

DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY

Board Approval:	May 2021	Responsible Board:	Ocean Housing Ltd
Next Review:	May 2023	Responsible Executive:	Managing Director of Ocean Housing Ltd

1.0 POLICY STATEMENT

- 1.1 Ocean Housing is a provider of social housing for people in need in Cornwall. Our mission is *'to be an innovative provider of quality homes and services, with residents and staff at the heart of Ocean, and Ocean at the heart of the community.'*
- 1.2 This policy primarily concentrates on Ocean Housing's role as a landlord and sets out Ocean's responsibilities and approach when dealing with customers experiencing domestic abuse. The policy underpins our Mission Statement above and Golden Threads:
- Have residents at the heart of everything we do.
 - Provide good quality services, right first time.
 - Be an employer of choice.
- 1.3 This policy should be read in conjunction with other Ocean Housing policies including:
- Safeguarding Adults
 - Safeguarding Children
 - Allocations and Lettings
 - Anti Social Behaviour (ASB)
 - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy
 - Vulnerable Persons Policy

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Ocean Housing takes its responsibilities seriously, as a landlord, service provider and employer, in safeguarding the independence, safety and well being of all its customers. Ocean Housing believes no-one should live in fear of domestic abuse and will take steps to identify, assist and support any customer in this situation.
- 2.2 Ocean Housing will ensure that it has appropriate policies and procedures in place to respond in a sensitive and non-judgemental way.
- 2.3 This policy is closely linked to the company's ASB and Vulnerable People policies.

3.0 SCOPE AND DEFINITION

- 3.1 This policy is intended to cover all Ocean customers, including tenants, shared owners, and leaseholders.

3.2 The Government definition of domestic abuse and abuse is:

'Any incident 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 (Family members are: mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister, & grandparents; directly-related, in-laws or step family). This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional
- Digital (using smartphones and social networking to harass and intimidate).
- Coercive control

3.3 'Controlling behaviour is: 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.

3.4 Coercive behaviour is: 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.'

3.5 These definitions and other aspects of this policy may be subject to change following consultation and review of the existing legislation.

4.0 THE POLICY

4.1 Ocean Housing is committed to:

- treating all reports of domestic abuse seriously
- taking a confidential, caring and sensitive person-centred approach offering support to signpost to appropriate agencies anyone identified as experiencing domestic abuse ensuring that any action it takes is in agreement with the victim's wishes, unless this is a Safeguarding matter, in which case a referral would be made without consent.
- working in partnership with other local agencies and specialist organisations to ensure the victim of domestic abuse has access to the advice, care and support they need

4.2 Ocean may be required to make a safeguarding referral to protect the health and wellbeing of a person experiencing domestic abuse or if a child is at risk of abuse and/or neglect. We will seek consent where necessary, however there may be circumstances where consent is not required i.e. (criminal behaviour is taking place, the person lacks mental capacity or there is significant risk of harm).

- 4.3 The aims of this policy are:
- To ensure that Ocean Housing's working practices support effective safeguarding of customers and contribute to reducing the risk of domestic abuse for all people who use our services.
 - To ensure that our services are open and accountable and that information on reporting domestic abuse is widely available and well publicised.
 - To ensure that domestic abuse, in all its forms is understood and recognised by all staff within the organisation.
 - To ensure staff are confident in their ability to respond to, and take appropriate action in relation to allegations or concerns of domestic abuse. To ensure any children within the household are protected with effective safeguarding referrals as appropriate.
 - To ensure customers who have leave to remain in the UK have access to the correct support with the Home Office.
- 4.4 Ocean will provide training for staff on how to identify and work with victims of domestic abuse.
- 4.5 In applying this policy, Ocean will consider a range of measures to mitigate and resolve incidents of domestic abuse. These may include but are not limited to:
- Providing a safe, non-judgemental environment, within which the victim can report concerns, seek advice or simply discuss their case
 - Supporting the victim, if required to make an application for rehousing elsewhere including applications made to Home Choice and Home Swapper
 - Supporting a victim by taking legal action against a perpetrator tenant
 - Signposting to specialist agencies including working within the Sanctuary Scheme which provides practical security measures including the provision of a 'safe room' if required
 - Multi agency working with specialist agencies
 - Tailoring our services to meet the needs of the victim (e.g. meeting at neutral location or out of normal working hours, same sex officers working with the victim etc)
- 4.6 Exchange of Information Protocol - Ocean are signed up to the protocol for sharing of information on incidents of domestic abuse, sexual assaults and sexual violence in Cornwall. Any requests for information must be completed by the Tenancy Sustainment Co-ordinator, Neighbourhood Services Manager or Head of Neighbourhood Services. Any data can be accessed from any agency that is signed up to the information sharing protocol.

5.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 Risk Assessments will be carried out for each customer at various stages to identify any causes for concern and a plan is put into place to mitigate the risk, which will include a Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour based violence (DASH) assessment
- 5.2 Ocean will utilise information sharing protocols with other agencies including the police and health department so that key information can be shared between agencies.

6.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

- 6.1 Ocean collects data on our customers to enable our service offer to be tailored to meet the needs of all customers.

6.2 Ocean recognises that victims of domestic abuse come from a diverse range of backgrounds. Although it is recognised that there tends to be a higher percentage of women who are affected by domestic abuse, men can also be victims. Ocean will adopt an inclusive approach to ensure that all victims can receive support tailored to their individual needs and aspirations.

7.0 GENERAL DATA PROTECTION REGULATION (GDPR)

7.1 In cases at risk of serious harm or risk of death we are required to liaise and share information with the local authority via the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Committee, whose purpose is to help protect those affected from harm. Any data we collect in the pursuance of this policy and / or performance of our obligations under the terms of the tenancy agreement will be kept securely and will not be retained for any longer than is reasonable. We will comply the latest Data Protection laws and guidance.

8.0 ACCOUNTABILITY

8.1 Delivery of this policy rests with the Head of Neighbourhood Services. Responsibility for this policy rests with the Managing Director of Ocean Housing.

9.0 MONITORING & REVIEW

9.1 Domestic abuse will be monitored in a number of ways:

- attendance by Ocean at Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences(MARAC)
- participation in the Sanctuary scheme which provides practical help and support including extra security to the home
- recording the number of cases requiring this level of involvement

9.2 This policy will be reviewed every two years.