



DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY

1. Introduction

Citizen is committed to providing all its customers with safe homes and working with community partners to provide specialist support when needed. Citizen also commits to being an employer of choice and as such will offer a range of wellbeing opportunities. This Domestic Abuse policy reflects these commitments through the provision of landlord services that enable customers affected by domestic abuse to feel safe in their home and by working with community partners who offer specialist support and advice.

The aim of this policy is to -

- Support victims of domestic abuse to live safely in their homes
- Support victims to move where this is the best option
- Allow perpetrators opportunities to address behaviour but take enforcement action when needed
- Create a culture that promotes reporting and advocacy for customers and staff affected by domestic abuse.

Citizen's Domestic Abuse Policy supports the objectives of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 by promoting awareness, protecting and supporting victims and holding perpetrators to account. We believe everyone has the right to live free from violence and abuse in any form and the responsibility for the abuse lies with the perpetrator.

This policy should be applied in conjunction with both our Safeguarding Adults, Safeguarding Children and ASB and Hate Crime policies.

2. Scope

2.1 Definition

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 defines domestic abuse as abusive behaviour between individuals aged 16 or over who are personally connected. Abusive behaviour includes physical or sexual abuse, violent or threatening acts, controlling or coercive behaviour, economic abuse, and psychological or emotional abuse, whether a single incident or a pattern.

Domestic abuse encompasses controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading, and violent behaviour, including sexual violence, stalking, and harassment, predominantly by a partner or family member. It includes honour-based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM), and

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forced marriage, occurring in all domestic situations without regard to race, gender, sexuality, age, religion, or ability.

This policy applies to all areas and covers Citizen customers, their household members, and Citizen's workforce. Citizen's workforce includes permanent and temporary staff, agency staff, apprentices, volunteers, contractors, Board and committee members.

3. Policy detail

3.1 Policy overview

Citizen will prioritise the safety of domestic abuse victims by offering services that help victims to feel safe in their home, encourage perpetrators to address their behaviour but take enforcement action where needed and work with specialist providers to achieve the best outcomes for victims. We will treat those experiencing domestic abuse with respect and dignity. We will believe their disclosure and ensure they are given priority advice and assistance in a non-judgemental, empathetic and supportive way.

When we are made aware of a case of domestic abuse there are a number of actions we can take as a landlord. In all cases of domestic abuse, we would strongly encourage the victim to seek support from a specialist provider and we will work with such providers to provide a package of support to the victim. However, as a landlord there are practical steps, we can take to help keep victims safe.

Citizen will support any member of its workforce experiencing domestic abuse with the same empathy as we would for our customers. We recognise that an employee's ability to work may be impacted both directly by the perpetrator of domestic abuse, but also indirectly due to the physical and mental impacts of domestic abuse. Citizen aims to create a safe environment for staff to disclose domestic abuse and offer support through our employee well-being programs as well as making any practical changes that will allow employees to continue in their role.

3.2 Tenancy Management

We will support victims of domestic abuse to retain their tenancy and property where this is the wish of the victim and doing so does not present an unacceptable risk to them, others in their household or the wider community. We will advise all tenants of their rights, responsibilities and risks in any matters regarding changing any aspect of their tenancy.

In cases where the victim is a joint tenant and wishes to become the sole tenant by removing the perpetrator, we would advise the victim to seek legal counsel and obtain a court order in regard to the tenancy of the property. We cannot change the tenancy without an order from the court. We will not operate 'stop start tenancies' as these may breach the

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rights of tenancy holders. We will support tenancy holders and occupants to access legal services to understand their rights and get the most appropriate advice.

Under a joint tenancy one tenant can still end the tenancy as permitted by the tenancy agreement. In such cases we may grant a new tenancy at the property, exercising our discretion about the suitability of the property, any outstanding breaches of tenancy and with regard to our lettings policy.

Where the victim is an occupier with no legal claim to the property, we would advise them to seek legal advice or support them to seek alternative accommodation if this would be the safest option. We cannot make any changes to a tenancy that would disadvantage the legal tenant without an order from the court.

3.3 Arrears

Arrears will not be a barrier to moving victims of abuse at risk of harm. We will offer money advice to victims who have arrears and support them to apply for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to pay down or pay off any arrears that have arisen due to domestic abuse.

3.4 Lettings

We will use the discretion allowed within our Lettings Policy where victims of abuse have applied for housing but may have outstanding arrears that would normally disqualify them. These cases will be referred to the Lettings Manager to decide the outcome.

Where victims wish to move, Citizen with permission, may speak to the victims friends or family, social services, health professionals, domestic abuse support services or the police to gain further information about the situation. We do not need proof of domestic abuse to undertake any action.

A decision to move is made to minimise the risk to the victim and as such Citizen will support moves that reduce the risk of harm. We may not support moves that keep victims within their current locality and the risk of harm remains high.

We will support victims to access both short and long term housing solutions, including helping them to seek alternative accommodation either within Citizen where possible or through local authority choice based lettings schemes. Maintenance and investment Citizen will provide a repairs service that supports victims of domestic abuse to live safely in their homes.

We will prioritise repairs to properties where there are victims of domestic abuse at risk from harm and provide additional security measures where budgets allow.

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Where a property has been damaged due to domestic abuse, we will not apply our rechargeable repairs where they can provide evidence from a person acting in an official capacity. A 'person acting in an official capacity' is defined as a:

- health care professional
- police officer
- registered social worker
- the claimant's employer
- any public, voluntary or charitable body which has had direct contact with the claimant in connection with the domestic abuse

3.5 Perpetrator Management

In cases where Citizen receives a report that a perpetrator of domestic abuse is a tenant we will encourage them to seek support to address their behaviour but be clear about the enforcement actions we may take if their behaviour continues. Depending on the terms of the tenancy agreement this action may include eviction.

3.6 Training

All staff who work with customers will receive training on the identification of domestic abuse and how they can apply this policy and its associated procedures in carrying out their duties. This will include:

- Neighbourhood officers
- Income officers (including money advice)
- Maintenance operatives
- CEC advisors

Enhanced training will be offered to neighbourhood managers and team leaders to enable them to carry out risk assessments and liaise between internal departments and external partners.

3.7 Partnership Working

Citizen acknowledges that we do not have the expertise to fully support victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse and as such commit to working closely with the local authorities and specialist support agencies to ensure the most effective and swift response for those experiencing domestic abuse. We understand that domestic abuse cannot be tackled in isolation and requires a joined up approach from all agencies involved. Through this policy we set out our commitment to these partnerships.

We will maintain good working relationships with providers of specialist domestic abuse support as well as other key agencies such as the local authorities, police and social care in delivering our domestic abuse offer.



MARAC, or Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference, is a meeting where information is shared on the highest risk domestic abuse cases between representatives of local police, probation, health, child protection, housing practitioners, Independent Domestic Abuse Advisors and other specialists from the statutory and voluntary sectors. We will attend MARAC for all cases that relate to Citizen properties and engage with the other agencies to tackle domestic abuse on an operational and strategic level.

Citizen has signed up to the Chartered Institute for Housing's 'Make a Stand' pledge which commits us to ensuring that;

- 1) Customers are supported
- 2) Direction to support services are available on our website and other appropriate places
- 3) Policies include staff as well as customers
- 4) We promote the reporting of domestic abuse for staff

3.8 Information sharing

We will treat all disclosures of domestic abuse confidentially. However, there may be circumstances in which we have a duty to disclose information given to us. This may be where we have concerns about safety of for children or adults at risk of harm. In these cases we would use follow the safeguarding procedures. Our Safeguarding policies contains further information on how and when we would use these procedures.

3.9 Staff Support

Where a staff member discloses that they are a victim of domestic abuse we will discuss how we can support them as an employer and if there are any considerations that need to be made to keep the employee safe while at work.

Staff can make a report to their line manager, to the H.R team or to a mental health first aider. Upon making a disclosure we will discuss with the member of staff how it is we can support them, identify and risks to them or anyone else in the business and signpost to specialist domestic abuse support.

As with all disclosures we will take a balanced approach to confidentiality, safeguarding, and health and safety to ensure the welfare of staff and customers.

If a disclosure is made regarding a member of Citizen's workforce (as defined in 2.1) as a perpetrator of domestic abuse, we will work with them to investigate the issue and follow procedures as appropriate to ensure Citizen meets its responsibilities under safeguarding and health and safety.

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4. Roles and responsibility

It is the responsibility of the Board to seek assurance that this Policy is successfully implemented. The Senior Leadership Team and Heads of Service are responsible for ensuring the effective implementation of this Policy and that all staff understand the importance of this Policy, the related procedures and that they comply with them.

Everyone working on behalf of Citizen is expected to behave towards those experiencing domestic abuse and staff in a way that demonstrates their commitment to this policy.

Managers are responsible for ensuring that their team have undertaken the appropriate policy learning and training,

Any changes to this Policy must be made in line with the requirements set out in Citizen's Standing Orders and our Policy framework.

5. Monitoring and review

All cases of domestic abuse are recorded and monitored to ensure appropriate action is taken. Regular case audits are carried out by local managers.

Regular reports will be provided to the Safeguarding Committee in relation to caseload, progress, analysing trends, KPIs and risk.

This policy will be reviewed at a minimum every three years, or earlier due to:

- significant changes to legislation or regulation;
- deficiencies or failures in this policy, as a result of complaints or findings from any independent organisations

6. Equality impact assessment

An equality analysis has been carried out and shows that this policy has or has the potential to have a positive impact on all individuals regardless of their protected characteristic as per the Equality Act 2010.

7. VERSION CONTROL

Version	Date	Amendments	Approved at/by	Next full review
1.0	Oct 2020	Policy Review	ELT	August 2023
2.0	Dec 2022	Light touch annual review. Definition changed to DA Act 2021 definition. Reference to chapter 1 (DA act objectives). Reference to 'Make a Stand' CIH pledge. Training section added.	Director of Housing, Care and Support	August 2023
3.0	February 2024	Full review of policy. Strengthened to provide clarity on aspects of Tenancy Management, Lettings, Perpetrator management and support for colleagues	Board	February 2027

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