

# **Domestic Abuse Policy**

## 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 is perpetrated by or against a resident, and any referrals are to be made to the Safeguarding Team. The Safeguarding & Compliance Coordinator is the named SPOC (Single Point of Contact) for MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) and will manage referrals into MARAC if threshold has been met and attend any subsequent meetings.

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 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.

### Standard 1: Reporting

Bernicia is committed to a victim centered approach and will treat anyone who reports domestic abuse to us sensitively.

Signs and indicators of Domestic Abuse are covered in Bernicia's eLearning Safeguarding Awareness at Bernicia – Adults Module. This is completed at induction stage and a refresher is required to be completed every three years. This is recorded on the Engage section of Workvivo.

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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.

All cases are to be followed through to resolution in-line with the relevant Safeguarding Process.

Failure to act / follow the Safeguarding Process will initiate a near miss enquiry, the purpose of which is to identify any gaps in process and implement learning where appropriate. The Safeguarding Incident/Near Miss Report applies to all colleagues who may interact with our customers and tenants.

## **Standard 2: Supporting Residents who are Victims of Domestic Abuse**

Bernicia 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.

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. Where we are unable to provide temporary accommodation, we will provide advice on housing options which may include signposting to local authorities with statutory duty to act or to specialist agencies.

Where a victim is unable to return to a property, we will give advice and signpost to relevant agencies to assist them in being able to collect personal belongings.

## **Standard 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.

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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 the use of appropriate legal action (or support the victim to do so) to remove the perpetrator from the property. Where a joint tenancy exists, we will signpost both parties to the relevant legal process.

### 3. Definitions

| Word/Phrase                             | Definition   |
|---|--|
| <b>Domestic Abuse</b>                   | 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Psychological</li> <li>• Physical</li> <li>• Sexual</li> <li>• Financial</li> <li>• Emotional</li> </ul> |
| <b>Physical Abuse</b>                   | Hitting, punching, kicking, slapping, hitting with objects, pulling hair, pushing, or shoving, cutting, or stabbing, restraining, strangulation, choking, murder.  |
| <b>Sexual Abuse</b>                     | 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.   |
| <b>Emotional or Psychological Abuse</b> | Intimidation, humiliation, verbal abuse and not allowing contact with family and friends.  |

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|                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Economic or Financial Abuse</b> | Not allowing access to money or withholding money.   |
| <b>Controlling Behaviour</b>       | 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.   |
| <b>Coercive Behaviour</b>          | 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.<br>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. |

**Version Number: V7.0**

**Effective From: March 2026**

**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 policy page on the intranet:

- 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 in January 2025. Please contact the Governance team if you require a copy.

**Approved By:** Executive Director of Communities

**Policy Author:** Assistant Director, Supported & Specialist Housing

**Policy Owner:** Executive Director of Communities

**Next Review:** March 2027

**Reference Number:** POL-0014

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## 4. Change Control

| Version Number | Effective Date | Amendment made by                                      | Version approved by          | Description of changes   |
|----------------|----------------|--|------------------------------|--|
| V7.0           | March 2026     | Assistant Director of Supported and Specialist Housing | Exec Director of Communities | Addition of Safeguarding Incident/Near Miss Report. Sentence added to Standard 2 about gaining access to belongings as suggested by tenants. Sentence added to Standard 1 about training requirements. |
| V6.2           | 07/07/2025     | Safeguarding & Compliance Coordinator,                 | Head of Care & Support,      | Removal of references to colleagues – now in Domestic Abuse Framework  |
| 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.  |
| V6.0           | 21/01/2025     | Head of Care & Support,                                | Housing Director,            | Minor grammatical changes, no change to legislation or procedure.<br>New policy template.  |

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