



Social Housing Regulator Consumer Standards Consultation 2023

Submission on behalf of the National Housing & Domestic Abuse Policy & Practice Group ("the Group")

16 October 2023

Submitted by Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (Judith Vickress, Senior Housing Manager, Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse – Chair)

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The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance's ([DAHA](#)) vision is based on the belief Home and safety are fundamental human rights. We call for a future where every victim/survivor including children can choose a home where they are safe and live free from domestic abuse. Those who use abusive behaviour must be visible and held to account for the fear and harm that they cause.

The DAHA- Led National Housing & Domestic Abuse Policy & Practice [Group](#) includes the following Membership:

- Against Violence and Abuse (AVA)
- Agenda Alliance
- Angelou Partnership
- Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid
- Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH)
- Commonweal Housing
- Crisis
- Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA)
- The DRIVE Partnership
- Employers Initiative on Domestic Abuse (EVAW)
- Generation Rent
- Gentoo Housing Association
- Hestia
- Homeless Link
- Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS)
- National Housing Federation (NHF)
- National Federation of ALMO's
- Peabody Housing Association
- Refuge
- Resolve ASB
- Respect
- SafeLives
- Shelter
- Single Homeless Project (SHP)
- Solace Women's Aid
- Southall Black Sisters
- Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse (STADA)
- St Mungo's
- Surviving Economic Abuse (SEA)
- Women's Aid Federation of England (Women's Aid)

This response to the consultation on the Housing regulator's proposed consumer standards is submitted on behalf of the Group. We deliberately focus on domestic abuse in our response.

The proposed Consumer Standards play a crucial role in ensuring that housing providers within the UK's social housing sector meet the needs and expectations of their tenants. It is essential that these standards are robust, comprehensive, and capable of addressing the diverse range of issues that tenants may encounter.

The Group welcomes the consumer standards and the aim to make a meaningful difference to tenants. We are encouraged that they are outcome-focused, meaning that registered providers can meet the outcomes the Regulator expects in the most appropriate way for their tenants and for their business. Where we have identified areas that are not outcome focussed, we have made recommendations – for instance where a landlord is required to

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have a domestic abuse policy, it would be essential for the Regulator to be satisfied that the policy is embedded in practice and not a tokenistic, surface smoke screen.

Landlords must be able to deliver its expectations, of course but we have highlighted areas where we would encourage the Regulator to challenge landlords to do more for the most vulnerable tenants including those who are living with domestic abuse.

The Regulator's approach to regulation within their four yearly cycle of inspections will remain risk based so that the regulatory engagement and actions are targeted according to the risk of standards not being met and the impact that this has on the tenants of that landlord. We understand the limitations in terms of resources and capacity for the Regulator but we do have some concerns that some landlords will "slip under the radar" where poor standards or practice are not brought to the attention of their attention Many tenants, particularly those experiencing multiple disadvantage, and other vulnerable communities are unlikely to feel empowered to voice their concerns about the condition of their homes.

We have made reference in our Group response here to the need to see domestic abuse run as a thread through all aspects of the consumer standards rather than to see it in just the Neighbourhood & Community Standard. Domestic abuse is insidious and often hidden but in plain sight – particularly in sight of housing providers, if they look for it. By incorporating reference to domestic abuse throughout the consumer standards we are more likely to see landlords understand the responsibilities they have to provide safe and secure homes and that this safety and security means living free from the fear of violence and abuse.

The proposed Consumer Standards are a significant step toward improving the lives of social housing tenants in the UK. We urge the Regulator of Social Housing to consider the feedback and recommendations provided here to strengthen the standards, making them more inclusive, tenant-centric, and responsive to the diverse needs of tenants.

Thank you for considering our input in this consultation. We look forward to seeing the final standards that will contribute to a more transparent, accountable, and tenant-focused social housing sector.



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Questions

1. Overall, do you agree that the proposed Safety and Quality Standard sets the right expectations of landlords, as set out in Chapter 6 of the consultation document?

Please state if you agree or disagree.

Please provide comments if you wish to explain your response.

Yes

Overall, the proposed Safety & Quality Standard is welcomed. We would like to see domestic abuse linked to safety within the body of the standard as well as in the Code of Practice (no. 19). Often survivors of domestic abuse feel unsafe in their own home. Landlords should work with their tenant/survivors to ensure they can stay safe in their own home and work in partnership with other specialist agencies to ensure that the home is safe – additional safety features to prevent an abuser entering a home or a property that houses the home of the survivor.

2. Overall, do you agree that the proposed Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard sets the right expectations of landlords, as set out in Chapter 7 of the consultation document?

Please state if you agree or disagree.

Please provide comments if you wish to explain your response.

Yes

Fairness & respect – we agree that this should be at the heart of service provision by landlords & these often are reflected in the values of landlords however tenants do not always see these reflected in practice. The Regulator will need to be clear on how this will be measured and consider how to satisfy themselves that these values are embedded in all policies and in practice.

We are particularly encouraged to see the requirement to collate data with respect to protected characteristics which is absolutely vital to ensure that housing providers understand and work to meet the needs of their tenants. It is essential that landlords know who lives in the homes they provide.

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3. Do you agree that the proposed Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard accurately reflects the government's 'tenant involvement' direction to the regulator?

You can find the government's direction to the regulator at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/revised-directions-on-tenant-involvementand-mutual-exchange>

Please state if you agree or disagree.

Please provide comments if you wish to explain your response.

We agree that the proposed standard accurately reflects the government's direction

4. Overall, do you agree that the proposed Neighbourhood and Community Standard sets the right expectations of landlords, as set out in Chapter 8 of the consultation document?

Please state if you agree or disagree.

Please provide comments if you wish to explain your response.

Yes – we would like to see more detail and a change of language.

For Requirement 3 please consider changing to this: Registered providers must work in partnership with other agencies including specialist domestic abuse services and other services designed by and for different communities and cultures as part of a coordinated community response (CCR) to domestic abuse. They should work to enable tenants to access appropriate support and advice safely from local specialist services.

[This requirement says landlords need to have a policy for tackling domestic abuse and related issues.] Instead – Landlords must have domestic abuse policies that demonstrate that they will hold perpetrators of abuse to account for their behaviour and prioritise the safety of victims/survivors including children. The policy should be fit for purpose and embedded through practice.

We would like to see the requirement for landlords to hold the responsibility for the provision of the tools, skills, knowledge that give staff confidence to identify and respond to domestic abuse as is mentioned at no.60/61 in the Code of Practice

Safer Neighbourhoods: It is essential that the Regulator looks to ensure that tenants experiencing domestic abuse are not dealt with by ASB Teams. Where the consumer standards talk about ASB it will be essential that landlords are clear that when dealing with ASB they are using a domestic abuse lens. Domestic abuse victims are 4 times more likely to

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have an ASB complaint made against them and this is raised in domestic homicide reviews often as a missed opportunity to identify domestic abuse and intervene.

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5. Overall, do you agree that the proposed Tenancy Standard sets the right expectations of landlords, as set out in Chapter 9 of the consultation document?

Please state if you agree or disagree.

Please provide comments if you wish to explain your response.

The regulator should consider protections for vulnerable people within this, particularly around joint tenancies where DA survivors are at risk. Clearly includes preventing tenancy loss and eviction (survivors of DA).

We ask that exceptions include domestic abuse within the list of vulnerabilities. Succession rights and vulnerable tenants-consider DA homicide/suicide survivors supporting them to keep home and prevent unnecessary evictions that compound trauma & increase homelessness

6. Do you agree that the proposed Tenancy Standard accurately reflects the government's 'mutual exchange direction' to the regulator?

You can find the government's direction to the regulator at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/revised-directions-on-tenant-involvementand-mutual-exchange>.

Please state if you agree or disagree.

Please provide comments if you wish to explain your response.

We agree and add:

Allocations & mutual exchange must take into consideration priority for survivors of domestic abuse, local connection, and secure tenancies (under DA Act). Inter-based mutual exchange.

We would like to see a reference to best practice around managed reciprocals in cases of domestic abuse (Code of Practice).

7. The proposed Code of Practice is designed to help landlords understand how they can meet the requirements of the standards. Do you agree that the proposed Code of Practice meets this aim?

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Please see Chapter 10 of the consultation document for more information on the Code of Practice.

Please state if you agree or disagree.

Please provide comments if you wish to explain your response.

Overall, the Code of Practice is good, but we would like to see it go further. We will focus on our area of work- domestic abuse in our response.

As mentioned earlier, we would like the Regulator to ensure that domestic abuse and a landlord's responsibility to have safe and secure homes and neighbourhoods for all tenants must be a thread throughout the Code of Practice. We (DAHA) would welcome the opportunity to work with the Regulator to ensure that the CoP is using the right language and provides a clear example of good practice for landlords to follow.

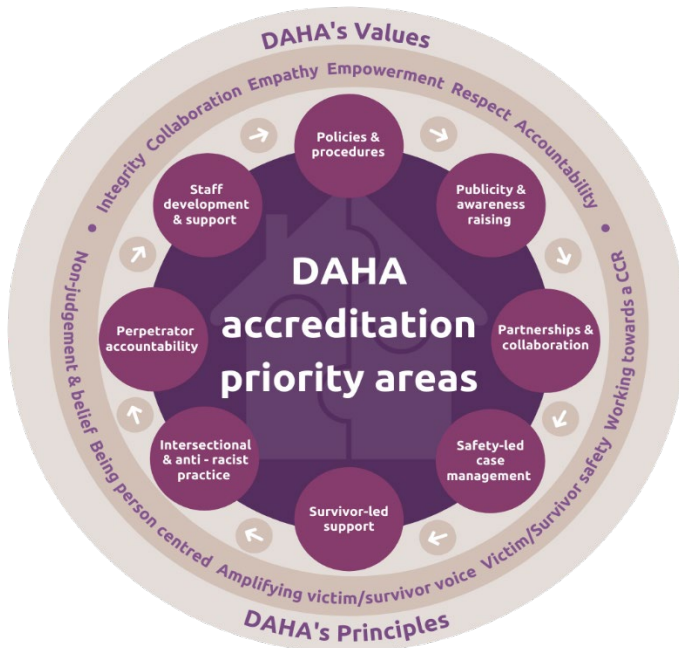
More specifically, it is essential that domestic abuse is defined and its links to anti social behaviour explained. Survivors of domestic abuse are four times more likely to have ASB complaints made against them. There are numerous examples in Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) of missed opportunities to identify domestic abuse and provide an intervention. Including domestic abuse as a consistent thread throughout the standards and the CoP will, we assert, save lives because it will alert landlords to their responsibility to prioritise domestic abuse, invest in upskilling staff and embed policies and practice- shifting the culture to one that will create an environment that will enable and empower disclosures and increase help seeking across communities. Housing has an absolutely vital role in the Coordinated Community Response to domestic abuse. Where the regulator describes working "co-operatively"- we request that this language is changed to working "in partnership" or "collaboratively"- language that is more recognisable and encourages good strong multiagency working. We know that this saves lives.

Where the Code of Practice specifically talks about domestic abuse (60-63) we believe it could go further and recommend that landlords can demonstrate that they meet these standards because they have committed to or have achieved an accreditation that has required the adoption and embedding of an evidence based framework of standards. An example of one such accreditation can be found here:

<https://www.dahalliance.org.uk/membership-accreditation/what-is-daha-accreditation/>. It is of note that the government's Statutory Guidance that accompanies the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 recommends DAHA accreditation and references the Whole Housing Approach as good practice.

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The DAHA Framework encompasses values & principles that member providers are required to adopt. There are a total of 43 standards of good practice across eight priority areas – for more information and details of the standards please contact Judith Vickress at the email provided.

In reference to the Tenancy Standards- Allocations and lettings, we would ask again for the domestic abuse thread to run through this. Working in partnership with local authorities is key for many reasons including how they work to support the allocation of safe housing for survivors to meet their responsibilities under the DA Act 2021- including meeting their responsibilities under Part 7 to prioritise those who present as homeless fleeing domestic abuse.

8. A draft Regulatory impact assessment has been produced to help in understanding the costs, benefits and risks of introducing a revised set of consumer standards and code of practice. Do you agree with our conclusions in the draft Regulatory impact assessment?

Please see Chapter 11 of the consultation document for more information on the Regulatory impact assessment.

Please state if you agree or disagree.

Please provide comments if you wish to explain your response.

We agree

9. The draft Equality impact assessment looks at what effects introducing the

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consumer standards might have on members of groups that are protected by equality laws. Do you agree with our conclusions in the draft Equality impact assessment?

Please see Chapter 11 of the consultation for more information on the Equality impact assessment.

Please state if you agree or disagree.

Please provide comments if you wish to explain your response

We agree. We are working together to promote an anti-racist response across the housing sector.

For further contact please email Judith Vickress, Chair, National Housing & Domestic Abuse Policy & Practice Group j.vickress@standingtogether.org.uk