

## POLICY REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT PANEL REPORT

REPORT TO:	Environment and Community Panel		
DATE:	22 <sup>nd</sup> March 2022		
TITLE:	Safe in Accommodation Strategy for Norfolk 2021-2024		
TYPE OF REPORT:	Update		
PORTFOLIO(S):	Cllr Sam Sandell		
REPORT AUTHOR:	Nikki Patton		
OPEN/EXEMPT	Open	WILL BE SUBJECT TO A FUTURE CABINET REPORT:	Yes

### **REPORT SUMMARY/COVER PAGE**

#### **PURPOSE OF REPORT/SUMMARY:**

In December 2021 Norfolk County Council considered and adopted the Safe in Accommodation Strategy for Norfolk 2021-2024 in accordance with Part 4, Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

The purpose of this report is to update members on the requirements of The Domestic Abuse Act 2021, the recently adopted Norfolk County Council Safe in Accommodation Strategy and the intention to take a report to Cabinet to endorse the County's Strategy.

Endorsement of the Strategy by the Councils Cabinet is necessary as it will inform the Councils Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-2024 and approaches to wider areas of work in relation to Domestic Abuse and ensuring that in housing services all is being done to support victim-survivors of domestic abuse.

#### **KEY ISSUES:**

The Domestic Abuse Bill was passed and became an Act in law on 29th April 2021. The Act will help transform the response to Domestic Abuse, helping to prevent offending, protect victim-survivors and ensure they and their children have safe accommodation and support when they need it.

The Act includes within Part 4 (Sections 57-61) new duties on Tier 1 local authorities (County Council) in England relating to the provision of support for victims and their children residing within relevant safe accommodation and a duty on Tier 2 authorities (Borough Council) to co-operate with Tier 1 authorities.

Domestic Abuse is a leading cause of homelessness for adult and child victim-survivors. The Safe in Accommodation Strategy for Norfolk 2021-2024 outlines how Norfolk County Council, as a Tier 1 authority, will work with Tier 2 authorities (Borough Council), and key stakeholders (including victim-survivors) to meet the new duties to provide support in safe accommodation for both adults and children in Norfolk.

#### **OPTIONS CONSIDERED:**

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 introduces statutory requirements for tier 1 authorities and necessitates the Borough Councils cooperation and the changes that are made to housing and homelessness legislation directly impact our work.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

To support the Safe in Accommodation Strategy for Norfolk 2021-2024 being presented to the Councils Cabinet.

To support and recognise the Councils membership on the Norfolk Domestic Abuse Partnership Board.

To support the Housing Department in undertaking the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) Accreditation over the next 2-3 years.

#### REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Council has specific statutory duties in relation to reducing homelessness and the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. Under the Act the Council has a duty to support the Tier 1 Authority . The Act requires tier 2 local authorities in each area to cooperate with the upper tier authority so far as reasonably practicable, when requested to do so.

The Strategy and action plan will inform where appropriate the Councils Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and other relevant policies.

## **REPORT DETAIL**

### **1.Introduction**

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 came into force on 29 April 2021. The Act includes a wide range of provisions intended to raise awareness and understanding about the devastating impact of domestic abuse on victims and their families. The Act places a duty on upper tier local authorities in England to provide accommodation-based support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other safe accommodation. The Act does not transfer any responsibilities for housing from housing authorities to upper tier local authorities. The Act requires the tier 2 local authorities in each area to cooperate with the upper tier authority so far as reasonably practicable, when requested to do so. In order to deliver this duty, upper tier local authorities must carry out a needs assessment and develop and publish a strategy. The Strategy is in response to this new duty on Norfolk County Council (NCC) as a Tier 1 authority and in particular to Part 4 of the Act : Safe Accommodation and Support.

### **2. The Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment**

NCC in collaboration with the seven Local Authorities across Norfolk, other statutory agencies and key partners/ service providers in relation to Domestic Abuse services undertook a needs assessment to inform the Strategy. Further details of the needs assessment are referenced in the Strategy.

### **3. Safe in Accommodation Strategy for Norfolk 2021-2024**

The 5 core objectives of the Strategy;

1. Increase the amount and flexibility of safe accommodation
2. Improve engagement with victim-survivors of DA
3. Improve the quality of support and safe accommodation
4. Support children in safe accommodation
5. Improved intelligence

The Strategy outlines how all agencies will work collaboratively to provide victim-survivors with a range of flexible options, that enable them to remain safe at home or access suitable alternative safe accommodation and support if that is what is needed and wanted.

Whilst the Borough Council will support all of the objectives of the Strategy, objectives 1,3 and 5 are areas that the Council will have particular input in.

#### **4. Norfolk Domestic Abuse Partnership Board**

Tier 1 Local authorities must create a Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board with a minimum representative membership set out in the Act. The role of the Partnership Board is to support and advise the local authority in the delivery of the duty. Local authorities must monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the Strategy and report back annually to central government. Tier 2 Authorities have a duty to support this data collection and reporting back to Government.

Norfolk have established the Norfolk Domestic Abuse Partnership Board. The Borough Council are a board member with the Housing Strategy Manger attending monthly meetings. The core focus of the board is on the arrangements and actions needed to implement the housing and support elements of the Domestic Abuse Act and ensure a multi-agency approach to the understanding of accommodation and support needs of all victims of domestic abuse (male, female and children).

#### **5. Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance -**

In 2014, Standing Together co-founded the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) in partnership with Peabody and Gentoo Housing Associations. It is a national initiative to improve the housing sector's response to domestic abuse. The work focuses on social housing and private rented sectors. DAHA offer an accreditation process for housing providers (local authorities, housing associations, homelessness services, to support housing services in responding to Domestic Abuse. It is a UK benchmark for how housing services and providers should respond to Domestic Abuse. Norfolk County Council have provided funding to all Local Authorities across Norfolk to support gaining the accreditation. The process involves, training, awareness raising, review and inclusion of best practice in relation to policies, procedures, protocols and ongoing learning. The Borough Council seeks to commence the accreditation as soon as possible.

#### DAHA

‘Our accreditation framework includes 8 priority areas that considers an organisation's operations and delivers safe and effective interventions in domestic abuse.’

‘It builds in processes that help guide staff to adequately address the needs of survivors and hold abusers to account.’

#### **6. Priority Need**

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 gives those who are homeless as a result of domestic abuse priority need for accommodation secured by the local authority.

[Section 188\(1\) of the 1996 Act](#) requires housing authorities to secure that accommodation is available for an applicant if they have reason to believe that the applicant **may** be homeless, eligible for assistance and have a priority need. Categories are set out within the Housing Act 1996 and Homelessness Code of Guidance. The Domestic Abuse Act extends priority need to victims who are homeless as a result of domestic abuse and eligible for assistance.

Prior to this change in the Act Local Authorities had to consider whether someone experiencing domestic abuse was vulnerable as a result of their abuse in order to access accommodation secured by the local authority.

These changes have implications for the Councils Housing Allocations Policy and will be set out in a separate report.

## **7. Corporate Priorities**

The emerging Corporate Business Plan identifies a key ambition of improving social mobility and inclusion, with a commitment to supporting residents to access support and services they need. The Councils Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-2024 sets out a clear objective and action of increasing a range of temporary accommodation to meet identified needs and providing appropriate refuge accommodation.

## **8. Financial Implications**

The Ministry of Housing, **Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) – now the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)**, committed a three-year settlement for the delivery of the Part 4 duty for both Tier 1 and Tier 2 authorities (New Burdens funding). Norfolk County Council and the district and borough councils across Norfolk each received additional funding. For 2021/22 the Borough Council received **£32,863 to support implementing additional provisions within the Act.**

It is anticipated that there will be no financial resources over and above existing budgets required in 2021/2022.

## **9. Equal Opportunity Considerations**

The impacts of Domestic Abuse and homelessness can have a disproportionate impact on those with protected characteristics. In supporting to deliver this strategy effectively a positive impact should be delivered for those groups.

## **10. Consultation**

Norfolk County Council undertook a variety of stakeholder engagement and consultation when producing the strategy and in accordance with the requirements of the Act. Full details are contained within the NCC Cabinet report 6<sup>th</sup> Dec 2021. Ongoing consultation with victim-survivors is a key action in the Action Plan attached to the Strategy.

## **11. Conclusion**

Domestic Abuse is a leading cause of homelessness for adult and child victim-survivors. Local Authorities have both a moral and statutory duty to support victims-survivors of domestic abuse. The provisions and requirements set out in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and Safe in Accommodation Strategy for Norfolk 2021-2024 seek to ensure that we are doing all we can to support victims-survivors of domestic abuse.

## **12. Background Papers**

Support in Safe Accommodation Strategy for Norfolk 2021-2024

Norfolk County Council Cabinet Report 6<sup>th</sup> December 2021

Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-2024

[https://www.westnorfolk.gov.uk/downloads/download/911/homelessness\\_and\\_rough\\_sleeping\\_strategy](https://www.westnorfolk.gov.uk/downloads/download/911/homelessness_and_rough_sleeping_strategy)

