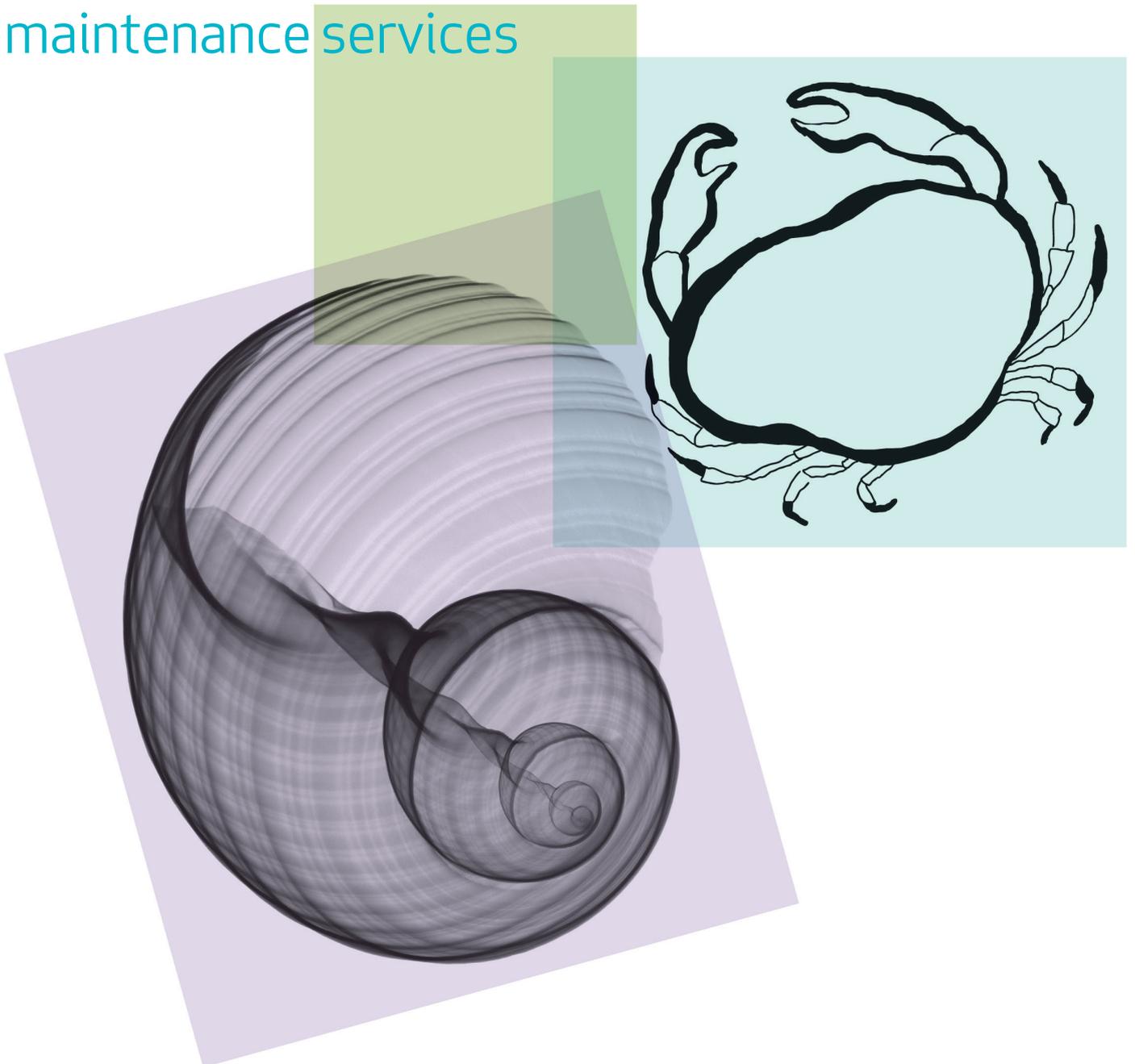


# Domestic Abuse Prevention

Guidance on procuring repairs and  
maintenance services



## Introduction

Domestic abuse blights the lives of thousands of tenants and residents in the UK and it is estimated that over 100 women will be killed in any given year as a result of domestic abuse. This simply isn't good enough and agencies that have the ability to support victims and survivors must do their best in preventing and detecting this abuse.

Housing providers are in a position to play a vital role in supporting people suffering in silence and in particular it's the contractors and their staff that have most exposure to what is often happening behind closed doors. Therefore, it's so important that contractors' staff are equipped with the knowledge to know what to look out for and also what to do if they were to spot the signs of domestic abuse.

Many housing providers will procure repairs and maintenance services through a procurement tendering process. Whilst it's of course necessary for this process to focus on the key requirements of repairs and maintenance, quality and costs; there is a growing emphasis on a contractor's social responsibility and to be aware of risks and concerns happening within the housing providers' homes.

This guidance focusses specifically on this issue, and is designed to assist housing providers to factor in domestic abuse responsibilities within their procurement tendering packs for bidders. We believe that making this a feature in the procurement process will ensure that any professional that has an interaction with a tenant or resident, will understand that it's their responsibility to respond if they feel that something isn't right.



## What duties does a Housing Provider have when undertaking a procurement exercise?

In accordance with the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 a social housing provider, as a “relevant authority” (a contracting authority for the purposes of procurement legislation), has a duty, when undertaking a procurement exercise, to consider how the service being procured may improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the relevant area and how it might act to secure that improvement.

For registered providers of social housing, this duty can also be found within the Regulator of Social Housing's Economic and Consumer Standards (the Standards). Housing providers have a variety of obligations under the Standards; including the duty to co-operate with relevant partners to help provide social, environmental and economic wellbeing in their areas.

But what does this mean for social housing landlords?

The parameters of what will satisfy this duty vary between housing providers and can incorporate a variety of different activities or initiatives for the promotion of “social value”. For example some housing providers expect their procured partners/contractors to offer apprenticeships within their organisations or assist with the funding of corporate social responsibility projects. The housing provider must satisfy the duty, but it is, therefore, at their discretion how they do so.

Contractors know that, whilst housing providers are of course businesses, they are often also charitable organisations. What this means is that charitable housing providers must act in accordance with their charitable purposes. Outside of the specific procurement context, this means that where they are seeking to meet their organisational purposes and objectives they are considering the use of resources and assets in accordance with these charitable purposes. For registered social housing providers this is specifically referenced within the Value for Money standard of the Standards.

## How can housing providers measure their maintenance partners to have an understanding of Domestic Abuse and Safeguarding issues?

Repairs and maintenance contractors are some of the few people that can gain access and “conversation time” in a way that might allow typical signs of Domestic Abuse to be spotted.

For housing providers, ensuring that the repairs and maintenance contractors have an understanding of the importance of the role that they may play in domestic abuse prevention will be a factor for consideration when going out to the market.

Establishing a contractor's approach to domestic abuse prevention can be included within a housing provider's procurement exercise and there is a level of discretion that can be taken as to how this can be done. The key is to ask the right questions at the right time.

Within a procurement exercise, the housing provider will set questions which will be split between Selection Questionnaire questions and Tender questions.

The Selection Questionnaire assesses the bidder's previous experience. In contrast, the Tender questions look to the future as to how the bidder will deliver the contract.

A housing provider can consider including questions about domestic abuse prevention within both of these elements of the procurement exercise.

### *Selection Questionnaire*

The selection stage is used to shortlist or qualify bidders. Often housing providers will want to include "differentiator" questions at the selection criteria stage. This will assist to identify a shortlist of bidders and identify the "stand out" bidders.

Asking about a contractor's previous experience on other contracts in relation to domestic abuse prevention could therefore be a useful question to set contractors apart and identify those contractors who can demonstrate real customer focus when delivering their services.

A housing provider could include a specific scored questions about the contractor's experience as part of selection stage and include within this specific reference to domestic abuse prevention. Questions may include asking for examples of the contractor's approach to domestic abuse prevention, including what types of training its employees may have undertaken and any anonymised "case studies".

Another way of including Domestic Abuse prevention within these selection questions is to include this within questions about resident focus, such as requesting demonstrable experience of how the works/service are delivered in a resident focussed way. This could include a request for details of customer focus groups, communication with diverse groups of residents, dealing with vulnerable residents and spotting domestic abuse issues more generally.

Domestic abuse is likely to form part of a wider customer focus question asked (rather than stand-alone questions), but it could be stated that a higher score could be given to contractors who can show they have taken extra steps towards protecting customers in delivering their services, including preventing domestic abuse and other safeguarding issues such as dementia support.

### Example questions:

What training do you provide trade staff in spotting the signs of Domestic Abuse and how to report it?

Provide examples of where a member of staff has raised concerns about domestic abuse within a home when carrying out their duties

Other than in individual cases, what examples can your organisation provide to highlight a proactive approach in raising awareness of Domestic Abuse (i.e. campaigns etc.)?

Does your organisation track the number of domestic abuse referrals made to clients? If so – how many each year and how is this monitored?

Describe your experience of delivering services in a resident focussed way, including your approach to safeguarding and preventing domestic abuse.

### *Added value at tender stage*

Housing providers may also wish to include a specific reference to domestic abuse prevention following the selection questionnaire stage and at the tender stage.

Like at the selection questionnaire stage, the housing provider may wish to include a specific focussed question on this issue or may prefer to include domestic abuse prevention within questions surrounding customer focus or "added value".

As with the selection stage, where domestic abuse prevention is to be included within "added value" questions the housing provider may say that a higher score will be given to bidders who can show a range of initiatives to support and protect residents including in particular in relation to domestic abuse prevention.

### Example questions:

What added value will you provide in the delivery of the services which will benefit our residents? This might include programmes for resident employment/training, prevention of domestic abuse and/or resident forums.

How will you deliver the services in a resident focussed way? Include details of your approach to resident engagement, safeguarding and prevention of domestic abuse.

Have you formally committed to supporting action to prevent domestic abuse in social housing e.g. through signing up to the Chartered Institute of Housing's Make a Stand Supporters Pledge or a similar initiative? How do you apply this commitment in practice?

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This guidance was produced in conjunction with the Social Housing Domestic Abuse Steering Group.

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- Chartered Institute of Housing
- Gentoo
- Hastoe Housing Association
- Homes in Sedgemoor
- LiveWest
- MD Group
- SOHA Housing
- The Guinness Partnership
- United Welsh
- Westward Housing
- WISH
- Yarlington Housing Group