

**Tai Calon Domestic Abuse
Procedure**

**27th September
2019**

Purpose and Scope:

The purpose of this procedure is to set out how Tai Calon should respond to reports of domestic abuse from tenants or members of their household.

This procedure is supported by the Tai Calon victim/witness support procedure. Reference should also be made to the joint tenancy and relationship breakdown procedure.

Responsibility (Manager/Team):

Housing Manager, Housing Service

Director Approval:



Date:

27th September 2019

Tai Calon Domestic Abuse Procedure

1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this procedure is to set out how Tai Calon should respond to reports of domestic abuse from tenants or members of their household. This procedure has been devised with challenging targets. The desired outcome is to promote confidence and develop trust with our tenants.

This procedure is supported by the Tai Calon victim/witness support procedure. Reference should also be made to the joint tenancy and relationship breakdown procedure.

Staff roles are abbreviated as follows

- CHO – Community Housing Officer
- CSO – Community Safety Officer

2.0 Responsibility

Where domestic abuse is disclosed it is the Community Housing Officer with the victim's address on their 'patch' who is responsible for undertaking any further management should it be required. This is not necessarily where any incidents occur. This provides for a single point of contact for the victim and promotes continuity and avoids the victim having to deal with multiple members of staff.

The Housing Manager is responsible for supervising the case management of relevant staff and ensuring that this procedure is followed.

The Community Safety Officer is responsible for case managing any legal action arising from a case of domestic abuse and will provide advice and guidance in cases, seeking external legal opinion where appropriate.

Case officers should liaise frequently with the Community Safety officer regarding any case developments that increases risk or that may prompt immediate legal action.

3.0 Dealing with the initial disclosure.

Disclosures of domestic abuse may be received in a number of ways including:

- Direct or indirect report from the victim
- Report from a third party

The CHO should make 'safe' telephone contact with the victim within 1 working day or as otherwise preferred by the person making the disclosure.

Things to consider – assessing risk

- a) Does the victim co-habit with the perpetrator?
- b) Are there vulnerabilities and/or communication barriers?
- c) Are there health and safety issues relating to contact with the household (if so comply with instructions provided on 'Special Operating Procedures' list i.e. two people to attend.)
- d) Is there ongoing action on a separate breach of tenancy e.g. rent arrears or past action such as old ASB cases

Below is a checklist of issues to discuss with the victim at this stage.

1. Emphasise our approach
 - a) Explain that Tai Calon prioritises reports of domestic abuse and will deal with all reports as a priority
 - b) Explain our victim centred approach (See Paragraph 5.0)
2. Talk about immediate safety (is it safe to return to current home?)
 - a) If not, contact the Housing Options Team, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council.
 - b) Consider seeking support of Domestic abuse agencies to access refuge.
3. Emergency repairs / security measures at current home
 - a) Refer to the Victim/Witness support guidance and liaise with Community Safety Officer regarding security measures to be offered to the victim.
 - b) Raise repairs requests in relation to security as a priority

4. Ask if the incident has been reported to anyone else?

If yes, take details of the police log number/Support worker/Domestic abuse support worker and seek consent to speak to same.

5. Emergency legal action by landlord

Seek advice from the Community Safety Officer on whether it is appropriate to apply for a without notice injunction particularly where incidents have taken place publicly. Where appropriate the Community Safety officer will coordinate a court application, attend court and assist with service of the court order.

Note: It is not always appropriate to tackle the perpetrator about their behaviour even if the victim consents or requests it. Any proposed action or intervention against a perpetrator should be discussed with the Community Safety Officer or alternatively a Housing Manager before any contact is made with a perpetrator. It may however be appropriate to take action, including legal action where behaviour has an effect on the housing management function. For perpetrator support, please refer to paragraph 7.0 “Working with other agencies”

6. Are there children affected by the domestic abuse?

If yes, complete a Multi Agency Referral form and send it to the Duty Referral team at Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council. A referral should be made even if children were not physically present at any incident. A referral should be made even if the children are known to be already open to social services.

All referrals should be made the same day.

3.1 Interviewing the victim, Risk assessment and action plan

Staff must use their expertise to help victims work through available housing options and any other potential remedies, but as a social landlord, Tai Calon is limited in the support that it can offer victims of domestic abuse. Tai Calon staff are not trained to the level required to offer full support to

victims experiencing domestic abuse; however they must do all they can to help victims to access specialist support.

Therefore the purpose of the interview with the victim is to identify risk, what housing related support can be offered and to connect the victim with relevant services.

Domestic abuse risk as Assessment (DASH)

If the current report of domestic abuse has been reported to police or a specialist support agency, a risk assessment may have already been completed but staff should not presume this is the case and should seek clarification from the victim.

If a risk assessment has not been carried out staff should use the 'DASHRA RIC' form. Complete guidance notes are included with the form and staff should familiarise themselves with this guidance before any visit or interview with the victim.

The DASHRA RIC form can be downloaded from the Tai Calon intranet under the Housing/ASB section.

Key points to be considered when speaking to a victim

- Believing the victim is important - Staff should start from a position of belief, rather than trying to “break down” their story. Staff should be sensitive to how difficult it is for many people to report domestic abuse.
- Interviews should always be conducted in private but the victim should be given the option of having someone present who supports them.
- If an interpreter is being used, officers must ensure that it is a professional, trained interpreter, to whom the victim has no objections. This is important as the interpreter may know the victim's spouse, partner or family. Refer to Customer Services Managers for details on accessing such services.
- Children who accompany victims should be welcomed and not ignored. However interviews should not be conducted with children

present as it could force them to relive a traumatic event. They may also be victims or witnesses in their own right and the interview could taint their version of events. They must not be questioned or interviewed in any way.

- The victim's safety should be paramount; they must be informed of the relevant agencies to approach in the event of an emergency.

Recommending separation does not in itself ensure safety, it often temporarily increases the risk.

3.2 Follow up actions after a disclosure

a) Add case to the ReACT database

- Target: within 1 working day of receipt of the report
- All further file notes should be kept in the case records.

b) Discuss the case with Community Safety Officer

Discussion should include:

- Action Plan proposals
- Consideration of security measures / emergency repairs
- Whether emergency legal action by landlord is appropriate or necessary
- Is a multi agency discussion required (MARAC)

c) Is a specialist support agency requested?

- If the DASH assessment produces a HIGH risk grading then the MARAC process must be followed. (refer to Paragraph 7.0 regarding working with other agencies)
- If Medium or standard risk then a Support People referral should be offered and any referral made within 1 working day of agreement to accept support.

4.0 Target Hardening / Repairs to the property

At initial assessment must be made to consider the need for emergency repairs or security measures at the victim's property. This can include securing the property or re-glazing or seeking to expedite other improvements. The Community Housing officer should photograph any damage before it is repaired or removed. Maintenance staff or contractors must be told about the urgency of the situation and the need to behave sympathetically towards the complainant while in their home. The work should be treated priority

Target hardening is a term often used to refer to crime prevention and improving safety. This may include any combination of the following:

- fireproof letterbox;
- strengthened gates, doors and windows
- improved lighting;
- extra locks;
- extra fencing or walls; or
- window/door alarms
- CCTV
- Provide mobile phone and credit

(Staff can refer to the Tai Calon Witness/Victim Support guidance which is available on the Tai Calon intranet under Housing/ASB)

In the case of a joint tenancy, where the victim remains in occupation and the perpetrator has left the property, consideration can be given to changing the locks in favour of the remaining tenant but this must be first discussed with a line manager or community safety officer.

5.0 Supporting the victim

A 'victim-centred approach' means:

- believing people who report domestic abuse
- respecting their wishes as to how matters should proceed
- agreeing a course of action with them and delivering results
- keeping the victim informed of progress of the case
- Being open about what actions can or cannot be taken.

Staff should still however be mindful to the fact that on occasion, a perpetrator may present as the victim in an effort to maintain control and staff should be alert to these circumstances and if suspected, seek advice from a specialist DA organisation.

6.0 Requests for rehousing

If the victim fears for their safety if they stay in their home, Tai Calon may:

- Offer the victim respite/temporary use of a property if available
- Offer the victim a management transfer (direct offer of a property)
- Offer the victim an alternative property in accordance with the Local authority and Tai Calon Allocations Policy

The Housing Manager with responsibility for Community Safety and Lettings has discretion to grant high priority for a transfer application to overcome a situation that is undermining the effective management of the accommodation or estate. This might include in some situations, the perpetrator being allowed to access other accommodation.

7.0 Working with other agencies

Staff should resolve issues of consent before consulting other agencies. Where a risk assessment is gauged as 'HIGH' or there are Safeguarding concerns then staff may consult with other relevant agencies for the purpose of protecting the interests of those at risk.

MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) is a meeting where information is shared on the highest risk domestic abuse cases between representatives of local police, health, child protection, housing practitioners, Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) and other specialists from the statutory and voluntary sectors. Actions are determined to promote the safety of the victim.

Any risk assessment resulting in a 'high risk' should be referred to MARAC in accordance with prevailing MARAC operating protocol and assistance should be sought from the Community Safety Officer who is the Tai Calon MARAC representative.

Opportunities to offer supportive interventions to a perpetrator should not be overlooked. Phoenix Domestic Abuse Services currently offer an accredited support programme for men or women in heterosexual or same sex relationships designed to help people who want to stop being abusive in their intimate relationships and to improve their current or future relationships with partners. Further information is available at www.phoenixdas.co.uk

8.0 Requests for action from other agencies.

Staff may receive requests for assistance from other agencies e.g. as an action arising from MARAC in relation to cases of domestic abuse. This may in relation to:

- General tenancy advice
- Moving property
- Providing extra security at the property

All requests must be noted on the housing management system together with a completion note

If a request for extra security is received then staff should refer to the Tai Calon victim/witness support guidance for appropriate measures.

9.0 Training

All staff that may come into contact with victims or perpetrators of domestic abuse should be briefed as part of their induction training about the Domestic Abuse policies that relate to both customers and the workplace and have a clear understanding of their own role.

Staff are encouraged to actively seek regular training opportunities.

10.0 Preventing domestic abuse

A number of actions can be taken to help prevent domestic abuse

- Make all new tenants and members of their household aware of the services offered by Tai Calon and other agencies
- Use tenants' newsletters to explain our policy on Domestic Abuse

- Work in co-operation with Local Authorities and other statutory and voluntary agencies.
- Staff should familiarise themselves with the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) also known as Claire's Law. A third party can also make enquiries through the Clare's Law Scheme about an individual who is in a relationship with someone they know, and they have a concern that the individual may be abusive towards their partner. Full details can be found at www.gwent.police.uk