incidents themselves.

5.7 We have dedicated officers who can carry out safety planning to provide support for the person experiencing domestic abuse and their children. Unless we are informed that another organisation has carried this out, we will carry out a risk assessment using the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour (DASH) based Risk Identification Checklist.

5.8 We will share information between agencies where the assessment against the DASH Risk Identification Checklist meets the local authority threshold for Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) referrals. This information will only be shared with those agencies attending the meeting. (Please see 7. MARAC).

5.9 We will support individuals with emergency temporary housing when this is required and appropriate. This could be a referral to our Housing Options Team or involve a referral to a refuge via the National Domestic Violence Helpline.

5.10 Permanent rehousing is on a case by case basis. We will seek to ensure that victims are not allocated housing that continues to put them at risk, for example, in the same area as the perpetrator (unless they have requested that area, for example because they want to keep their children at the same school and it is safe to do so).

5.11 All new tenants will be made aware of our policies relating to domestic abuse and where applicable the implications of joint tenancies. Information will be provided on how we and other agencies can assist those experiencing domestic abuse.

5.12 We will publicise our domestic abuse policy to all tenants and employees, highlighting the consequences for perpetrators.

5.13 We will take appropriate enforcement action (where evidence is available) against anyone responsible for domestic abuse. This will only be done in cases where we can do so without compromising the safety of the individual, and we will work closely with partner agencies and keep them informed of any action taken.

5.14 With the support of the survivor, action against perpetrators will be explored, but will depend upon individual circumstances. This may include legal action for recovery of possession against a perpetrator, where other members of the household have left the home due to domestic abuse.

5.15 Subject to data protection requirements, we will share information with other relevant agencies so that serial perpetrators are identified and dealt with appropriately.

5.16 We will seek to assist perpetrators of domestic abuse who wish to positively change their behaviour by signposting them to access support and assistance via the Respect website and helpline.

5.17 Ashfield District Council is committed to raising awareness and supporting initiatives and campaigns that seek to make a difference to survivors of domestic abuse and their family. Every year we actively take part in the White Ribbon 16 days campaign.

5.18 We use our internet page and social media to remind residents that support is available.

5.19 We endeavour to continually review our processes to improve the support experience that we offer and welcome feedback on all our services. One way in which we are doing this is by working towards DAHA accreditation (Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance).

6. Sanctuary Scheme

6.1 The Ashfield District Council Sanctuary Scheme is an additional option for households at risk of domestic violence. The Scheme is a survivor centred initiative which aims to enable households at risk of violence to both remain and feel safe in their own home, where suitable and appropriate, by installing additional security measures that are identified through a property assessment conducted by a person specially trained in crime prevention.

7. MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference)

7.1 We are an active member of county MARAC Meetings (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences) and representation at MARAC will be by our Domestic Violence and Vulnerability Officer.

7.2 High risk domestic abuse cases are heard at the fortnightly MARAC. An appropriate member or representatives from multiple agencies attend the conference where they discuss the victim, the family and the perpetrator, and share information. The meeting is confidential.

7.3 An action plan is written for each case, and agencies are given responsibility for carrying out particular tasks to ensure that the victim and their family are safeguarded, that the right support is in place, and that the appropriate action has been taken against the perpetrator.

7.4 Any referrals to MARAC will be made after discussion with, and consent from, the victim. A thorough DASH risk assessment form will be completed with them. However, if consent is not granted and there is an immediate or potential risk (to the victim or the victim's family) a referral may be made without the consent of the survivor to protect them and their family from potential serious harm.

8. Support and Positive Action

8.1 We understand that survivors will need different support and will inform those who are experiencing domestic abuse of the external agencies who can offer further advice and support dependent upon their needs and work with our partners to ensure co-ordinated services to prioritise the safety of the person who is experiencing domestic abuse and the safety of their children, where present.

8.2 We recognise that domestic abuse impacts people and their families in different ways. This includes but is not limited to a person's friendships and family relationships, housing, financial situation, safety, employment, mental health, physical health, and wellbeing. Please see Appendix 1 on page 8 for a list of some of the support agencies that are available to offer advice and support and who are able to assist in explaining what options are available to survivors and their families.

8.3 We will signpost the individual experiencing domestic abuse to relevant organisations to provide legal advice as appropriate where civil or criminal remedies can be explored.

8.4 We are actively involved in White Ribbon Campaigns and 16 Days of Activism to support the Violence Against Women and Girls Agenda and actively promote support for domestic abuse survivors

9. Staff Training

9.1 A comprehensive domestic abuse eLearning package is mandatory for all staff joining Ashfield District Council. This will ensure our staff not only have a good understanding of domestic abuse and how to recognise signs of it but are informed in how to deal with disclosures appropriately and sensitively.

9.2 To complement the domestic abuse training, safeguarding training is also a requirement for all Council employees.

9.3 Refresher training at regular intervals is provided to all staff that require it in their role.

10. Information Sharing and Confidentiality

10.1 Survivors will be encouraged to allow staff to share information with other agencies to ensure that full support can be provided. All information provided by the victim will be treated in the utmost confidence and only passed to external agencies with their proper, informed consent.

10.2 Confidentiality is not absolute as there may be circumstances where the safety of the victim and their children overrides their right to confidentiality. The Data Protection Act 2018 is not a barrier to sharing information and would be based on the assessed risk in each case. There may also be occasion where the Authority is obliged to carry out statutory enquiries.

10.3 We will share information in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018, the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and the Caldicott Principles.

11. Policy Review

11.1. This Policy will be reviewed every three years, unless legislation, business or sector developments require otherwise, ensuring that it continues to meet its objectives and take account of good practice developments.

Appendix 1

Useful contacts

- Ashfield District Council (including housing options, tenancies, repairs):
01623 450000
- Juno Women's Aid (women, children, and teenage survivors):
0808 800 0340
- NIDAS (women and families):
01623 683250
- Equation (male survivor support helpline):
0115 960 5556
- National Domestic Violence (24 Hour helpline number):
0808 2000 247
- GALOP (LGBT+ survivors):
0800 999 5428
- Respect (perpetrator support line):
0808 8024040
- National Stalking Helpline:
0808 802 0300
- Victim Support:
0808 168 9111
- National Centre for Domestic Violence (emergency injunctions):
0800 970 2070
- Citizen Advice Bureau (advice on debts, housing, benefits, law and more):

0800 144 8848

- Crisis Team (mental health crisis):
0808 196 3779
- Samaritans (struggling with mental health/ thoughts of harming yourself):
116 123
- Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (Safeguarding concerns regarding adults or children):
0300 500 80 80
- Relate (help with working on relationships):
0115 958 4278