

Uttlesford Domestic Abuse Policy

2025-2028

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1. Policy Scope

This policy sets out how Uttlesford District Council (UDC) will assist and support any person who approaches it to report that they have been a victim of Domestic Abuse.

This Policy applies to all tenants, leaseholders, residents and employees of UDC as well as victims of domestic abuse, and those seeking assistance from UDC.

2. Key Principles

At UDC we believe that no person should live in fear of violence, abuse, stalking or harassment. This policy sets our commitment to deal with domestic abuse. It explains that we will take all reports of domestic abuse seriously, consider the needs of the individuals and work in partnership with specialised agencies to provide a co-ordinated response.

We are committed to ensuring that all our service users and employees are supported in a sympathetic and non-judgemental way, whilst ensuring that the service we provide is accessible, responsive and is in accordance with legislation and our statutory requirements.

It is important that victims, survivors and perpetrators can access support services at the right time to keep them safe and break the cycle of abuse.

3. Definitions of Domestic Abuse

The [Domestic Abuse Act 2021 - GOV.UK](#) defines domestic abuse as any incident or pattern of incidents, between those aged 16 years or over who:

- Are a partner
- Are an ex-partner
- Are a relative
- Have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental responsibility in relation to the same child.

Within the Act and this policy, domestic abuse is defined as:

- Physical or sexual abuse
- Violent or threatening behaviour
- Controlling or coercive behaviour
- Economic abuse
- Psychological, emotional or other abuse

This definition includes 'honour-based' violence, female genital mutilation and forced marriage victims who are not defined to one gender.

Controlling behaviour is a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependant on them by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources, depriving them of the means needed for independence and behaviours that are used to punish, harm, frighten their victim and/or regulate their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is defined as an act, or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm or punish their victim.

Coercive and controlling behaviour is defined under section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 as causing someone to fear that violence will be used against them on at least two occasions or causing serious alarm or distress that has a substantial effect on their usual day to day activities.

Economic abuse involves behaviours that interfere with an individual's ability to acquire and maintain economic resources, such as money, transportation, and utilities. It can be controlling and coercive, causing a victim to be isolated, dependant on their abuser and limit their ability to escape and access safety.

Stalking is a pattern of persistent and unwanted attention that can cause the victim to feel pestered, scared, anxious and harassed. Some examples of this behaviour are:

- Unwanted communication (e.g. texts, phone calls, e-mails)
- Unwanted gifts
- Damage to property
- Following or spying
- Threats

Whilst these acts may seem insignificant, when they are persistent, unwanted and consistent, it can be frightening and upsetting for victims. It is important to note that stalking is a criminal offence.

We determine that **violence against women and girls** refers to the following range of serious crimes that are predominately, but not exclusively, experienced by women and girls: domestic violence and abuse; sexual offences; stalking; honour-based, forced marriage, prostitution, and trafficking for sexual exploitation.

4. Children as Victims of Domestic Abuse

A child is a person under the age of 18 years and is related to a person if they are their parent, or if they have parental responsibility for the child as stated in the Child Act 1987 and the Family Law Act 1996.

The Act recognises children under the age of 18 years who see, or hear, or experience the effects of the abuse, are a victim of domestic abuse if they are related or have a parental relationship to the adult victim or perpetrator of the abuse.

Familial abuse refers to where the parent/victim is over the age of 16 years but the child displaying that behaviour is under that age.

It is important to recognise that whilst the Act sets out the criteria for domestic abuse, violence in relationships can take place outside of the accepted definitions, and how some survivors are hidden from services: [Safe Young Lives | Young people & domestic abuse - SafeLives](#).

5. Reporting Domestic Abuse

We understand that it can be daunting for victims of domestic abuse to come forward, and that the abuse may have been ongoing for a significant period of time before it was reported. We are committed to providing a sensitive, supportive and confidential response.

We take all reports of domestic abuse seriously and have a zero-tolerance approach to those who perpetrate domestic abuse, both as a local authority and landlord. We will investigate all reports that we receive, including from witnesses or third parties who are concerned that domestic abuse is taking place.

We endeavour to be as accessible as possible and will offer several ways to report domestic abuse to use, including in person, over the phone, via our website, in writing and e-mail.

We will respond to all reports of domestic abuse within one working day and where requested, we will endeavour to provide an officer of the same gender, or ethnicity. Where required, we will provide translation services.

We operate a 24-hour control centre for reporting emergency repairs out of hours and for urgent homeless advice, should victims of domestic abuse need emergency repairs or accommodation.

Where requested, and with consent, we will report incidents to the police on behalf of victims or support them to do so themselves where they feel frightened or concerned.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

UDC will provide a named caseworker from either the housing options, housing or communities team, who will agree a clear action plan, setting out what steps we will take to investigate a case and detail what support we can offer.

We will agree a safe place to meet and communicate to ensure that we do not place the victim at greater risk.

We will ensure that we complete a risk assessment based upon the latest guidance and best practise using the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour Based Violence (DASH) checklist. This may be carried out by a trained member of UDC staff, or by another agency, depending on who is best placed to complete it. Where a DASH assessment meets the threshold for the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC), it will be referred.

We will ensure that our frontline staff receive the appropriate level of ongoing training as necessary to ensure that they identify, assess, refer for support and manage domestic abuse cases.

Where a victim can no longer stay in their home, because it is unreasonable for them to continue to occupy, if it is probable that this will lead to domestic abuse or other violence taking place, we will offer advice and support on their housing options.

Where survivors wish to remain in their home, we will provide advice and guidance on how to manage tenancies, security measures, such as the Sanctuary Scheme, provide additional security, such as lock changes, additional lighting and referrals to agencies who provide Ring Doorbells. We will signpost to specialist agencies where appropriate.

Closure of the case will be agreed with the victim, unless the victim is no longer engaging. In this case, any other agencies working with the victim will be notified.

7. Action against Perpetrators

UDC has a zero-tolerance approach against anyone who is found to be perpetrating domestic abuse. Where the perpetrator is a UDC tenant, this is a clear breach of tenancy in addition to the crime being committed. This may result in enforcement action, such as Possession Proceedings. We will use the appropriate tools to sanction and, where possible, support perpetrators.

Where the perpetrator is not a UDC tenant, another agency or service may be best placed to act, such as the police or the victim themselves.

We recognise that perpetrators may have their own vulnerabilities and support needs, and we will assess this at the earliest opportunity. When considering any enforcement action, we will endeavour to undertake a proportionality assessment to ensure any action we take is both necessary and proportionate and consider any other available options. With enforcement proceedings, we will pay due regard to the Human Rights Act and the Equalities Act 2010.

Where support needs are identified, we will work with the perpetrator, or signpost to the appropriate agency, to break the cycle of abuse.

8. Safeguarding

We recognise that victims of domestic abuse may be vulnerable for a variety of reasons and that this can change multiple times during a case.

We will ensure that we complete a risk assessment based upon the latest guidance and best practise using the DASH checklist. This may be carried out by a trained member of UDC staff, or by another agency, depending on who is best placed to complete it. Where a DASH assessment meets the threshold for the MARAC, it will be referred.

We will not share details or information to anyone without permission, unless there are serious concerns for the safety of any victim, perpetrator, or household member. In situations where there are clear safeguarding concerns, we have a statutory responsibility to share information, and where necessary, complete a safeguarding referral.

We will ensure that where there are children involved, a safeguarding referral to Essex Children's services will be made.

9. Partnership Working

We recognise that when an individual experiences domestic abuse, many other agencies may be involved in their care. We recognise that a co-ordinated response is essential to effective support for victims and survivors. We work in collaboration with relevant agencies when responding to incidents of domestic abuse, to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable.

UDC is a key member of the Domestic Abuse Forum that shares statistics, embeds the Essex Domestic Abuse Strategy and helps to inform good practice across the district.

We commit to training and promoting Domestic Abuse and J9 (Domestic Abuse training) Champions as a supporter of the Champions Network in Essex.

UDC is an active partner of MARAC which facilitates, monitors, and evaluates effective information sharing to enable appropriate actions to be taken to increase the safety of victims. MARAC combines up to date risk assessments and links them to a risk management plan and the provision of services appropriate to those involved in domestic abuse, victim, children and perpetrator.

The Community Safety Partnership will promote the engagement of multiple agencies to identify, prevent, intervene, and reduce the impact of domestic abuse as well as raising the profile of available services.

We will work collaboratively to break down harmful gender and cultural barriers that make it difficult for some victims and survivors to report domestic abuse and engage with services.

10. Information Sharing and Confidentiality

We will maintain confidentiality when dealing with cases of domestic abuse and will always seek consent from those reporting domestic abuse before disclosing information to any other agency. However, where cases meet the MARAC threshold, where there are safeguarding concerns or it is believed a crime has taken place, we have a legal basis for sharing information irrespective of whether consent has been gained.

When we share information, we will ensure that we transfer it safely and store it appropriately.

Should we receive Freedom of Information or Subject Access Requests we will deal with these lawfully and within guidance from the Information Commissioners Office.

11. Employer

UDC aims to provide a safe and supportive workplace for all employees, especially those experiencing domestic abuse. We recognise that when employers demonstrate that they are aware of domestic abuse, and advise staff of the support that is available, it can help to break down the wall of silence that prevents many from seeking help.

We are taking practical steps to build awareness, develop support mechanisms and offer flexibility to employees who are victims of domestic abuse. This includes training staff to be J9 representatives, to being able to spot the signs of abuse, knowing how to respond to a disclosure from a member of staff or colleague, and signposting to specialist domestic abuse and victims' organisations.

12. Monitoring

This policy will be reviewed every three years unless legislation, statutory guidance or business developments require otherwise. This is to ensure that we continue to meet our key principles and deliver good practice.

We will monitor how many domestic abuse cases are reported to us, our response times and how many survivors approach us with a housing need and are assessed under homelessness legislation.

All cases of domestic abuse that are reported to us will be audited by a team leader or manager within three working days of it being responded to.

We will capture feedback on cases of domestic abuse to ensure that we can continue to improve our service and that it meets the needs of those accessing it.

13. Equality and Diversity

The council will treat all customers and staff with fairness and respect. We value diversity and work to promote equality and tackle unlawful discrimination.

We are committed to helping customers to access information about their homes and services in a way that suits individual needs.

We will meet the requirements relating to equality and diversity laid down in the Equality Act 2010 by working to:

- advance equality of opportunity and
- eliminate victimisation, discrimination, and harassment
- foster good relations between all our residents, service users and staff.

The Council is committed to welcoming and valuing diversity, promoting equality of opportunity and tackling unlawful discrimination. We will not discriminate against staff, customers or others based on their sex, sexual orientation, marital status, pregnancy and maternity, gender reassignment, race, religion, belief, disability or age (collectively referred to as protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010).

The Council aims to provide homes and services that meet the diverse needs of customers. We believe that all customers should be able to access housing, support and care services with the same ease and that the quality of our service is the same high standard for all.