



# We're Listening

## Our first domestic abuse policy and domestic abuse services

### Who did we talk to?

We wanted to develop our first domestic abuse policy and our domestic abuse services alongside residents and customers with lived experience. So we worked with our existing partner, The First Step.

The First Step is Knowsley's independent specialist domestic abuse service. They deliver the commissioned Independent Domestic Abuse Advocacy Service (IDVA), support survivors, run community services and provide accommodation through their women's refuge and dedicated children's service.

We attended The First Step's coffee morning and Survivors Forum, talking with twelve survivors - of which 50% were either Livv customers or customers of other social housing providers.

### What did you tell us?

At the first session, we listened to survivors tell us about their experiences around accessing support and housing. Survivors told us that:

#### Communication

- communication can be difficult for those experiencing domestic abuse
- the wrong type of communication can be risky to those experiencing domestic abuse
- communication preferences need to be fully understood and actioned

- there needs to be flexibility in communication - planned meetings or times of calls may change
- a dedicated point of contact helps to develop trust and can also prevent the need to repeat 'the story' multiple times, which can be triggering and emotionally damaging
- websites should clearly outline support available
- the customer handbook should clearly outline support available.

#### Information/documentation and financial access

- those experiencing domestic abuse will not always have access to their own information and documentation (as this is part of the abuse). Examples included identification, tenancy/ mortgage paperwork and bank account/ financial information
- a lack of information and documentation can make it difficult for survivors to access systemised support or opportunities such as Property Pool Plus
- support provided needs to be flexible and provide 'work arounds' where necessary
- survivors cannot always access their own money, constraining their options.

#### Security measures

- security options need to be discussed and the package varied as needed
- special consideration should be provided to those living in buildings with shared entrances and communal areas
- security options should be provided for those deemed as 'lower risk' (silver and bronze).



## Priorities for the domestic abuse policy

- use of language is important - it could encourage or discourage customers from reading on and finding out more
- language needs to be empathetic rather than legal
- wording needs to reflect customer choice and customer decision-making
- customers who come to the housing association for support want to know more about housing-based support and tenancy options
- the different housing options and individual tenancy 'rules' don't all need to be detailed. However, it should be clear that options can be discussed based on individual circumstance and need
- new customers who have previously experienced domestic abuse should be included.

At the second session we provided copies of our draft domestic abuse policy and highlighted the changes we had already made as a result of the first session. Survivors made further recommendations about the policy:

- re-ordering of the types of domestic abuse, so that it does not feel like a priority order
- providing more assurance to customers about how their wishes and consent would be used in the sections about 'partnership working' and 'action against perpetrators'.

## What are we doing?

We've used information from the sessions to shape our domestic abuse policy including:

- changing language and removing legal jargon
- making communication and how we meet our customers' needs clearer
- re-ordering the policy to make the customer-facing information clearer (including bringing support details forward and providing detail on colleague training and customer feedback further down)
- re-ordering the types of domestic abuse, so they do not feel like a 'priority order'
- providing key information about personalised housing and tenancy options support
- providing key information about customer choice and consent
- including information for new customers.

We've used information from the sessions to plan further improvements to our services including:

- reviewing our website content
- increasing the number of housing advisors to enable them to be proactive in the areas they work
- reducing the sizes of our geographies (the number of homes that each housing advisor looks after)

- re-launching our customer handbook with information about domestic abuse
- rolling out further staff training
- increasing the number of community safety advisors
- reviewing our approach to security options in every case.

## Thank you

We'd like to thank the team at First Step team and all the survivors who took the time to talk with us.

Your voice matters!