

1 Scope

- 1.1 Approximately 1 in 4 women, 1 in 6 men, and 1 in 8 children will be affected by domestic abuse (DA) at some point in their life. Around 40% of the LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and others) community have experienced DA. On average, 2 women are killed each week in the UK as a direct result of DA.

Aster recognises the harm DA can cause within our homes and communities. DA is often a hidden problem, but research shows it is unfortunately and steadily on the rise. Aster wants all our customers and colleagues to be safe from the impact of DA, and this policy sets out our commitment to help tackle this, and how we will aim to manage and support any cases of DA.

- 1.2 Along with other Housing Associations, Aster plays an important role in tackling DA, being well placed to help and support victims and survivors, as well as working with partner agencies such as the Police, Local Authority, and Social Services to help tackle and further prevent it. To do this, all colleagues need to be aware of what DA is, how to spot the subtle signs of it and what to do if they have any concerns.

- 1.3 We recognise the cross-Government definition of DA as: “Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or 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. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse:

- Psychological/mental
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional

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.

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.”

We recognise that this could cover issues such as FGM (Female Genital Mutilation), forced marriage, or ‘Honour-based’ violence.

- 1.4 Further to this there is a statutory definition of DA: “*Behaviour of a person (“A”) towards another person (“B”) is “domestic abuse” if—(a) A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and (b) the behaviour is abusive.*” –continuing on to say “*Behaviour is “abusive” if it consists of any of the following—(a) physical or sexual abuse; (b) violent or threatening behaviour; (c) controlling or coercive behaviour; (d) economic abuse (see subsection (4)); (e) psychological, emotional or other abuse; and it does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.*”

- 1.5 Aster has signed up to the Chartered Institute of Housing “Make a Stand pledge”, which outlines our obligations around DA. For more information see here: <https://www.cih.org/media/ob5oirgo/make-a-stand-the-pledge-document.pdf> . If a colleague becomes aware of DA, they will always take the views and wishes of the customer

experiencing abuse into account, as well as manage their responsibilities around safeguarding.

- 1.6 This policy is applicable to all Aster customers and household members. We have a [Domestic Abuse Guidance document](#) that gives information and advice to support colleagues who are experiencing DA.
- 1.7 This policy aims to ensure that customers who report they are experiencing DA are taken seriously and managed sensitively in accordance with their needs. It aims to ensure all colleagues act in a non-judgemental and sympathetic manner which reflects the customers' best interests and wishes.
- 1.8 We will give customers experiencing DA access to accurate and appropriate advice about their housing options and signposting around their legal rights and responsibilities.

2 Policy Statement

- 2.1 We will ensure customers can report DA to us through a variety of methods, including face to face, social media, through the website or email, the MyAster customer portal, or telephone. We will respond to reports as soon as we can, within two working days whenever possible. The ASB team can be contacted directly in office hours on 01202308744, with a voicemail facility for evenings and weekends. If someone feels there is an imminent danger, they should always contact the police.
- 2.2 We commit to acting on all reports of DA that we receive and will work closely with the customer affected in decision making. We will also respond to reports from colleagues, contractors, external agencies, or other individuals, but we are mindful of a customer's consent to share information and will use information we receive sensitively.
- 2.3 While we recognise women and the LGBTQ+ community are disproportionately affected by DA; we will support those individuals experiencing DA; irrespective of age, gender, sexuality, disability, race or ethnicity, sex, religion, social background or any other protected characteristics identified in the Equality Act 2010.
- 2.4 We are committed to working towards preventing and tackling DA to ensure that everybody can live free from fear, intimidation and violence based on the following principles:
 - Those experiencing domestic abuse should never be made to feel responsible for the abuse
 - Those experiencing domestic abuse should not be required to take any action they reasonably feel will place them in greater danger
 - Those experiencing domestic abuse are best able to assess the danger they are in. The individual's perception of the situation will be of paramount importance.
- 2.5 We realise it is often extremely difficult for the individual to come forward for help and it may take several attempts for them to leave an abusive situation. We accept an individual may choose to return to a potentially abusive situation, but this will not affect the way in which their case is dealt with or the support provided if they subsequently return for help.
- 2.6 We will ensure specialist training is given to colleagues. For more information speak to the Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) team. The ASB team will lead on any cases where we receive a report of DA and will usually act as the single point of contact for the customer.

- 2.7 We will engage with the MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) process and other specialist agencies; and recognise partnership working is instrumental towards achieving a resolution. We will share information between agencies as required, whilst ensuring all data protection protocols are maintained.
- 2.8 We will use the [DASH Risk Checklist](#) (Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment) to plan actions and support victims if this has not been completed by other agencies.
- 2.9 We recognise English may not be the first language for some vulnerable customers and commit to using translation services where required whenever possible.
- 2.10 We will offer to meet victims in an agreed safe location, via the customer's preferred method of communication, and will give opportunity to choose a colleague of a specific gender where possible.
- 2.11 We will aim to work across departments and partner agencies to resolve any issues with joint tenancies and helping a victim to be adequately housed. This may involve working with the Local Authority.
- 2.12 Where emergency accommodation is required, we will offer advice and assistance with partner agencies to help try to arrange this. For more information see: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities/chapter-21-domestic-abuse>
- 2.13 We will aim to ensure sensitivity around lettings when DA is disclosed.
- 2.14 We will provide reasonable increased security measures within/around the home where required, for example additional door locks for sole tenants. We sometimes refer to this as 'target hardening'. This may involve working in conjunction with partner agencies.
- 2.15 We will aim to agree and review an action plan with the individual, that considers any vulnerable members of the household.
- 2.16 We will look to take firm action against the perpetrator where appropriate. This could also include supporting the perpetrator through partner agencies and/or intervention programmes to try and prevent recurrence of abuse.
- 2.17 We will support and empower individuals to report events to the police.
- 2.18 We recognise that cases of DA can be very sensitive and managing them must be done with care. Colleagues will ensure they only involve other agencies and share information with the customer concerned when required, except for:
- Raising safeguarding concerns about adults with care and support needs or child protection concerns
 - Where Aster is required by law, for example, if being questioned by Police as part of a criminal investigation
- 2.19 We will use our contact management (CRM) systems to ensure information is recorded confidentially, and not disclosed to any other household members without explicit consent. We will lock our CRM cases when required to avoid unwanted individuals, such as abusive partners or ex-household members, accessing sensitive data.

- 2.20 We will meet our statutory and safeguarding requirements in line with our existing policies and procedures where there are safeguarding concerns about a vulnerable customer. In all cases of DA, colleagues should refer to the Safeguarding policy. Any children witnessing DA would be considered a type of child abuse and safeguarding procedures should be followed. This also applies for any elderly household members, for example where financial abuse is occurring.
- 2.21 If any customer is unhappy about anything related to the policy, or how they have been treated in accordance with the policy, they may complain in line with our Complaints Policy.

3 Monitoring and Review

- 3.1 We will monitor cases and performance as set out in section 3 of the ASB policy.
- 3.2 We will ensure effective implementation of this policy by publishing on the Aster website and on our intranet Asternet. We will ensure overview sessions are held for teams that will be responsible for implementing the policy and make these sessions available for any new colleagues or refreshers.
- 3.3 We will monitor attendance of these sessions, and of colleagues who have confirmed having read the document through Asternet, 6 months post-implementation.
- 3.4 The effectiveness of this policy will be continuously monitored, and the embedding of the policy scrutinised after 12 months by the *Customer Experience Panel*
- 3.5 This policy will be reviewed every 3 years unless business need, regulation or legislation prompts an early review

4 Related Policies and Procedures

- 4.1 ASB Policy
- 4.2 ASB Procedure
- 4.3 Domestic Abuse Guidance for Colleagues
- 4.4 Tenancy Policy
- 4.5 Safeguarding Policy
- 4.6 Safeguarding Procedure
- 4.7 Sensitive Let Procedure
- 4.8 Lettings Policy
- 4.9 Management Move Procedure
- 4.10 Honesty Policy
- 4.11 Diversity & Inclusion Policy
- 4.12 Data Protection, Privacy, and Confidentiality Policy
- 4.13 MAPP High Risk Assessment Guidance
- 4.14 S.A.F.E Procedure

External Resources:

- SafeLives: www.safelives.org.uk
- [Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme](#)
- National Domestic Violence Helpline: www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk
- The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance: www.dahalliance.org.uk
- Victim Support: www.victimsupport.org.uk
- Women's Aid: www.womensaid.org.uk
- National Stalking Advocacy Service: www.paladinservice.co.uk

- Surviving Economic Abuse: www.survivingeconomicabuse.org
- Refuge: www.refuge.org.uk
- LGBTQ+ victims: www.galop.org.uk
- 'Honour' based abuse Victims: www.karmanirvana.org.uk
- BME victims: www.southallblacksisters.org.uk
- LD/Autistic Victims: www.respond.org.uk
- Male Victims: www.mensadvice.org.uk
- For children: www.childline.org.uk
- For perpetrators: www.respectphoneline.org.uk
- For elderly abuse - https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/factsheets/fs78_safeguarding_older_people_from_abuse_fcs.pdf

5 Governance			
Effective From:	19/07/2021	Expires:	18/07/2024
Policy Owner:	Regional Director – Somerset, Dorset, Devon & Cornwall		
Policy Author:	Policy & Assurance Officer		
Approved by:	<i>Customer Oversight Group</i>		
Delegation Matrix Reference:	R082	Version Number:	V1.0