

Guidance for Hillingdon Council Tenants Experiencing Domestic Abuse

Housing related support and options



Accessibility statement

If you would like this information in another language or reading format, please contact the Resident Empowerment Team on 01895 277038 or email customerengagement@hillington.gov.uk

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Everyone has the right to live in their home in safety. This guide provides information on the support available to you if you are experiencing domestic abuse and need housing-related support.

1. What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is abusive behaviour between those aged 16 or above who are personally connected to each other (partners, ex-partners, family members). Behaviour is abusive if it consists of any of the following:

- physical or sexual abuse
- violent or threatening behaviour
- controlling or coercive behaviour
- economic abuse
- psychological, emotional or other abuse

Coercive control is when someone you are close to repeatedly behaves in a way that makes you feel controlled, dependent, isolated or scared.

Financial abuse is when you don't have full control of your own money. Someone may have put you in debt, always check your bank account or make you pay their living expenses.

It does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or more. Domestic abuse is a crime and it comes in many forms, including 'harmful practices' such as female genital mutilation, forced marriage, and honour based violence.

2. I feel unsafe due to experiencing domestic abuse, what should I do?

- in an emergency call **999**
- if you are deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired, you can contact the police in emergencies by calling 18000. You can also text 999 if you've pre-registered for the Emergency SMS service on www.relayuk.bt.com. In non-emergencies or for general advice you can call the police non-emergency textphone number: 18001 101
- contact our Housing Management Services by calling 01895 556666 or emailing tenancymanagement@hillingdon.gov.uk and tell us what has happened
- tell your social worker, support worker, GP or any other professional who is supporting you
- contact one of the support agencies listed at the end of this guide, for help and support.

3. What will happen when you contact us?

If you contact us we will:

- listen to you
- be compassionate, supportive, non-judgemental and treat you with courtesy and respect
- assess your safety
- work with you and other professionals to help make you safer.

Making you safer might involve:

- helping you explore your housing options if you feel unsafe in your home. This could include making your property safer, or helping you move to a safe address, depending on your circumstances
- involving extra services to help you with your needs. For example, if you wish to explore your legal options, if you need help to separate from the person who is hurting you, or if you need help trying to reduce your risks if you want to remain with them.

Your tenancy sustainment officer will provide support during this difficult time. They will assess your situation, suggest immediate safety measures, and help develop a long-term plan. Based on your circumstances, they will explain your available housing options.

We will work with you and won't force you to do anything you're not ready to do. We usually see people at the Civic Centre in Uxbridge. If you prefer, we can arrange to see you somewhere else that is safe, accessible and comfortable for you.

We strongly suggest that you seek independent legal advice about your housing options. We can signpost you to organisations such as Hillingdon Law Centre, if needed.

You will have the opportunity to:

- be interviewed by someone of the same sex or gender, if you wish to
- be interviewed in a private safe space
- be provided with confidential translation services, if needed
- be contacted via a safe telephone, email or address that does not increase the risk of domestic abuse and specific to your individual needs
- have a friend or support worker present to provide emotional support in the interviews.

4. Confidential support

Any information you share with us is confidential. We only share information with organisations if you give us permission, unless you or someone else are at risk of serious harm. We never share anything you tell us with the person that is hurting you.

5. Supporting you to stay safe in your current home

We can support you to stay safe in your home:

- we can arrange for additional security measures to be installed in your home, including reinforced doors, fireproof letter boxes, window locks
- change locks – if the person causing you harm has keys to your home, we may be able to get the locks changed (if the other person is a joint tenant, you may need to obtain an injunction first)
- we can help you request repairs that may be connected to the abuse, such as broken windows or damaged doors
- taking tenancy-related action against perpetrators of violence and abuse. If they are Hillingdon Council tenants, we may be able to seek possession of their home.

6. If it is safe for you to stay in Hillingdon longer term

- if you can **safely stay in your home while you wait** for a move, **and it is safe for you to stay in Hillingdon longer term**, you can apply for re-housing under our management transfer policy. Through this scheme you may be entitled to one offer of a suitable home of the same bedroom size to your current home within Hillingdon
- if your application is successful, we will offer you a suitable home. However, please note that due to a very limited supply of available properties, there may be significant waiting time before a new home can be offered.
- We can also support you to apply for a home swapper scheme. See below 'mutual exchange' for more information about this option
- if remaining in Hillingdon long term is a safe option for you, but you require temporary accommodation while awaiting a permanent move, your housing officer will assist you. They will assess your circumstances and help you plan your next steps
- where safe to do so, we always look to provide temporary accommodation within the borough, however, due to the national housing crisis, this is not always possible and placements may be out of the borough or London.

Women experiencing domestic abuse can call the 24/7 National Domestic Abuse helpline to receive help to find a refuge, which again could be anywhere in the country. Call, **0808 2000 247**.

Men experiencing domestic abuse can call the Men's Advice Line to receive help to find a refuge, which could be anywhere in the country. Call, **0808 8010 327**.

7. If it is unsafe for you to stay in Hillingdon longer term

If Hillingdon has become an unsafe area for you, you may need to move further away. Unfortunately, we cannot directly offer you another council home out of the borough, because we only have direct access to council homes in Hillingdon.

If you can safely **stay in your home** while you look to move out of Hillingdon in the longer term, you may be able to apply for the following options:

Mutual exchange

This is a system where tenants who live in council or housing association properties can swap their homes with another tenant. This option gives you the flexibility to decide which area you'd like to move to, anywhere across the UK. However, if the person who has been abusing or harassing you is likely to try and find you, we would advise you to carefully consider if this option is right for you. They could potentially locate you by asking the tenant you have swapped with. We may be able to support you with a multi-swap, which is when three or more tenants arrange to swap homes in a chain. This option may still carry the risk of the perpetrator discovering your new address.

Directly arranged reciprocal

A 'reciprocal' rehousing is when we ask other councils directly if they can offer you a property you can move to. We can do this with up to three other social landlords.

Other councils and housing associations have no duty to assist with this and would only do so voluntarily. Unfortunately, due to the national shortage of social housing, they are frequently unable to help, and arranging moves to areas surrounding London is especially challenging.

Housing Moves

This scheme is run by the Mayor of London. The Housing Moves scheme enables victims / survivors of domestic abuse who have a social tenancy to move to a home within London. Your housing officer can refer you.

Find out more at, www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/housing-and-land/council-and-social-housing/housing-moves

Seaside and Country Homes

This scheme offers people aged 55 and over who live in social housing the opportunity to move to bungalows and flats managed by housing associations mainly located across the south coast but also in eastern England and the west country.

Find out more at, www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/housing-and-land/council-and-social-housing/seaside-country-homes

Moving Soon

This is a portal listing potential affordable homes available across the country: movingsoon.co.uk

Making a homelessness application to another council

If Hillingdon is not safe and you need temporary accommodation, we advise you to approach a council in an area where you would feel most safe to make a homelessness application:

- you can approach any council in the country to make a homelessness application. Even if you do not have a local connection to that area, they should not turn you down, due to the risk you are facing in Hillingdon
- the council you apply to will assess and investigate your situation and will develop a plan to help you. This may involve providing you with a temporary home
- if you have any problems making a homelessness application and / or seeking temporary accommodation, please seek independent legal advice as soon as possible.

8. If you are a joint tenant

If you are a joint tenant and no longer wish to live with the other joint tenant, it is important that you seek independent legal advice immediately. Please be aware that even if you (or they) are not living in the home, you both remain jointly liable for the rent and any arrears that may build up. You cannot sign up for a new sole tenancy while you remain a joint tenant at another home.

Possible options to resolve your issues may be:

- taking enforcement action against the joint tenant who has been harming you. For example, if the court obtains clear evidence of the abuse, we might be able to take legal action against them to remove them from the tenancy
- either person can end a joint tenancy by serving a Notice to Quit. This will end the whole tenancy, and the other party does not have to know about or consent to this in advance. For more information, visit england.shelter.org.uk/ and research “joint tenancies”
- before serving a Notice to Quit, you should seek independent legal advice from a housing lawyer
- if you are legally married and going through divorce proceedings, you may be able to obtain a financial remedy order to transfer the tenancy from joint to sole via the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973
- if you have children, you may be able to bring an application under Section 1 of the Children Act to request a transfer of tenancy from joint to sole, on the basis of providing a home for the child until a certain age (the order may end when the child is 18). You should seek independent legal advice to explore this option.

Civil Injunctions – you can seek an Injunction Order under the Family Law Act to stop the perpetrator harassing you, or to keep them out of the home you shared. This could be:

- An Occupation Order, which determines who can live in a home, or a specific part of it, and who can enter or be excluded from the property. It is a temporary measure

- A Non-Molestation Order, which is like an injunction and can stop the perpetrator harassing, abusing, contacting you. The court may be able to grant these orders very quickly. It is a temporary measure.

9. Safety planning

If we agree you need to move, we will help you make a plan to reduce the risk of the person abusing or harassing you from finding you. This will include ensuring your new home is at least one mile away from your current home and any other potential risk we have identified, i.e. where the perpetrator lives.

We will also encourage you to think about other options that might help keep your new address confidential and keep you safe, for example:

- changing your child's school or nursery
- speaking to family and friends about the need to keep your whereabouts secret
- changing your phone number or email address and locking down or closing social media accounts
- thinking about child contact and how to manage this safely.

For further information about safety planning, please contact the Hillingdon Domestic Abuse Advocacy Service on 07874 620954, or via email at hdaas@hillingdon.gov.uk, or call the National Domestic Abuse helpline on 0808 2000 247.

10. Temporary home and financial considerations

If we offer you a temporary home, this will typically be a hostel with shared facilities or a self-contained, minimally furnished flat. You may need to provide your own bedding, cutlery, and crockery. Pets are not allowed in temporary accommodation.

Typically, you will need to pay rent, utilities, and Council Tax for your Temporary Accommodation while also remaining responsible for the expenses of your permanent home.

Housing benefits

If you move to a temporary home but are intending to return to your permanent home, you may be able to claim Housing Benefit for both your temporary home as well as your normal home for up to 52 weeks. This is called **Dual Housing Benefit**.

If you decide that you will not return to your council home, then you can claim Housing Benefit (or the housing element of Universal Credit) on both your permanent and your temporary homes for up to **four weeks only**. After this four-week period, or if you stay in temporary housing for over 52 weeks and your dual Housing Benefit/Universal Credit housing element ceases, you will either have to cover rent yourself, or decide if you wish to relinquish your council tenancy to avoid building up rent arrears.

We strongly encourage you to seek independent legal advice prior to deciding to give up your council tenancy and to discuss this with us before deciding how to proceed.

According to national Housing Benefit regulations, **if you are absent from your primary home for over 15 months**, you may be required to repay any housing benefits received for that property. To avoid incurring substantial debt, it is crucial to resolve your situation before this 15-month period expires.


Working tenants in temporary accommodation

Temporary housing can be costly, especially if your salary prevents you from receiving benefits to cover expenses for both your temporary and permanent residences. This can lead to significant financial strain, forcing difficult choices between employment, safety, and debt. If you are employed and require temporary accommodation, please inform us promptly so we can assist with planning.

11. Useful information and support

If you are experiencing Domestic Abuse

Hillingdon Domestic Abuse Advocacy service (HDAAS)

 **07874 620954**

 hdaas@hillingdon.gov.uk


 www.hillingdon.gov.uk/article/11408/Hillingdon-Domestic-Abuse-Advocacy-Service-HDAAS

GALOP specialises in providing advice and support to LGBT+ people experiencing domestic abuse

 **0800 999 5428**,


 www.galop.org.uk

Men's Advice Line offers advice and support to men experiencing domestic abuse

 **0808 801 0327** (freephone)

 www.mensadviceline.org.uk

Refuge National Domestic Abuse helpline offering advice to female victim/survivors of domestic abuse, including support to find refuges

 **0800 200 0247** (24hrs a day (freephone))

 www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk

Respect works with people who abuse others in their relationship, providing confidential advice and support to stop their abusive behavior

 **0808 802 4040**

 info@respect.uk.net

 www.respect.uk.net

Stonewall Housing – Domestic Abuse Housing Resettlement for LGBTQ+ people who have experienced abuse

 **020 7359 5767** (Mon–Fri 10am–1pm)

 www.stonewallhousing.org

Southall Black Sisters support female victim/survivors from the Black/Global Majority

✉ info@southallblacksisters.co.uk

🌐 www.southallblacksisters.org.uk

For help fostering your pets while you are in a temporary home,

🌐 www.refuge.org.uk/i-need-help-now/other-support-services/what-about-pets

Free Legal Advice and support

National Centre for Domestic Violence (NCDV)

☎ **0800 970 2070** or text to **60777**

🌐 www.ncdv.org.uk

The Rights of Women

☎ **020 7608 1137** and **020 7251 6577** (Family Law Line)

☎ **020 7251 8887** (Criminal Law Line)

🌐 www.rightsofwomen.org.uk/get-advice/

Hillingdon Law Centre

☎ **020 8561 9400**

🌐 www.hillingdonlawcentre.co.uk

Check if you are eligible for free legal advice

🌐 www.gov.uk/civil-legal-advice

If you need some additional support

Shelter can advise you about your housing situation

☎ **0808 800 4444**

🌐 www.england.shelter.org.uk/get_help

Victim Support provides support for all victims of crime and traumatic incidents

☎ **0808 1689111**


🌐 www.victimsupport.org.uk

Hillingdon Advice Partnership (HAP) provides a single point of access for Hillingdon residents aged 18+ who need advice and guidance on welfare, benefits, housing, or wellbeing support, including support for those with physical or learning disabilities and mental health needs

☎ **020 8044 5676**

🌐 www.hillingdonadvicepartnership.org.uk

Hillingdon Stronger Families Hub supports families with the help they need and works to protect children and young people from abuse and neglect.

 **01895 556006**

 strongerfamilieshub@hillingdon.gov.uk


 www.hillingdon.gov.uk/childs-safety

Hillingdon Adult Social Care supports adults with disabilities, mental health problems, or those who are elderly, with the goal of helping them live independently, improving their well-being and protecting them from abuse and neglect

 **01895 556633**

 www.hillingdon.gov.uk/safeguarding-adults

Step Change provides advice and support with debt or other financial concerns around the cost of living crisis


 **0800 138 1111**

 www.stepchange.org

Surviving Economic Abuse website provides information and useful resources to victims of economic abuse

 www.survivingeconomicabuse.org/i-need-help

The Financial Support Line offers specialist advice to anyone experiencing domestic abuse who is in financial difficulty

 **0808 196 8845**