

Domestic Abuse Policy

Version Number: V6.1

Effective From: January 2025

Applicable To: This policy and its processes apply to all members and colleagues of Bernicia Group, including Board Members, Trustees, Independent Committee Members, Directors, Involved Tenants, and colleagues whether full-time, part-time, fixed-term, casual employees, and volunteers of Bernicia, and subsidiaries of the group.

Associated Documents:

The following resources support the Domestic Abuse policy and Bernicia colleagues to deliver on Bernicia's commitment to tackling domestic abuse effectively. These can be found on the right of the Connect policy page:

- Anti-Social Behaviour Policy & Procedure
- Safeguarding Policies and Processes
- Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy
- Complaints Policy
- Allocations Policy
- Tenancy Agreements
- Staff Handbook

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion: An ED&I Assessment was completed on 13/01/2025. Please contact the Governance team if you require a copy.

Approved By: Housing Services Director

Policy Author: Head of Care & Support

Policy Owner: Housing Services Director

Next Review: January 2026

Reference Number: POL-0014

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1. Policy Scope

Domestic abuse, as defined below, is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. We recognise domestic abuse can take many forms, which may include:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional or Psychological Abuse
- Economic or Financial Abuse
- Controlling Behaviour
- Coercive Behaviour

The above list is not exhaustive and there may be other ways in which domestic abuse is perpetrated.

We recognise that domestic abuse can happen to anyone at any time in any kind of relationship regardless of any personal characteristics inclusive of Teenage Relationship Abuse. We are committed to tackling domestic abuse effectively, and will take action, where appropriate against all perpetrators. Domestic Abuse is a direct breach of the tenancy conditions contained in tenancy agreements.

This policy will be actioned when a report of domestic abuse perpetrated by or against a resident or colleague, and any referral are to be made to the Safeguarding Team. The Head of Care & Support will provide the relevant Boards with a report to form a judgement on the service Bernicia provides in relation to domestic abuse. Directors and Managers are responsible for ensuring this policy is adhered to and implemented.

2. Policy Standards

We are committed to supporting all residents and applicants who may experience or are at risk of domestic abuse.

We are committed to supporting any of our employees who may be experiencing domestic abuse.

We are committed to keeping clear and detailed confidential records of all incidents and reports of domestic abuse, so as to be able to support victims in any legal proceedings.

2.1 Supporting Residents who are Victims of Domestic Abuse

We will treat anyone who reports domestic abuse to us sensitively.

We will provide good quality advice, support, and information. Where necessary, signposting residents to other agencies.

We will not insist on legal action being taken against any perpetrator, however, we will encourage the victim to report the matter to the police, as many forms/acts of domestic abuse are criminal offences.

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We will keep all reports of domestic abuse confidential. There may be some exceptions to this, including those cases where we have a duty to share information by law. For example, where a child or a vulnerable person is at risk we will follow our safeguarding policy. This could involve working with other agencies.

We will offer anyone reporting domestic abuse the chance to speak to someone of the same sex should they wish to do so.

We will provide anyone reporting domestic abuse with an interpreter should they require it. If requested, we will endeavour to offer the complainant an interpreter of the same sex or from a specific community.

We will assist victims of domestic abuse to stay in their homes (if they wish to do so), by working with other agencies and providing additional security measures as part of our wider package to support witnesses and victims.

Where the victim is unable or afraid to return to a property, we will seek to rehouse them into temporary accommodation until alternative accommodation can be found.

2.2 Supporting an Employee who is a Victim of Domestic Abuse

We recognise that domestic abuse can affect all elements of a victim's life, including their work.

We encourage employees to raise any issues with their manager, and should they do so, they will be treated with sympathy and in confidence.

We understand that an employee may feel unable to tell their manager directly if they are suffering domestic abuse, and employees are able to involve a third party, such as a colleague.

We have a free 24 hour confidential counselling service available to our employees via our Employee Assistance Programme. Posters for this are displayed across the organisation and further information can also be accessed easily via Connect.

We will, at the request of the employee, consider altering working times and patterns so as to ensure that the employee suffering domestic abuse is at less risk at work.

We will, if required, make changes to an employee's specific duties and practices such as answering the phone or working on reception, as well as changes to office layout to avoid being visible from windows, if requested, and where practicable.

Line managers will consider all reasonable requests by employees who are suffering domestic abuse to help keep them safe.

We will consider requests for domestic leave for employees to enable a victim to deal with their specific circumstances.

2.3 Our Approach to the Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse (a resident)

Where domestic abuse is taking place, we will identify whether it is possible to support the perpetrator / household if the behaviour has a specific root cause that can be tackled. This support would only be offered where the person suffering from domestic abuse feels it is appropriate.

Should a perpetrator require it, we may offer support, or refer them to agencies. We will seek to tackle any specific issue or root cause of behaviour alongside legal action necessary and appropriate.

We will pursue action that is flexible and proportionate against the perpetrators of domestic abuse. We will speak to the person suffering domestic abuse about the action, where necessary with the support of specialist agencies.

If we consider that someone suffering domestic abuse requires safeguarding, we may take action against the perpetrator without discussing the action.

Where a victim has fled their home as a result of domestic abuse, and then wishes to return, we will consider appropriate legal action (or support the victim to do so) to remove the perpetrator from the property.

2.4 Taking action against the perpetrators of domestic abuse (an employee)

Any employee who is established, acknowledged, admitted, or witnessed to have perpetrated domestic abuse should be aware that it could lead to disciplinary action being taken, including dismissal if appropriate.

In relation to these matters, an employee should seek advice from the HR Manager.

3. Definitions

Use this table to list key words and phrases used in the policy and their definitions. This is to help make sure that the policy is clear. Where the area of practice covered by the policy tends to use a lot of technical terms or jargon (not necessarily all used in the policy), it may be helpful to develop a separate resource in addition.

Word/Phrase	Definition
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Domestic Abuse	<p>Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence, or abuse between those aged 16 or over who have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass but is not limited to the following types of abuse:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychological • Physical • Sexual • Financial • Emotional
Physical Abuse	Hitting, punching, kicking, slapping, hitting with objects, pulling hair, pushing, or shoving, cutting, or stabbing, restraining, strangulation, choking, murder.
Sexual Abuse	Rape and coerced sex, forcing a survivor to take part in unwanted sexual acts, refusal to practice safe sex or use contraception, threatened or actual sexual abuse of children.
Emotional or Psychological Abuse	Intimidation, humiliation, verbal abuse and not allowing contact with family and friends.
Economic or Financial Abuse	Not allowing access to money or withholding money.
Controlling Behaviour	A range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.
Coercive Behaviour	<p>An act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.</p> <p>This definition, which is not a legal definition, includes so called 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, and is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group.</p>

4. Version Control

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Version Number	Effective Date	Amendment made by	Version approved by	Description of changes
V6.0	21/01/2025	Head of Care & Support	Housing Director	Minor grammatical changes, no change to legislation or procedure. New policy template.
V6.1	11/02/2025	Safeguarding & Compliance Coordinator	Head of Care & Support	Minor amendments to Policy Scope section – additional comments regarding responsibility and actioning policy.