

INNISFREE HOUSING ASSOCIATION

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE POLICY

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Innisfree Housing Association will not condone any form of violence and abuse and we are firmly resolved to using any influence we have and the resources available to work towards preventing it and asserting how unacceptable it is. We will attempt to assist and support any tenant who reports that they have been subjected to such violence. This Policy outlines our approach for dealing with reports of domestic violence and demonstrates our commitment to providing a sensitive, victim-centred, non-judgemental service to tenants.

2.0 Definition

2.1 Domestic violence is actual violence, threat or fear of violence suffered in a family or relationship context. It does not only relate to physical abuse; it can extend to verbal and emotional abuse and can seriously damage a person's safety, health and ability to participate fully in life. Domestic violence is not restricted to women and heterosexual relationships. It can affect, men, occur in gay and lesbian relationships and can be between adult/teenage children and parents. Domestic violence does not necessarily have to take place within the home.

2.2 Domestic violence can cover a range of situations including slapping, pushing, verbal abuse, humiliation, threats, kicking, punching, stabbing, physical sexual or psychological abuse and rape. It can also cover financial and emotional manipulation e.g. withholding money/cheque and benefit books, controlling and denying a person physical freedom.

2.3 Domestic Violence can have an adverse effect on other family members, neighbours and the local community.

2.4 Throughout this document the term "victim" is used to refer to the person suffering domestic violence for simplicity, however, the use of this word does not imply "passivity" or any other negative connotation. The term "survivor" is used once the person has left the relationship.

3.0 Best Value Service Statement & Performance Standards

3.1 Innisfree is committed to achieving continuous improvement in service provision. We aim to ensure all cases of domestic violence are dealt with speedily, thoroughly, supportively, sensitively and with our tenants care, safety and needs in mind.

- 3.2** We aim to deliver a good quality and consistent standard of service in all reported cases of domestic violence.
- 3.3** We will aim to adopt and follow best practice when dealing with cases of domestic violence and will review our policy and procedures a minimum of every 3 years or more regularly if legislation requires us to do so. This is to ensure that our procedures are up-to-date and adequately meet the needs of our tenants.
- 3.4** We will take positive steps to discourage domestic violence by publicising our policy in tenancy agreements, handbooks, newsletters and advising new and existing tenants about it.
- 3.5** We aim to provide a victim centred and non-judgemental approach.
- 3.6** We will aim to respond to reports of domestic violence quickly and efficiently, meeting publicised timescales and targets.
- 3.7** We will treat all reports seriously and in the strictest confidence.
- 3.8** We aim to ensure that our staff offer sufficient support and advice to those suffering domestic violence and that appropriate referrals are made to external agencies that can provide specialist care and assistance. e.g. women's aid, refuges.
- 3.9** We will consider rehousing any tenant where there is a serious threat to health and safety.
- 3.10** We will refer tenants to solicitors/legal advisers if more detailed and specialist legal advice is required e.g. to apply for injunctions.
- 3.11** We will ensure that properties are made secure, graffiti is removed and repairs are undertaken within the published timescales.
- 3.12** We recognise the value in linking with other agencies to tackle domestic violence and support victims, so with the tenants permission we will consult and work in partnership with other residents and other agencies including the police, domestic violence and community safety units, Solicitors, women's aid, victim support, local authorities, voluntary support services when dealing with cases of domestic violence. We will also input into interagency Domestic Violence Fora to promote consistency and increase effectiveness. We will sign up to Local Authority Information Sharing Protocols as required by the Crime and Disorder Act, to assist us when investigating incidents.
- 3.13** We will consider legal action if:
- a) the victim requests it and is prepared to assist with such action;
 - b) the perpetrator has no legal right to remain in the property;
 - c) the perpetrator is in breach of his/her tenancy conditions;
 - d) damage has been caused to Innisfree property.
- 3.14** We aim to follow and adopt best practice in all cases of domestic violence and comply with legislation;
- 3.15** Regularly update policies and procedures;
- 3.16** Ensure that staff receive adequate training;
- 3.17** Provide interpreters and translations where required;

- 3.18** Monitor and review cases every 3 months to assess ongoing situation;
3.19 Undertake all action within the Association's policy on Equalities and Diversity.

4.0 Equalities

- 4.1.** We aim to ensure that all our tenants receive a fair and equal standard of service regardless of race, colour, ethnic origin, gender, sexuality, age, disability, religious beliefs, marital status, physical or mental health.
- 4.2** It is vital that the response given to those approaching us is based on the principle of, equality of service, customer care, good practice and courtesy.
- 4.3** We will provide translation services if required.

5.0 Confidentiality

- 5.1** Innisfree is committed to the principle of confidentiality and requires that any information known, written or held about tenants remains confidential.
- 5.2** In cases of domestic violence information will only be divulged to a third party if we have the written consent of the person concerned. Where information is being shared on individual cases, due regard will have to be paid to the Data Protection Act and the Human Rights Act.
- 5.3** In the case of a joint tenancy it should be noted that the perpetrator has the right of access to the tenancy file. Measures will be taken to ensure that confidential information provided by the person suffering violence is not seen by the perpetrator or anyone representing the perpetrator.
- 5.4** We will be mindful that the person suffering violence may not wish to be contacted directly at home or by the telephone. If possible a "safe address" will be used for correspondence.

6.0 Support and Sensitivity

- 6.1** We are committed to ensuring that all victims of domestic violence are dealt with in a sympathetic, sensitive and non-judgemental manner. Victims may approach the Association many times before deciding to leave or take action but it is essential that subsequent requests for assistance are treated as seriously as the first request.
- 6.2** Officers will not place any pressure on the victim to make an immediate decision and will respect any decision finally made, even if it is to try reconciliation with the perpetrator.

- 6.3 We will interview the victim at a venue of their choice, within reasonable distance, if they do not wish to visit the office.
- 6.4 We will give the victim the choice to decide whether they wish to be interviewed by someone of the same sex.
- 6.5 We will provide translation services and will not use children or other family members to translate.
- 6.6 We will allow the victim to have an advocate or friend present if requested.

7.0 Publicity

- 7.1 The Association will publicise its policy for dealing with domestic violence in the Tenant's Handbook and at least once a year in a newsletter so that tenants know what they can expect. This will hopefully encourage tenants to come forward for advice and assistance. Such publicity will make staff aware of the service they are committed to providing.

8.0 Monitoring

- 8.1 All cases reported should be logged in a central incident file and monitored every 3 months to ensure that ongoing cases are not forgotten and that appropriate action has been taken. All cases should be reported to the Housing Services Committee along with cases where large rent arrears exist as a result of the domestic violence.

9.0 Review

- 9.1 This policy will be reviewed every three years or more regularly should there be relevant changes to legislation.