

## *If You Are Experiencing Domestic Abuse*

### *What is domestic abuse?*

Domestic abuse is defined as any incident, or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members.

Domestic abuse can affect anybody, regardless of age, gender, race, sexuality, wealth or geography.

There are many types of abuse, including psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional.

Controlling behaviour is defined as a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from their sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating 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, punish, or frighten their partner or family member.

### *If you are experiencing domestic abuse*

You can ask for advice and assistance from our Homeless Prevention Service or any professional that you receive support from (like a family worker or health worker) or the police.



*If you believe that you will be in danger if you stay in the borough you can move to another area. You have the right to ask for help from any local authority in the UK if you are fleeing domestic abuse. If you are assessed as being at risk in Reading we will advise you to move area but it is your decision on whether to move.*

### *How we can help*

Your safety is our priority. We will:

- allocate a Homeless Prevention Officer to work with you until your situation is resolved
- take you through an in-depth assessment, including a detailed risk assessment using a form known as a DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment and Honour Based Violence risk assessment). This process will help us to identify the risks you (and your children) are facing so that we can offer the most appropriate help
- give you advice on your housing options, explain your housing rights and work with you to develop a personalised housing plan to consider your long-term accommodation options
- discuss options and refer you to emergency accommodation if you need to leave immediately

**If you are a Council or Housing Association Tenant** and you are experiencing domestic abuse please contact your Housing officer. They will refer you to the Management Transfer Panel and the Homeless Prevention Service.

The Panel will look at the risk to your safety when determining your priority for rehousing. If they decide you need to move quickly you will be awarded the highest priority for rehousing on the Housing Register (Band A).

You will need to bid for alternative accommodation through Homechoice. We will offer advice to support you through this process.

### *Following your assessment*

The advice and support we offer depends on your situation and the outcome of your assessment:

#### **If you are at risk in Reading**

We will advise you to move to a different area - but it's your decision whether to move.

#### **If your assessment suggests your risk is medium/high**

We may, with your consent, refer you to MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference).

MARAC is made up of representatives from a range of different support agencies, including the Council. We work together to ensure that any services we offer to support and protect you are coordinated and effective.

#### **If you have children**

Safeguarding children is a key responsibility for the Council. We need to be mindful of the impact the abuse you are experiencing is having on your child/children and, may, with your consent, make a referral to the Children's Safeguarding Team for further support and assistance.

#### **If you need more advice and practical support**

We may refer you to other local agencies (like Berkshire Women's Aid) who provide the help you need - if you agree to this.

#### **If you need extra security to return home**

We may refer you to the Sanctuary Scheme which provides enhanced security measures so you continue to live in your own home. This could include simple measures like security lighting, additional fencing or complex safety measures.

#### **If it is not safe for you to return home**

If you need to leave straight away we will tell you about emergency accommodation and work with you to find a safe option. This may be:

- **A Refuge** offering short-term accommodation for people fleeing domestic abuse. This will provide a safe place for you (and your children) to stay, along with the practical and emotional support to help you secure long term accommodation and to help keep you and your family safe.

Refuges are located throughout the UK and their locations are always confidential. Most are for women and children - some provide specialist support for women from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds and some cater specifically for women with disabilities. There are some refuges for men although these are limited.



We can help you find a refuge or you can make your own arrangements by calling the 24 hour National Domestic Violence Helpline: 0808 2000 247.

- **Temporary Accommodation** if you don't want to move into refuge, or there are no suitable spaces available, we will assess whether or not we have a duty to provide you with temporary accommodation under homelessness legislation.

## *Other advice and support services*

### **Crossing Bridges**

A town centre based 'one stop' shop supporting victims of domestic abuse. Drop in or make an appointment.

Support offered includes face to face support, structured support for the whole family, a free weekly legal surgery, referrals to external support services and DIY injunctions.

Call 0118 959 7333

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### **Berkshire Women's Aid (BWA)**

A local domestic abuse support service. They offer a helpline (Monday-Friday 10am-5pm or 24/7 for emergencies) for those experiencing domestic abuse.

Call 0118 950 4003 or visit [www.berkshirewomensaid.org.uk](http://www.berkshirewomensaid.org.uk).

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### **National Domestic Violence Helpline**

A national service for people who are experiencing domestic abuse. Their helpline is open every day of the year.

Helpline: 0808 2000 247 or visit [www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk/](http://www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk/)

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### **Thames Valley Police**

The police can provide legal remedies and arrange safety measure (like a panic alarms, safety phone or flagging your address for quick response) if you decide to stay living in your current accommodation. In an emergency call 999.

Call Thames Valley Police Domestic Abuse line 0118 953 6248 or the Police non-emergency 101

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## *Contact the Homeless Prevention Service*

We are open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm. You will initially be seen by a Housing Advice Support Officer who will then allocate your case to either:

- a Homeless Prevention Officer if you are threatened with homelessness within 56 days or are immediately homeless
- or a Homeless Resolution and Enablement Officer if you are still in accommodation but you are worried about becoming homeless in the future

Call: 0118 937 2165 (office hours)

Email: [Housingadvice@reading.gov.uk](mailto:Housingadvice@reading.gov.uk)

Drop-in Civic Offices, Bridge Street, Reading RG1 2LU

This information can be provided in alternative formats (Braille, audio, large print) and other languages on request