



## INNISFREE HOUSING ASSOCIATION

October 2021

Domestic Abuse Policy

# DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY

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# DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Innisfree does not tolerate domestic abuse or Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG).
- 1.2 We recognise the detrimental effect that domestic abuse can have on residents, their families, and communities. We believe that taking appropriate action in relation to domestic abuse is essential in our efforts to creating safe and secure neighbourhoods where people feel comfortable.
- 1.3 We recognise that our staff may be well placed to identify abusive relationships as they may become apparent through repairs reporting, rent arrears, or from reports of antisocial behaviour. Therefore, we understand the importance of training our staff to stay vigilant throughout their roles.
- 1.4 Innisfree have taken the Make a Stand pledge, to publicly commit to take action to support victims of domestic abuse.
- 1.5 This policy should be read in conjunction with the Safeguarding policy, Antisocial Behaviour policy, and Hate Crime policy.

## 2. OUR APPROACH

- 2.1 Innisfree will encourage all tenants and household members to report domestic abuse, whether they are victims of abuse, or are witnesses to incidents.
- 2.2 Staff members who come into contact with victims affected by domestic abuse will be a supportive first point of contact. We will treat all victims and witnesses with respect and kindness. Those experiencing domestic abuse, need to know that they will be taken seriously if they disclose domestic abuse and that it will not be minimised.
- 2.3 We adopt a multi-agency approach in working with victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse, so that we can help ensure the safety of the victims, meet their needs, access support services, and take action against perpetrators.

### 3. WHAT IS DOMESTIC ABUSE?

3.1 Innisfree adopts the Home Office definition of Domestic Abuse as “any incident or pattern of incidents 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”. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:

- Psychological and emotional – constant ridiculing, criticism, isolation from friends and family
- Physical – actual violence or threats of violence
- Sexual – rape or other non-consensual sexual acts
- Financial – withholding access to money

### 4. WHAT IS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS?

4.1 Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) refers to crimes which disproportionately are experienced by women and girls. This includes domestic abuse, sexual offences, stalking, female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage, honour-based violence/abuse, trafficking and prostitution.

## 5. POLICY AIMS

- 5.1 Innisfree is committed to responding quickly and effectively to reports of domestic abuse or VAWG. This policy enables staff to deal with cases of domestic abuse reported by tenants or occupants of our properties.
- 5.2 We aim to do the following:
- Take all reports of domestic abuse or VAWG seriously and respond appropriately
  - Provide a proactive housing response to preventing and addressing domestic abuse.
  - Provide a sensitive and supporting response to those affected by domestic abuse, to access a range of housing options, advice, and support
  - Prevent homelessness and address the housing needs of victims where necessary
  - Increase awareness and understanding of this issue amongst staff, contractors, and residents.
  - Facilitate early identification of domestic abuse and offer supportive and effective intervention
  - Be aware of safeguarding issues in relation to vulnerable tenants or family members, particularly children
  - Respond rapidly, effectively, and consistently to all reports of domestic abuse, with the aim of improving the safety and welfare of those affected
  - Empower victims by providing them with information on the options available to them
  - Create a consistent approach for recording and monitoring incidents of domestic abuse or VAWG
  - Work with supporting agencies including local authorities, Police, Refuges, registered providers, and specialist support groups to deal with incidents of abuse

## 6. HOW TO REPORT DOMESTIC ABUSE

- 6.1 Tenants that are experiencing or have witnessed domestic abuse in their neighbourhood can report their concerns to any member of staff in writing, by email, in person or over the phone.
- 6.2 We offer a supportive and safe environment for people who are suffering from domestic abuse to report it. We will record all reports of domestic abuse that we receive, including those made in confidence, and those made to individuals not directly involved, such as neighbours and contractors.
- 6.3 We will provide interpreting and translation services for tenants where needed.

## 7. HOW INNISFREE RESPOND TO A REPORT

- 7.1 Tenants reporting incidents must be interviewed within one working day to ensure that they are given a clear signal that the allegations are being taken seriously, and that all necessary and appropriate support will be provided. The interview should take place where the victim feels comfortable.
- 7.2 We will carry out a risk assessment using the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour based risk identification checklist (DASH). Safety planning will be carried out to provide support for the person experiencing domestic abuse and their household unless another organisation has carried this out.
- 7.3 We will agree an action plan with the person experiencing domestic abuse or VAWG, monitor the situation and review at a frequency agreed with them. This will be recorded on our housing management system
- 7.4 We will offer support to anyone living in the household who feels that they are a victim.
- 7.5 Where appropriate, we will encourage victims to seek independent legal advice regarding their tenancy rights and housing options.
- 7.6 Where we have concerns about a potential victim of modern slavery or are suspicious about a situation that is potentially exploitative, we will contact the Modern Slavery Helpline on 08000 121 700. If we suspect that a person is being trafficked or is in immediate danger, this will be reported to the Police.

## 8. SUPPORTING VICTIMS

- 8.1 We adopt a 'survivor-centered' approach in dealing with domestic abuse, i.e., if a person feels they are experiencing domestic abuse we will deal with it under this policy.
- 8.2 Innisfree staff deal with all reports in a non-judgmental manner and in confidence. We will not require victims to take legal action or to contact the Police before we provide assistance.
- 8.3 We will take a proactive and sympathetic approach. Each situation will have its own challenges and so the type and level of assistance offered will differ. Options available will also depend on whether the victim is coming to us as one of our tenants; or a household member within an Innisfree property or is an applicant seeking rehousing with us.
- 8.4 We aim to only take action with the victim's consent. However, where we consider a child is at risk or if there is a high risk of serious harm to anyone involved, we may need to take steps to safeguard the victims without consent.

- 8.5 Innisfree recognise that every case of domestic abuse is different, therefore our responses will be tailored to the individual circumstances and needs of the victim. When a tenant or household member reports domestic abuse, all available options will be discussed and considered with them, including:
- Making arrangements for their immediate personal safety
  - Support the tenant to contact their local authority and external partner agencies to review the safety and security of their existing home, to enable them to remain there safely. Where needed, additional security may be considered such as arranging for panic alarms, installing fireproof letter boxes, changing the locks (in case of a sole tenancy), and improving the lighting
  - Reporting incidents to the Police. This could result in criminal action against the perpetrator

## 9. ACTIONS AGAINST PERPETRATORS

- 9.1 We will work with the Police and other agencies to deal with perpetrators of domestic abuse. The actions taken against perpetrators will depend upon the individual circumstances; this may include legal proceedings to gain possession of the home from the perpetrator, where other household members have had to leave due to domestic abuse.
- 9.2 Victims of domestic abuse or VAWG, with independent legal support, may wish to consider seeking an interdict/interim interdict, or non-harassment order, or exclusion order against the perpetrator.

## 10. SAFEGUARDING

- 10.1 Innisfree has a separate policy relating to safeguarding of vulnerable people and children. This document gives the definition of safeguarding, what staff should look for, and what responsibilities Innisfree has to ensure that vulnerable people are safeguarded.
- 10.2 In terms of domestic abuse where there are children, it is possible that the safeguarding policy will need to be used to report any concerns that officers have regarding the welfare of a child/children or older people.

## 11. PARTNERSHIP WORKING

- 11.1 Innisfree will signpost the victim to relevant organisations such as Refuge or other domestic abuse agencies within their borough to provide support where appropriate. Our officers will need to work closely with specialist agencies, both statutory and voluntary. These may include local authorities, police, social services, Travellers' and women's support groups. We will work with these agencies to ensure coordinated services, so as best to prioritise the safety of the person who is experiencing domestic abuse and the safety of their children, where present.
- 11.2 We will work with supporting partner agencies to identify and support those suffering from domestic abuse and take action against perpetrators where appropriate, and where we can do so without compromising the safety of the individual experiencing domestic abuse.
- 11.3 We will complete a DASH Risk Identification Checklist and hold multi-agency meetings to ensure support is received from all relevant agencies. This is most appropriate where the DASH Risk Identification Checklist does not meet the local authority threshold for a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) referral.
- 11.4 Where necessary we will work with support agencies to improve security to a tenant's home.

## 12. LEGAL ACTION AND ADVICE

- 12.1 Innisfree tenants should be advised to seek independent legal advice, including the alleged perpetrator. This is particularly important where the tenancy is a joint one as Innisfree has an obligation to both parties. Where appropriate, a victim may need to make an application for an injunction and officers may encourage tenants to approach a solicitor.
- 12.2 Innisfree reserves the right to take legal action against a tenant who breaches their tenancy agreement by committing acts of domestic abuse.

## 13. HOUSING OPTIONS

### 13.1 Remaining in the property

- We will, in conjunction with Police, advise victims who wish to remain in their own homes of any improvements which may be possible to improve the security of their existing accommodation.
- We will offer assistance to those experiencing domestic abuse by not recharging them for lock changes and damages due to the domestic abuse. Where appropriate we will charge such costs to the perpetrator.

### 13.2 Emergency rehousing

- Where a resident reporting domestic abuse needs emergency accommodation, we will provide advice and assistance on accessing such accommodation provided by the Local Authority or by a refuge. We will provide a referral letter where appropriate.

### 13.3 Permanent rehousing

- Where a resident reporting domestic abuse requests permanent rehousing, we will prioritise their application as a 'management transfer'. We will seek to ensure that victims are not allocated housing that continues to put them at risk, for example, in the same area as the perpetrator. However due to our limited housing stock, Innisfree may not be able to offer a transfer quickly and so will support the victim to approach their local authority for help rehousing. Where appropriate, we will support the victim to be a part of the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal, to apply for rehousing in different boroughs.

### 13.4 Joint tenancies

- Where the victim and perpetrator have a joint tenancy, we cannot intervene to decide which party should occupy the property. In these circumstances we will refer the victim to obtain independent legal advice on their options, which include:
  - Seeking an occupation order
  - A court order to transfer the tenancy to their sole name
  - The victim serving Notice to Quit to end the tenancy
- Where Innisfree have rehoused the tenant as a direct result of domestic abuse or VAGW and they have served a Notice to Quit to end a joint tenancy, if the perpetrator fails to move out when the tenancy has ended, we will take possession proceedings to remove them from the property.

## 14. TRAINING

14.1 Innisfree will arrange for staff to undertake training to ensure they are up to date with best practice, any changes in legislation, or ways to provide additional security measures for their home.

## 15. DATA SHARING

15.1 All information will be stored in our Housing Management systems. All personal information will be kept confidential in line with the Data Protection Act 2018. We will adhere to the Data Protection Act and comply with General Data Protection Regulation for Sharing Personal Information to ensure that we maintain confidentiality of all parties.

15.2 We will share information with third parties where we have an information sharing protocol in place, if there are safeguarding concerns, or we have a duty to do so for the purpose of crime prevention under the provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, and the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018 (and any other relevant legislation) justify it.

## 16. EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

16.1 We are committed to embedding the 2010 Equality Act into our Policies and Procedures. As part of this commitment, staff should facilitate reasonable adjustments and adapt our standard policies and procedures wherever possible, in order to ensure every individual can report antisocial behaviour.

16.2 To make an adjustment means to change work practices to avoid or correct the disadvantage to a person with a disability. This may include:

- Allowing more time than we would usually for someone to provide information that we needed.
- Providing specialist equipment or additional support such as a sign language interpreter.

## 17. CONSULTATION AND REVIEWING THIS POLICY

17.1 Innisfree will consult with tenants on this policy via our website and newsletter.

17.2 All open cases will be reviewed regularly by the Housing team and by the Operations Director to assess the effectiveness of the actions being taken in line with the Policy.



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