



West Lothian
Council

HOUSING, CUSTOMER, AND BUILDING SERVICES

DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY

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Executive Summary

West Lothian Council fully recognises the critical role it plays as a social landlord in preventing and responding to domestic abuse across West Lothian. This Domestic Abuse Policy reflects Scotland's national Equally Safe strategy and framework, which aims to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls and address the inequalities that underpin abuse.

While this policy supports anyone affected by domestic abuse, West Lothian Council acknowledges that domestic abuse is a form of gender-based violence that disproportionately impacts women and girls. As such, the policy adopts a gender-informed, trauma-sensitive approach, ensuring that all responses recognise the gendered nature of domestic abuse, coercive control and the power imbalances that often exist within abusive relationships.

West Lothian Council is committed to supporting individuals experiencing domestic abuse to make informed housing choices based on their personal circumstances, needs and preferences. Wherever it is safe and appropriate to do so, we will support individuals to remain within their home and local community if this is their preferred option. Our approach focuses on person-centred housing and tenancy solutions that prioritise safety, stability and long-term wellbeing.

This may include enabling the survivor to remain in their home through appropriate legal and tenancy measures, seeking the removal of perpetrators from joint tenancies where legislation allows, or facilitating access to suitable alternative accommodation where remaining in the home is not safe or desired. The Council is committed to minimising disruption to individuals and families, particularly where children, caring responsibilities or the risk of homelessness are factors.

The complexity of domestic abuse requires a coordinated and effective multi-agency response. West Lothian Council works in partnership with Police Scotland, NHS Lothian, specialist domestic abuse services, and other statutory and third-sector organisations to ensure that those affected by domestic abuse receive tailored, holistic and timely support. This collaborative approach ensures that housing responses are integrated within wider frameworks of risk assessment, safety planning, safeguarding and recovery.

West Lothian Council's Housing Services are fully committed to:

- Taking a zero-tolerance approach to domestic abuse and all forms of gender-based violence.
- Delivering services that are trauma-informed, person-centred and focused on the safety and wellbeing of those experiencing abuse.
- Supporting the Scottish Government's Equally Safe vision of a Scotland where everyone can live free from violence, abuse, coercion and fear.
- Working proactively with partners to prevent homelessness and reduce the housing impact of domestic abuse.
- Ensuring that individuals affected by domestic abuse are listened to, believed, supported and protected.
- Promoting accountability for perpetrators and ensuring responsibility for abuse rests solely with those who perpetrate it.

Through this policy, West Lothian Council aims to ensure that everyone affected by domestic abuse has access to safe, secure and sustainable housing, appropriate support, and the opportunity to live free from abuse, fear and harm.

Head of Housing Customer & Building Services

Julie Whitelaw

August 2026

Policy Scope

This policy provides a framework for West Lothian Council to respond to domestic abuse in its capacity as a social landlord. It sets out how the Council will respond where domestic abuse affects a tenant's safety, tenancy, housing circumstances, or risk of homelessness, and how these issues will be considered within the management of council tenancies.

The policy is intended to provide a clear housing focused response to domestic abuse, ensure a consistent approach to case handling, support homelessness prevention, and provide practical housing options and assistance to tenants affected by domestic abuse. This includes the approach in regards to income management and wider management of the tenancy.

The policy applies where domestic abuse is current, recent or historic, and where concerns are disclosed by the person affected, identified by staff, or raised by a partner agency.

Definition of Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse, for the purposes of this policy, means a course of behaviour by a person towards a current or former partner that is abusive. Such abuse may include physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, verbal, coercive, controlling or financial abuse, and may involve threats, humiliation, intimidation, isolation, harassment, stalking, abuse through children, abuse through pets, damage to property, or other behaviour intended to control, frighten, punish or subordinate the other person.

This reflects the definition and approach set out in the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018, which created the specific criminal offence of engaging in a course of abusive behaviour towards a partner or ex-partner, including coercive and controlling behaviour.

Domestic abuse may continue after a relationship has ended. It may also escalate at points of separation, pregnancy, child contact, legal proceedings, homelessness presentation, tenancy change, eviction action, rehousing, benefit changes or other major life events.

West Lothian Council recognises that domestic abuse occurs across all communities and types of relationships. While women and children are disproportionately affected and domestic abuse is recognised nationally as a form of gender-based violence, support and protection must be available to any person experiencing domestic abuse, including men, LGBT+ people, older people, disabled people, minority ethnic communities and people with insecure immigration or welfare circumstances.

Strategic Context

This policy sits within the wider strategic and operational context of West Lothian Council's housing, homelessness prevention, community safety, equality, public protection and partnership responsibilities. It recognises domestic abuse as a housing issue, a community safety issue, a child and adult protection issue, and a significant driver of homelessness and housing insecurity.

Equally Safe: Scotland's strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls provides the national framework for preventing and responding to domestic abuse and other forms of gender based violence. This policy supports the aims of Equally Safe by promoting a housing response which is survivor centred, focused on safety, and connected to wider partnership arrangements.

Domestic abuse good practice for social landlords: The good practice guide developed by CIH, ALACHO, SFHA, Shelter Scotland and Scottish Women's Aid highlights the role of social landlords in preventing homelessness, supporting victim-survivors, acting effectively with perpetrators, providing a specific housing options pathway and avoiding service generated risks.

West Lothian Council Local Housing Strategy 2023-2028: The Local Housing Strategy recognises domestic abuse as a housing issue and highlights the importance of preventing homelessness, supporting victims to remain safely in their home where possible, and providing rehousing options where a move is required. It also refers to the role of the Living in Safe Accommodation service and notes that domestic abuse cases are recognised within revised allocations arrangements.

West Lothian Council Allocations Policy and Allocations Points Procedures: The Allocations Policy framework recognises domestic abuse as a strategic housing need and provides a mechanism for awarding priority where a person is experiencing, or is at risk of, domestic abuse. It also supports access to housing for applicants seeking to move into West Lothian because of domestic abuse.

DASAT and LISA: West Lothian's domestic abuse support arrangements, including the Domestic and Sexual Assault Team and the Living in Safe Accommodation service, provide specialist support linked to housing, safety, prevention of homelessness, recovery and independence.

Safe & Together: Safe & Together provides an important practice framework for working with families affected by domestic abuse. It supports child centred and domestic abuse informed practice by partnering with the non-abusive parent, recognising their protective efforts and increasing accountability for the person causing harm.

West Lothian Community Safety Plan 2025-2028: The Community Safety Plan provides the local partnership framework for safe, inclusive and well-connected communities. It supports prevention, early intervention, training, awareness raising and partnership action.

West Lothian Local Outcomes Improvement Plan 2023-2033: The LOIP notes that some partnership issues, including domestic abuse, are supported through established multi-agency arrangements. This policy strengthens the role of housing services within wider partnership responses.

Equality Outcomes and Mainstreaming: West Lothian Council's equality work highlights the importance of tackling disadvantage, improving access and developing a domestic abuse informed workforce. This policy supports fair access to services and recognises the disproportionate impact of domestic abuse on women and children while ensuring support is available to all people affected.

Strategic Housing Planning: Strategic housing planning, including the Strategic Housing Investment Plan, should continue to consider the needs of households requiring specialist, supported or trauma informed housing responses.

Specialist third sector provision: Specialist third sector services, including West Lothian Women's Aid and national domestic abuse support services, form an important part of the local support landscape and should be reflected in referral pathways and partnership arrangements.

Taken together, these strategies, plans and guidance require housing services to take a proactive, trauma informed and partnership-based approach to domestic abuse. This policy provides the framework for Housing Services to identify risk, respond safely to disclosures, prevent homelessness where possible, support safety planning, consider rehousing options, work with specialist partners and ensure victim-survivors are treated with dignity, belief and respect.

Policy Principles

The overall aim of the Domestic Abuse Policy is to prevent and alleviate the housing impacts of domestic abuse through a survivor centred and trauma informed approach. Where abuse does occur, the policy seeks to provide reasonable and responsive housing solutions to minimise harm, prevent homelessness where possible and support safety, recovery and independence.

- **Safety first:** The safety of the person experiencing domestic abuse and any children or vulnerable household members will be the primary consideration.
- **Believe, listen and respond:** Staff will respond in a supportive, non-judgemental and respectful way, recognising that disclosure may be difficult and may take time.
- **Choice and control:** People affected by domestic abuse will be supported to make informed decisions about their housing options and the level of support they want to engage with.
- **Trauma informed practice:** Staff will recognise the impact of trauma, fear and coercive control on communication, decision making, attendance at appointments and engagement with services.
- **Perpetrator accountability:** The Council will focus on the behaviour and impact of the person causing harm and will avoid placing responsibility on the person experiencing abuse to manage the perpetrator's behaviour.

Legal Provisions

This policy is informed by, and should be read in conjunction with, relevant legislation. Legal advice should be sought where legal action, tenancy recovery, tenancy transfer, exclusion, eviction, information sharing without consent or protection measures are being considered.

- **Housing (Scotland) Act 2025:** Introduces provisions for tenants affected by domestic abuse, including new expectations on social landlords in relation to domestic abuse policies and additional protections where domestic abuse is a factor in rent arrears cases.
- **Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Act 2021:** Introduces domestic abuse protection notices and orders and tenancy related remedies intended to better protect victim-survivors and support them to remain safely in their home where appropriate.
- **Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018:** Creates the specific offence of abusive behaviour towards a partner or ex-partner, including coercive and controlling behaviour.
- **Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2011:** Strengthens civil protections connected to domestic abuse interdicts.
- **Housing (Scotland) Acts 1987, 2001, 2010 and 2014 and Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003:** Form part of the wider housing and homelessness framework relevant to prevention, rehousing, tenancy sustainment and possession proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor.
- **Antisocial Behaviour (Scotland) Act 2004**
- **Matrimonial Homes (Family Protection)(Scotland) Act 1981**
- **Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and related child protection guidance:** Relevant where domestic abuse affects children's wellbeing, safety or care arrangements.
- **Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007:** Relevant where an adult may be at risk of harm and unable to safeguard their own wellbeing, property, rights or other interests.
- **Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR:** Provide the framework for handling personal data and sharing information lawfully, fairly and securely.
- **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024:** It is unlawful for a public authority to act, or fail to act, in connection with a relevant function in a way that is incompatible with the UNCRC requirements. The relevant articles are:
 - **Article 3 – Best interests of the child**
The child's best interests must be primary consideration in decisions affecting them.
 - **Article 9 – Family life and separation from parents**

Children should not be separated from their parents unless this is necessary for their best interests

- **Article 12 – Respect for the views of the child**
Children have the right to express their views in matters affecting them, where appropriate.
- **Article 16 – Privacy, family and home**
Children have the right to privacy, family life and home.
- **Article 19 – Protection from violence, abuse and neglect**
Children have the right to be protected from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and harm.
- **Article 27 – Standard of living, including housing**
Children have the right to a standard of living that supports their development, including suitable housing.

Equality and Human Rights

West Lothian Council, in its role as a social landlord, will implement this Policy in line with its duties under the Equality Act 2010, the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012, the Human Rights Act 1998, the Fairer Scotland Duty, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). It is recognised that domestic abuse can affect human rights, including the safety, dignity and wellbeing of adults and children. In responding to domestic abuse, the Council will seek to uphold these rights and recognise the best interests of children.

Housing Services will communicate clearly, provide information in alternative formats where needed, and arrange interpretation or translation support where required.

Domestic abuse can affect children even where they are not directly harmed. Staff should consider whether children are present in the household, whether they are safe, whether they are being used as part of coercive control, and whether child wellbeing or protection referrals are required. Where children are affected, the Council's response should seek to reduce disruption to schooling, family support, health care and existing protective networks wherever this can be achieved safely.

In delivering this Policy, the Council will:

- make reasonable adjustments where required;
- recognise and respond to barriers faced by marginalised groups;
- assess domestic abuse cases in a respectful, sensitive and non-judgemental way;
- support safety, housing stability and fair access to services;
- take a person centred and trauma informed approach;
- provide information in accessible formats where required;
- arrange interpretation or translation support where needed, avoiding reliance on family members or the alleged perpetrator to interpret; and
- consider the rights, needs and circumstances of children at each stage of decision making.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

The Council will treat disclosures of domestic abuse sensitively and confidentially. Staff must recognise that unsafe contact, unsafe correspondence or inappropriate information sharing can increase risk. Safe communication contact arrangements must be discussed with the person affected at the earliest opportunity and recorded clearly on relevant systems.

Safe contact arrangements should include:

- whether it is safe to phone, text, email or write to the person;
- whether voicemail messages can be left;
- whether letters can be sent to the property;

- whether the alleged perpetrator or another person has access to the person's phone, email, online accounts or postal mail;
- the safest times and methods for contact;
- whether a safe alternative address or nominated contact should be used; and
- whether any system alerts or notes are required to prevent accidental disclosure.

Information should normally be shared with the person's consent. However, information may be shared without consent where there is a lawful basis to do so, including where there is a risk of serious harm, a child protection concern, an adult support and protection concern, a requirement of law, or a need to prevent or detect crime. Any sharing must be necessary, proportionate and limited to the information required for the purpose.

Where officers are unsure whether information can be shared, or where the circumstances are complex or sensitive, advice should be sought from the Council's Data Protection Officer before information is disclosed.

Staff must not contact the alleged perpetrator, arrange joint interviews, attempt mediation, disclose the location of the person affected, or share case details with household members without first considering risk and seeking management advice where required.

Partnerships & Collaborative Working – Prevention & Early Intervention

Housing Services will work with other Council Services, local and national partners, to provide a coordinated response to domestic abuse, manage risk, support recovery and prevent homelessness where possible.

- Referrals from Police Scotland
- Reports from the Scottish Prison Service
- Third Party information / concerns

Housing Service has an important prevention role because staff may identify indicators of domestic abuse through routine contact, including tenancy visits, rent arrears work, repairs, complaints, estate management, antisocial behaviour reports, and contact from partner agencies.

Prevention and early intervention will include:

- promoting awareness of domestic abuse and available support to tenants, applicants and staff;
- ensuring Housing Options and Homelessness advice includes safe routes for people experiencing domestic abuse;
- ensuring repairs, income management, tenancy management, allocations and customer-facing staff know how to report concerns internally;
- considering whether arrears, property damage, access refusal, neighbour complaints or tenancy breaches may be linked to domestic abuse;
- using safe and sensitive questioning where indicators are present;
- supporting early referral to specialist services;
- avoiding mediation, joint interviews or joint approaches where domestic abuse is suspected;
- challenging victim blaming language and assumptions; and
- using learning from cases to improve practice.
- avoid mediation, joint interviews or contact with the alleged perpetrator.

Housing Options

The Council will seek to prevent homelessness wherever it is safe and appropriate to do so. The person affected should be supported to make an informed choice about whether they wish to remain in their current home, move to alternative accommodation, or access emergency or temporary accommodation. The safety, views and wishes of the person affected, together with the needs of any children or other household members, will be central to case management.

Housing options may include support to remain safely at home, homelessness assistance, emergency or temporary accommodation, refuge accommodation, allocation priority, management transfer, tenancy changes, legal remedies, or other rehousing routes depending on the person's circumstances.

The Council will not require a person affected by domestic abuse to report the matter to Police Scotland, take legal action, or provide formal evidence before receiving housing advice, homelessness assistance, safety planning support or referral to specialist services.

The Council should consider whether the person affected wishes to remain in the home and whether any legal, tenancy management or housing options route may support this. The person affected should not be expected to leave the home as the default response solely because the perpetrator is the tenant.

Options may include:

- considering whether the person affected wishes to remain in the home;
- considering whether tenancy action or legal remedies may allow the person affected to remain safely in the home;
- considering powers available under domestic abuse and housing legislation;
- considering tenancy enforcement action where tenancy conditions have been breached;
- liaising with Police Scotland, DASAT, Social Policy, Legal Services or other relevant partners where appropriate;
- avoiding contact with the perpetrator where this could increase risk;
- considering the housing needs of the perpetrator separately where this supports safety planning or risk management; and
- seeking legal advice where tenancy action, eviction, exclusion or transfer of tenancy may be relevant.

Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse

West Lothian Council recognises that housing services have a role in holding perpetrators of domestic abuse to account where their behaviour impacts on a Council tenancy, household safety, neighbours, staff, or wider community safety. The focus should remain on the behaviour and impact of the person causing harm, rather than requiring the person experiencing abuse to manage or prevent that behaviour.

Where the alleged perpetrator is the West Lothian Council tenant, the Council will consider what action may be appropriate in relation to the tenancy, while ensuring that any action does not increase risk to the person affected. Action involving the perpetrator must be carefully planned and risk assessed.

Staff should not issue immediate warnings, arrange joint meetings, contact the perpetrator about the disclosure, or take tenancy enforcement action without considering whether this could increase risk to the person affected or any children.

Enforcement Action

Where domestic abuse is known or suspected, the Council will consider what action it may take in relation to the person responsible for the abusive behaviour. This may include tenancy management action, antisocial behaviour intervention, engagement with partner agencies, referral to specialist support services, or seeking legal advice on the options available to the Council, including formal legal action where this is necessary, reasonable and proportionate.

Council officers will not provide legal advice to the tenant or victim-survivor. Where legal advice may be required by the tenant or victim-survivor, officers should signpost them to independent legal advice and appropriate specialist support services. The Council will seek to ensure that survivors are not unfairly penalised for the behaviour of the perpetrator. Where tenancy breaches, complaints, rent arrears, property damage, access issues or antisocial behaviour are linked to domestic abuse, staff should consider whether these issues have been caused or influenced by coercion, control, threats or intimidation. Where appropriate, action should be directed at the perpetrator rather than the survivor or the tenancy as a whole.

Depending on the circumstances of the case, action against perpetrators may include warnings, tenancy breach action, antisocial behaviour case management, engagement with Police Scotland or other partner agencies, legal advice, or court action where the legal tests are met. Where there is ongoing risk, the Council will consider all available and appropriate remedies to protect the person affected by domestic abuse, children, neighbours, staff and the wider community.

The Council will take account of its duties and responsibilities as a social landlord in relation to tenants affected by domestic abuse. This includes providing appropriate information, assistance and support, considering the housing options available to the survivor, and exploring whether they can be supported to remain safely in their home.

Where legally available, the Council may consider action to end a perpetrator's interest in a tenancy or support the transfer of the tenancy to the survivor, where this is necessary to protect the person affected by domestic abuse and enable them to remain safely in the home. Any such action will be considered in line with legislation, statutory guidance, legal advice and local procedures.

Mediation, joint meetings or approaches that require direct engagement between the survivor and perpetrator should not be used where domestic abuse, coercive control, intimidation or fear is known or suspected, unless there is clear professional advice that this is safe and appropriate.

Before formal enforcement or legal action is progressed, staff should ensure that relevant risks have been considered, the survivor's views have been considered where safe to do so, appropriate advice has been sought, and partner agencies have been consulted where required. Decisions should be clearly recorded, including the evidence considered, the reasons for the action proposed, any risks identified and the steps taken to avoid further harm.

The Council will balance its responsibilities to protect people affected by domestic abuse, children and adults at risk, safeguard neighbours and staff, manage antisocial behaviour and enforce tenancy conditions.

Action against perpetrators will be proportionate, evidence based, risk led and consistent with the Council's legal duties, housing policies and commitment to preventing further harm.

The Housing Needs of the Perpetrator

The Council recognises that a person responsible for domestic abuse may also have housing needs, particularly where they are required to leave the family home, are excluded from a property, or are no longer able to remain in their current accommodation. Where this applies, the Council will consider their housing circumstances in line with relevant legislation, homelessness duties, allocations policy and local procedures.

Any consideration of the perpetrator's housing needs will be managed separately from the support and housing options provided to the person affected by domestic abuse, wherever possible. This is to ensure that the safety, wishes and circumstances of the survivor are not compromised, and that housing processes are not used as a means of further abuse, coercion, control or unwanted contact.

The Council will not require the person affected by domestic abuse to engage with the perpetrator, provide information on their behalf, or participate in joint discussions about housing options. Information about the survivor's address, housing application, rehousing options or support arrangements must not be shared with the perpetrator.

Where the perpetrator approaches the Council for housing assistance, staff should consider any risks, legal restrictions, court orders, bail conditions, child protection or adult protection concerns, and any relevant information from partner agencies. Housing advice may be provided, but this should be done in a way that does not increase risk to the survivor, children, neighbours, staff or the wider community.

The Council may provide information on alternative housing options, homelessness assistance, support services or other relevant agencies where appropriate. However, any housing assistance provided to the perpetrator will not prevent the Council from taking tenancy management, antisocial behaviour or legal action where this is necessary and proportionate.

Where there is a risk of further harm, staff should seek appropriate advice and work with relevant partner agencies to ensure that decisions about the perpetrator's housing needs are informed by risk, safety and safeguarding considerations. Decisions should be clearly recorded, including any risks identified, advice received, information shared, and steps taken to protect the person affected by domestic abuse.

Staff Awareness and Training

West Lothian Council recognises that staff awareness and confidence are essential to providing a safe and consistent response to domestic abuse. Staff may become aware of domestic abuse through disclosures, tenancy management, rent arrears, repairs, antisocial behaviour reports, homelessness presentations, housing options advice or information from partner agencies. Staff should understand domestic abuse as a housing issue and respond in a sensitive, trauma-informed and non-judgemental way.

The Council will support staff to recognise the signs and impacts of domestic abuse, including coercive control, emotional abuse, economic abuse, technology-facilitated abuse and abuse that continues after a relationship has ended. Training and guidance will cover safe enquiry, safe contact arrangements, confidentiality, information sharing, recording, referral pathways and when to seek management, legal or specialist advice.

Staff should avoid actions that may increase risk, including inappropriate mediation, joint interviews, unsafe correspondence, victim-blaming language or contact with an alleged perpetrator without proper consideration of safety. Learning from casework, partner feedback, legislative change and good practice will be used to strengthen the Council's response over time.

Quality Assurance

A random sample of domestic abuse cases will be quality assured by the appropriate senior staff to ensure appropriate and relevant advice given, actions taken and/or referrals made. Any identified outcomes from this assurance work will be used for staff development purposes and where appropriate to inform operational procedure review and learning and development.

Review & Complaints

Any individual who is not satisfied with the way Housing Staff have dealt with any aspect of their case, can request a review to be undertaken by the appropriate senior officer. If person is not satisfied with the

explanation provided and or the way the Housing Service has dealt with their case, the corporate Complaints Policy and procedure should be followed. Explanatory information is available on the Council's website.

Performance Monitoring and Evaluation

The Council will monitor the implementation of this policy to ensure that domestic abuse cases are identified, recorded and responded to consistently across Housing, Customer and Building Services. This will include reviewing case handling, referral pathways, staff awareness, use of housing options, outcomes for people affected by domestic abuse, and any tenancy management or legal action taken where domestic abuse is a factor.

Learning from case reviews, complaints, customer feedback, partner agency feedback, legislative change and good practice guidance will be used to improve the Council's approach over time. The policy will be reviewed periodically to ensure it remains effective, legally compliant and aligned with local partnership arrangements, statutory guidance and the needs of people affected by domestic abuse.

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APPENDIX 1

Practice/Processes

Set out below are the high-level practice and processes which will be underpinned by additional training, procedural notes, workflows and process maps.

Initial Response and Assistance

Staff should make reasonable efforts to ensure the person can speak privately, safely and without the alleged perpetrator present. The person affected should not be required to retell their experience to multiple officers where this can be avoided. Where possible, a lead officer or case coordinator should be identified, in the case of Council Tenants, this should be their Housing Officer.

All staff should ensure they:

- listen without judgement and avoid asking unnecessary or repetitive questions;
- check immediate safety and whether emergency services are required;
- agree safe contact arrangements;
- explain the person's housing options clearly;
- offer referral to DASAT or other specialist domestic abuse support;
- consider whether homelessness assistance or temporary accommodation is required;
- consider whether the person wants to remain in the home and what measures may support this;
- consider whether a management transfer, allocation priority, tenancy change, legal remedy or other rehousing route may be appropriate;
- assess the financial impact of domestic abuse and whether referral to the Anti-Poverty Service, Advice Shop or Scottish Welfare Fund is required;
- record factual information securely and sensitively; and
- agree next steps, including who will contact the person, how and when.
- offer assistance to access financial help and safety equipment from Victim Support Scotland
- consider a referral to Scottish Fire and Rescue Service for, fire safety check and support

Housing, Customer, and Building Services will aim to:

- Provide a safe, consistent and sensitive first response to disclosures or indicators of domestic abuse.
- Ensure people affected by domestic abuse receive clear information about their housing rights, options and available support.
- Support people to remain safely in their home where this is their choice and where risk can be managed.
- Provide access to rehousing, temporary accommodation, homelessness assistance or other housing solutions where remaining at home is not safe or appropriate.
- Ensure domestic abuse is recognised within tenancy management, income management, homelessness, allocations, repairs, antisocial behaviour and estate management processes.
- Avoid service generated risks, including unsafe contact, inappropriate mediation, joint interviews, unsafe information sharing, victim blaming language or treating domestic abuse as a neighbour dispute without recognising risk.
- Work with specialist services and partner agencies to reduce risk and support safety planning.
- Consider appropriate action in relation to perpetrators where housing powers, legal remedies or partnership action can reduce harm.
- Recognise the impact of domestic abuse on children and young people and make appropriate wellbeing or protection referrals where required.
- Improve staff confidence, knowledge and consistency through guidance, training and management support.

Person Affected is a West Lothian Council Tenant

Where the person affected by domestic abuse is a West Lothian Council tenant, the Council will consider whether they wish to remain in their home or move to alternative accommodation.

Where the person wishes to remain in their home, the Council will consider whether this can be supported safely. Remaining at home may help preserve children's schooling, support networks, employment, health care, community connections and financial stability. However, remaining at home must not be pursued where it would expose the person or children to unmanaged risk.

Possible tenancy sustainment and housing options may include:

- referral to DASAT, or other specialist domestic abuse services;
- safety planning with appropriate partners;
- lock changes or security improvements where appropriate and lawful;
- arranging repairs linked to damage caused by abuse;
- reviewing safe contact and correspondence arrangements;
- considering whether tenancy changes or legal remedies may allow the person affected to remain safely in the home;
- reviewing rent arrears, rechargeable repairs or property damage where these are linked to domestic abuse;
- referral to the Anti-Poverty Service, Scottish Welfare Fund or money advice;
- liaison with Police Scotland or other agencies where risk is ongoing;
- management transfer where a planned move is required outside the usual allocations process;
- emergency or temporary accommodation, where required;
- provision of temporary decant accommodation where there is immediate risk to safety;
- refuge accommodation where appropriate and available;
- practical support with removals, storage, furniture, household goods or Scottish Welfare Fund applications where appropriate.

Where home safety measures are considered, staff should ensure they do not create a false sense of safety and that they form part of a broader risk assessment and safety plan.

Person Affected is an Occupant or Household Member in a Council Tenancy

Where the person affected by domestic abuse is living in a West Lothian Council tenancy but is not the tenant, for example as a partner, family member or other household member, the Council will consider their housing rights and options carefully.

Officers should avoid assuming that a person has no housing rights or options because they are not the tenant. The person should be provided with clear housing advice and support, including homelessness assistance, where appropriate.

Housing options may include:

- Housing Options advice; Homelessness advice and assistance;
- Emergency or temporary accommodation where required;
- Refuge accommodation where appropriate and available;
- Support to make a housing application;
- Consideration of allocation priority where the person is at risk because of domestic abuse; support to move into alternative accommodation;
- Support to remain with family or friends where this is safe and the person chooses this option;
- Referral to DASAT, or other specialist support;
- Practical support with Scottish Welfare Fund applications, furniture, household goods or other resettlement needs where appropriate; and consideration of whether any tenancy or legal remedies may support the person to remain safely in the home.

Housing Options and Homelessness Advice

Where a person affected by domestic abuse is not currently a West Lothian Council tenant, or where they approach the Council for housing options or homelessness advice, the Council will provide advice and assistance based on their circumstances, risk and housing needs.

West Lothian Council has a specialist officer within Housing Options who works directly with DASAT and provides dedicated housing advice and homelessness case support where domestic abuse is a factor. This is a beneficial role as it supports early intervention, strengthens links with DASAT, and helps ensure that people affected by domestic abuse receive coordinated advice and support without having to repeat their circumstances across multiple services.

Where domestic abuse is disclosed, suspected or identified, staff will:

- offer a private and safe environment to speak;
- avoid asking the person to explain their situation in a public area;
- refer the case to the specialist Housing Options officer where domestic abuse is disclosed, suspected or identified during the initial appointment;
- check whether it is safe to contact the person and agree safe contact arrangements;
- consider immediate safety, including whether it is safe for the person to return home;
- provide clear advice on rights, housing options and homelessness assistance;
- consider whether a homelessness application should be taken;
- consider whether emergency or temporary accommodation is required;
- consider whether refuge accommodation is appropriate and available;
- consider whether the person wishes to remain in their current accommodation and what support or protection may make this possible;
- support the person to make a housing application where appropriate;
- consider allocation priority under the Allocations Policy;
- support applicants seeking to move into West Lothian because of domestic abuse elsewhere;
- consider whether it is safe for the person to remain with family or friends where this is their preferred option;
- provide advice on private rented, social rented or supported housing options where appropriate;
- consider practical support with Scottish Welfare Fund applications, removals, storage, furniture or household goods where appropriate;
- consider referral to DASAT, or other specialist support before, during and after any move;
- avoid requiring police reports or formal evidence before providing advice or support; and
- avoid mediation, joint interviews or contact with the alleged perpetrator where this may increase risk.

Where a homelessness application is required, the Council will seek to reduce the additional trauma and disruption caused by homelessness. This includes considering location, safety, affordability, access to schools, employment, family support, health services, specialist support and any risks associated with areas or properties.

Moving Home

Where it is not safe or appropriate for the person affected to remain in their home, or where they choose to move, the Council will consider the most appropriate rehousing route. The decision should take account of risk, urgency, the person's wishes, household needs, children, affordability, support networks and the availability of suitable accommodation.

The Council will consider the person's housing status and relationship to the tenancy when identifying the most appropriate response. This includes whether the person is a council tenant, joint tenant, household member, occupant, housing applicant, homeless applicant, or whether the council tenant is the alleged perpetrator.

Where a move is required, the Council will seek to ensure that the move does not place the person at further risk. Consideration should be given to the safety of the area, proximity to the perpetrator, school or childcare arrangements, support networks, employment, health needs, transport, affordability and any known risks associated with locations or properties.

Referral to specialist support should be considered before, during and after a move to support safety, recovery, tenancy sustainment and independence.

Domestic Abuse and Rent Arrears

Domestic abuse can directly contribute to rent arrears. People experiencing abuse may have limited access to money, documents, clothing, medication, furniture, transport, banking, identification, benefits or employment.

Financial abuse, coercive control, benefit manipulation, enforced absence from the property, damage caused by the perpetrator, withholding of money, interference with employment, control of bank accounts or prevention from engaging with services may all affect a tenant's ability to pay rent or manage their tenancy.

Where arrears are present and domestic abuse is disclosed or suspected, staff should:

- consider whether arrears are linked to domestic abuse or financial abuse;
- review safe contact arrangements before issuing letters, making calls or arranging visits;
- consider whether the tenant has been prevented from accessing benefits, banking, work, correspondence or support;
- offer referral to income maximisation, welfare rights, debt advice and anti-poverty services;
- consider whether recovery action would increase risk or unfairly penalise the person experiencing abuse;
- consider the Pre-Action Requirements and domestic abuse protections;
- seek management and legal advice before progressing enforcement action where domestic abuse is a factor; and record the rationale for decisions, including any safeguards put in place.

The Council will seek to avoid penalising a victim for the behaviour of the perpetrator, while still taking proportionate steps to manage rent accounts, protect public funds and sustain tenancies where possible.