

DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY

Customer Service: Community Safety

Contents

1. Purpose.....	2
2. Scope.....	2
3. Principles.....	3
4. Further Information & Support	7
5. Roles and Responsibilities.....	9
6. Risks	10
7. Appeal & Complaints.....	11
8. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion	11



1. Purpose

- 1.1 We aim to ensure a consistent and effective approach to managing Domestic Abuse (DA), fostering a safer and more supportive community for all customers. This policy reflects current legislation and ensures compliance with housing regulations. We are committed to providing diverse, accessible, and responsive services to those affected by DA.
- 1.2 Riverside recognises that DA affects all sectors of society. This policy provides a comprehensive framework to address and respond to DA effectively. We adopt the values of the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA), including integrity, collaboration, empathy, empowerment, respect, and accountability.
- 1.3 We define DA as any incident or pattern of controlling, coercive, or threatening behaviour, violence, or abuse between individuals aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. This includes, but is not limited to, psychological, physical, sexual, financial, and emotional abuse

2. Scope

- 2.1. This policy is owned by the Chief Executive officer and Chief Customer Officer. It is subject to approval via the Customer Influence Assurance Committee and the Customer Experience Committee.
- 2.2. This Policy applies to all customers and business streams, including individuals over 16 living in properties owned or managed by Riverside, including those in Home Ownership tenancies (shared ownership, market/intermediate rents, rent-to-buy), and all Care and Support Services including those that use tenancy agreements and licences.



- 2.3. This Policy excludes Scotland as they have their own [DA Policy](#).
- 2.4. We also have a separate Policy for colleagues facing [DA](#).
- 2.5. Community Safety Team, Housing Services teams (Housing Officers, Leasehold and Tenancy Officers and Home Ownership Officers, Scheme Managers, Living Coordinators, Tenant Partners, etc.), Customer Service Centre, Housing Management Services teams (HMS Officers, Income and Administration Officers, etc.) , Contractors (All contractors and customer-facing personnel are required to comply with this Policy and utilise the associated business tools outlined in the Related Documents section below).

Legislation

- 2.6. Government legislation impacts how we manage our communities and implement our Domestic Abuse Policy. The legislation set out below helps us to deliver this Policy, it includes but not limited to:
 - Domestic Abuse Act 2021¹
 - Equality Act 2010²
 - Human Rights Act 1988³
 - The Care Act 2014⁴

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- The Children Act 1989⁵
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018⁶

Regulation

2.7. This Policy also aims to comply with the following Regulations:

2.8. RSH Neighbourhood and Community Standard:

Registered providers must have a policy for recognising and responding to cases of domestic abuse and cooperate with local authorities to support strategies and services for victims and their children. These standards aim to ensure that registered providers contribute to community well-being, address issues like anti-social behaviour and hate incidents effectively, and support tenants affected by domestic abuse.

2.9. RSH Safety & Quality Standard:

Registered providers must take all reasonable steps to ensure the health & safety of tenants in their homes and associated communal areas

3. Principles

3.1 We will:

- Treat all customers with fairness and respect.
- Assess our service to deliver fair and equitable outcomes, using data to understand the diverse needs of our customers.
- Communicate and provide information clearly, in accessible formats, ensuring all communications are relevant and appropriate to the needs of our customers.
- Support customers to use our service, ensuring that our services are accessible to all, including enabling our customers to be supported by an advocate or representative.
- Engage with customers when reviewing and updating this Policy, creating meaningful opportunities to influence our service. We will tailor these opportunities to meet the needs of customers wishing to participate.
- Keep customers up to date on progress, next steps and outcomes on services that affect them.
- Clearly set out our decision-making criteria, setting these out in the Roles and Responsibilities section below and in any associated procedures.
- Provide customers with information about how we are performing against this Policy and the actions we are taking to improve performance if required. Performance measures will be set out in any associated Procedure(s).
- Self-refer to the RSH if we fail to meet any of these principles in a material way and put improvement actions in place to minimise recurrence.

Accessibility

3.2 We will ensure customers and agencies can report DA in numerous ways, including online and each report will be investigated thoroughly, reflecting our commitment to transparency and accountability.

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- 3.3 Reports will be acknowledged within one working day, and a safe method of contact/ongoing communication will be established at the first point of contact, ensuring that customers feel supported and informed and are provided with accessible services, ensuring that customers understand their rights and options.
- 3.4 Individuals can self-refer for support. We will also investigate reports of suspected DA reported to us by neighbours or contractors, handling such reports with high levels of discretion and ensuring victim centred approach.
- 3.5 We can provide interpreting and translation services where needed, and all aspects of diverse communication methods, ensuring accessibility for all customers.
- 3.6 Anyone can experience DA; however, we acknowledge that women and girls are disproportionately affected by all forms of violence, and some are gender specific such as Female Genital Mutilation. We will support those individuals experiencing against women and girls (VAWG), or DA irrespective of age, sex, gender, sexuality, disability, ethnicity, religion, social background, or any other protected characteristics identified in the Equality Act.
- 3.7 We will give individuals experiencing DA the opportunity to have a colleague of a specific gender to handle their case where necessary, respecting their individual needs and preferences.

Confidentiality

- 3.8 We will deal with all reports of DA in a non-judgmental, sympathetic manner and in confidence, adhering to the highest standards of privacy and respect.
- 3.9 We will work collaboratively with partner agencies, in line with Local Information Sharing Agreements (LISAs), to provide coordinated, meaningful responses and support to those living with or fleeing DA. This allows us to enhance service delivery and safety for customers.
- 3.10 To create a safe environment, interviews will be arranged at safe locations away from the customer's home or our offices where individuals feel able to speak freely.
- 3.11 Information concerning DA cases will be stored and handled securely on our case management system. We will ensure compliance with GDPR and always respect the customer's right to privacy.
- 3.12 We will only act with the consent of the victim, except where we consider a child to be at risk or if there is a high risk of serious harm to anyone involved. In such cases, the victim will be informed of the actions we will take and who we will share their information with, including police and local authorities, invoking our internal Safeguarding procedures where necessary.

Ask Ruth

- 3.13 We understand the devastating impact that DA could have on our customers, their families and the wider community and we also recognise how difficult it can be to ask for help.
- 3.14 Customers can discreetly seek help by speaking with any Colleague by asking them for 'Ruth'. This code-phrase will indicate to Colleagues that victims require help with their situation. All Colleagues will then contact our dedicated DA Specialists on the victim's behalf.



- 3.15 Ask Ruth can also be accessed via our [website](#), alongside a range of support available to customers. By completing a short webform, customers can reach out to our specially trained team safely and in confidence. The team contact customers using the method best for them, at a time when they can speak freely and will talk through options to get the right support in place.

Empowering Our Customers

- 3.16 We will manage our customers' expectations from the outset and explain the next steps at each stage of the process, ensuring accountability and transparency.
- 3.17 The needs and wishes of the customer will be at the forefront of our decision-making, reflecting our commitment to customer engagement and customer influence. Ensuring customer voices are heard and considered in service delivery.
- 3.18 We will empower our customers to make informed decisions about their own future, providing them with the necessary support and resources including enabling our customers to be supported by an advocate or representative.
- 3.19 We will be patient and understand that each victim/survivor will make changes in their own time, supporting them and ensuring they know they can return to the service in the future if needed. Emphasising the importance of a supportive and understanding approach to victims' needs.
- 3.20 We will provide accessible services and ensuring that customers understand their rights and options. We will assist our customers in making a report to the Police and can report on their behalf, with their consent, if they are too fearful to do so themselves.
- 3.21 We will make referrals to relevant internal teams for additional support to provide a holistic approach (e.g., money advice and tenancy sustainability).

Partnership Collaboration

- 3.22 We will establish links with local Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) and Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) to stay updated on cases where our customers are identified as high risk of murder or serious harm due to DA. Enhancing service delivery and safety for customers.
- 3.23 We will collaborate with partner agencies, such as local Police and Crime Commissioners' offices, fire services, and regional police forces. This ensures we establish a coordinated approach to improve security at customers' homes and offer tailored safety planning advice based on identified risks.
- 3.24 We will attend multi-agency meetings as requested, including but not limited to Strategy meetings, Child in Need meetings, and Child Protection Conferences.
- 3.25 We will encourage our customers to engage with support services and promote the benefits of doing so ensuring they are informed about available services and their rights.

Interventions

- 3.26 We will be committed to maintaining safety and quality standards within our homes. Working with partner agencies to enhance the safety and security of properties where incidents of DA are reported. Target hardening and additional security measures, such as lock changes and rechargeable repairs, will be assessed on a case-by-case basis, guided by identified risks. We will support customers who need



to be rehoused due to DA through Local Authority Choice Based Lettings Partnerships and their Housing/Homeless Services.

- 3.27 We will coordinate with pre-approved contractors carrying out target hardening measures on our properties on behalf of Local Authorities via Police and Crime Commissioners' Offices, ensuring clear processes for prompt referrals for ongoing support. Ensuring that services are accessible and responsive to the needs of customers.

Action Against Perpetrators

- 3.28 We will consider the legal action or remedies (both civil and criminal) available to us to deal with perpetrators of DA. We will determine, monitor, and seek to understand what action is being taken by the statutory agencies in this respect, to ensure that we are working together.
- 3.29 We will be accountable in taking tenancy enforcement action against perpetrators of DA where appropriate, ensuring that such actions do not compromise the safety of the victim/survivor.
- 3.30 In cases of intentional damage to our property, we may provide a statement to the Police to assist with criminal proceedings against a perpetrator of DA.
- 3.31 To demonstrate a proactive approach, in circumstances where it is appropriate to do so, we may signpost perpetrators to DA perpetrator programmes such as respect.org.uk.

Information and Training

- 3.32 To ensure Colleagues are equipped to provide effective support and information to customers. We will ensure all colleagues, especially those in customer-facing roles, including contractors, receive appropriate training on recognising the signs of DA and have a clear pathway for promptly referring customers for support.
- 3.33 We will raise awareness of DA across the organisation and in our communities via newsletters, online platforms, and engagement with local DA services.
- 3.34 To provide clear and accessible communication, our call centre Colleagues will be trained to engage with callers reporting that they are victims of DA or expressing concerns for others, ensuring they know what information to obtain to establish safe contact.
- 3.35 We will raise awareness of DA across the organisation and in our communities via newsletters, our online platforms including social media and external website and through engaging with local DA services. We will provide publicity in other languages to raise awareness of DA where the need is identified.
- 3.36 We will identify specialist support services for a range of customers based on their circumstances and characteristics (e.g., male survivors, those fleeing honour-based abuse, and customers from the LGBTQI+ community).
- 3.37 Best practice advice, process maps, and referral pathways will be kept up to date on our [Procedure Library](#) ensuring information is accessible and necessary resources available for all colleagues.
- 3.38 We will ensure we communicate in a timely manner with the regulator on all material issues that relate to non-compliance or potential non-compliance with the consumer standards.



Safeguarding

- 3.39 Some adults who are experiencing DA or VAWG may also require safeguarding, for example where there are additional vulnerabilities such as a disability. In such cases, a referral will be made to Adult Services. Children living in a household with DA will always require safeguarding and will be referred to Children's Services in all cases. Our approach to safeguarding aims to prevent and reduce the risk of harm to adults and children who are experiencing, or are at risk from, abuse or neglect.
- 3.40 We are committed to safeguarding our customers. Colleagues will receive mandatory training on identifying signs of possible domestic abuse and factors that may increase risk, such as pregnancy or substance abuse. When DA is disclosed, we will clarify confidentiality and our safeguarding obligations, both internally and in relation to the roles of the Local Authority and Police.
- 3.41 We will ensure that the safety of customers is considered in the design and delivery of services and take reasonable steps to mitigate any identified risks to customers.

4. Further Information & Support

- 4.1. Customers and other stakeholders can access our Policies through the Riverside website at [Our policies - Riverside](#) and [Our policies - Riverside Scotland](#). Internally, Policies are available on the Policy Management System at [Riverside Policies](#).
- 4.2. This Policy conforms to our Customer Care Policy. We aim to deliver high quality customer service across all business streams, operating areas, and subsidiaries, and within all activities whilst meeting all legal and regulatory requirements. This involves putting the customer first, respecting their rights, needs and views.
- 4.3. This Policy conforms to our Tailored Services & Reasonable Adjustments Policy. We aim to identify and support customers who, because of a protected characteristic, vulnerability or diverse need require extra support or an adjustment to access our services, in line with our organisational values of 'We Care,' 'We are Inclusive' and 'We are Trusted.'
- 4.4. This Policy has been written in collaboration with our customers through our approved customer panels. Reviews will be undertaken every three years, or as required when new legislation or regulatory requirements are published, and customers will be given the opportunity to influence the way we work within the requirements set out in the relevant housing law and regulations described above, and in conjunction with our Customer Involvement and Engagement Strategy and Policy.
- 4.5. Here we share a passion and a vision to make a difference for our customers by transforming lives and revitalising neighbourhoods. To achieve our vision, we consistently look for ways of improving the way we work, and how we deliver our services so we can always put our customers first. Our Riverside Way represents who we are, what we stand for and guides how we work, treat our customers, and each other.
- 4.6. Data Protection and Privacy are at the heart of the services we offer and are the foundations of our relationships with our customers, colleagues, partners, and stakeholders. Personal data is valuable, and we must always act fairly, ethically and with integrity when dealing with it. The fair and lawful handling and protection of personal data is critical to developing trust and confidence and building and



sustaining long term relationships with those we provide homes to, and care for. We are dedicated to safeguarding the personal data under our care and to the continual development of a Privacy and Data Protection framework that is effective, fit for purpose and demonstrates an understanding of, and appreciation for Data Protection and the opportunities it brings. We are committed to the continuous cycle of improvement and enhancement of our compliance and governance framework.

4.7. Other Strategies, Policies and Procedures that support this Policy are:

- [Safeguarding Children Policy](#)
- [Safeguarding Adults Policy](#)
- [Domestic Abuse Staff Policy](#)
- Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Policy
- [Domestic Abuse Procedure](#)
- [Let a Property Procedure](#)

4.8. We are looking into how we can make our Procedures more access to Customers and other stakeholders, in the meantime requests for information can be made through the CSC (processed as a STAIRS request). Internally, Procedures are available on the Processes and Procedures Hub at [Riverside Processes](#).



5. Roles and Responsibilities

Group Board and Executive Directors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide overall leadership and approval of the Policy • Monitor our approach to DA
Directors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Champion DA across directorate, keeping awareness of the issue high and encouraging colleagues to report all incidents to allow for meaningful reporting and trend analysis
Heads of Service and Service Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of cases in designated area deemed 'high risk' • Ensure good case management including multi-agency approach and contemporaneous record keeping • Encourage colleagues to link with Community Safety Team as needed
Community Safety Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer advice and guidance in cases of DA or where DA is suspected but not yet proven (victim/survivor has not yet disclosed) • Effectively manage complex cases • Establish good working relationships with relevant partner agencies • Advice on case management, best practise and referral options • Champion our response and the service we offer to colleagues, customers and stakeholders
All Colleagues including Front Line Workers and CSC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively demonstrate our values when dealing with DA • Seek advice or guidance if unsure • Attend training identified for specific job role • Awareness of local support services and referral pathways

6. Risks

Customer Experience

- 6.1. Our review programme is driven by service improvement initiatives, changes to legislation, regulation, evolving good practice or feedback from customers and other key stakeholders. We will review this policy on a three yearly cycle.
- 6.2. There is limited tolerance of variations to the service standards set and this is diminishing even further as we drive up the customer experience. We will continue to work towards improving delivery of customer services, the short-term consequence of making major improvements may be a temporary reduction in customer experience, however such reductions will only be tolerated where there is a clear articulation of the potential impact and an agreed action plan to return to acceptable levels.
- 6.3. A full suite of customer experience KPIs which are scrutinised by Group Board, Executive Directors, Customer Experience Committee and Care and Support Committee.

Customer Safety

- 6.4. There is no appetite for risk of harm to customers and others. Targets for building safety KPIs are generally set at 100% against the standards agreed.

Key Risks

- 6.5. Key risks to the successful implementation/operation of this policy and measures to prevent them:
 - Obtaining buy-in from colleagues and changing stereotypes: Promote awareness, provide role-specific training, and highlight legislative changes relevant to our role as a responsible Registered Social Landlord (RSL).
 - Insular working: Ensure partnership collaboration is central to case management, working with relevant agencies to make a real difference for customers and their families. Build relationships with partner agencies and attend regular meetings.
 - Reluctance to report domestic abuse (DA): Promote internally and externally (intranet, website, community events) that we are experienced and competent in handling DA cases. Build trust with customers and partner agencies by ensuring thorough case management.
- 6.6. Unforeseen circumstances (e.g., COVID-19 lockdown): Provide various ways for customers to report incidents and obtain advice based on their specific circumstances and available time. Establish safe methods of ongoing contact from the first point of contact. Highlight trends in particular areas and target resources as needed, working with local partner agencies to bring about change. Ensure a quick exit button is available on the website and the ability to self-report for support. Collaborate with the Marketing and Communications team to promote DA support services during times when DA incidences are known to increase, such as Christmas and the football season.
- 6.7. A full suite of customer experience KPIs which are scrutinised by Group Board, Executive Directors, Customer Experience Committee and Care and Support Committee.



7. Appeal & Complaints

- 7.1. As detailed in the Regulator of Social Housing's Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard, customers are invited to hold us to account for the decisions we make, that impact upon them, under this Policy.
- 7.2. If a customer wishes to appeal a decision made under this Policy, this should be received and heard under our Tenancy Policy and Right to Review Procedure.
- 7.3. If a customer wishes to complain about the service they have received under this Policy, this should be handled through our Complaint Handling Procedure, which is governed by the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code of Practice.
- 7.4. These associated Policies and Procedures are available on our website at:
 - England: <https://www.riverside.org.uk/you-your-home/customer-feedback/> or <https://www.riverside.org.uk/about-us/our-policies/>
 - Scotland: [Customer feedback | Complaints | Riverside Scotland](#) or <https://www.riversidescotland.org.uk/about-us/our-policies>
 - and are also available by contacting our Customer Service Centre.

8. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

- 8.1. We are committed to Equality, Diversity & Inclusion. We strive to be fair in our dealings with all people, communities, and organisations, taking into account the diverse nature of their culture and background and actively promoting inclusion. This policy aligns with our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment.



Document Control (Internal Use ONLY) (Internal Use ONLY)

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Policy Owner	Charlotte Smith – Head of Community Safety
Policy Author	Lesleyanne Macmillan – Business Assurance Officer
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Change Category (Internal Use ONLY)

Category of Change	Tick Box
Minor Changes (Non-Strategic)	X
Major Changes (Re-Write)	
Summary of Changes Made	
Integrated Riverside and OHG Domestic Abuse policies, including adoption of DAHA principles from OHG policy. Addition of transparency, influence and accountability statement to complete regulatory compliance. No material change to the principles of this policy or how it should be applied.	

Quality Assurance and Approval (Internal Use ONLY)

Consultation and Approval	Tick Box	Date
Associated Documents Reviewed	X	11/11/24
Consultees:		
<i>Customer Service Extended Leadership Team</i>	X	20/11/24
<i>Care & Support Quality& Improvement</i>	X	04/03/25
<i>London Scrutiny Panel</i>	X	26/11/24
<i>Care & Support Strategy & Change</i>	X	04/03/25
<i>Customer Service Leadership Team</i>	X	12/02/25
<i>Executive Directors</i>	X	25/02/25
<i>Customer Experience Committee</i>	X	27/02/25
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