

## REPORT TO CABINET

<b>Open</b>		Would any decisions proposed :			
<b>Any especially affected Wards</b>	Mandatory/	Be entirely within Cabinet's powers to decide		YES	
	Discretionary /	Need to be recommendations to Council		NO	
	Operational	Is it a Key Decision		NO	
Lead Member: cllr Sandell E-mail: <a href="mailto:cllr.sam.sandell@west-norfolk.gov.uk">cllr.sam.sandell@west-norfolk.gov.uk</a>		Other Cabinet Members consulted:			
Lead Officer: Nikki Patton E-mail: <a href="mailto:Nikki.patton@west-norfolk.gov.uk">Nikki.patton@west-norfolk.gov.uk</a> Direct Dial:01553 616726		Other Members consulted: Homelessness & Housing Delivery Task Group			
Other Officers consulted: Duncan Hall					
Financial Implications YES	Policy/ Personnel Implications YES	Statutory Implications YES	Equal Impact Assessment YES	Risk Management Implications YES	Environmental Considerations YES

Date of meeting: **21<sup>st</sup> June 2022**

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

#### **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 seek Cabinet endorsement of the strategy.

#### **Recommendation**

To endorse Norfolk County Councils Safe in Accommodation Strategy for Norfolk 2021-2024 and note the requirements of the Domestic Abuse Bill, 2021

#### **Reason for Decision**

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. It will also ensure that the Council is fulfilling its role in supporting victim-survivors of domestic abuse.

#### **1 Background**

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. The Act does not transfer any responsibilities for housing from housing authorities to upper tier local 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

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.

### **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. See link in background papers.

The Needs Assessment identified the following gaps across Norfolk.

### **Extract from Strategy 2021-2024**

NODA have identified the following gaps in intelligence and/or provision in relation to DA and our ability to determine the types of services that may be needed:

- There is no specific safe accommodation provision for male survivors but as there is an under-recording of demand, either in terms of support or use of safe accommodation, we are unable to determine the amount of safe accommodation that may be required for male victim-survivors.
- LGBTQ+ groups are poorly represented in the data and it is recognised that many providers did not routinely collect the data. However, data provided by one refuge provider reports that 94% of survivors self-identify as heterosexual or straight.
- Complex needs including mental health and/or drug and alcohol dependency are recognised as being an issue in DA survivors and refuge service providers do not routinely collect this data. It is acknowledged that not all support providers of refuge accommodation are able to support those with high and complex needs and such referrals are declined on this basis. There is no data available to be able to say where these survivors are then supported.
- There is little information available for child and adult victim-survivors of DA in relation to physical or mental health and learning disabilities both from local police data and accommodation service data. It is recognised that data is not routinely collected by service providers.

- Norfolk has an older population compared to England. National data from the crime survey only samples individuals up to the age of 75 so there is a potential that older age groups are under-reported in both local and national estimates.
- There is a lack of data and/or regular recording of the types and amount of support children receive because of DA, whether living in the community or within safe accommodation as often different services and/or providers can be involved. Data that is available is from ad hoc audits.
- There is a lack of data on support services offered to children that have had to enter refuge accommodation. Qualitatively, one provider reports the support needs of children can be varied and support provided can be limited and depends on the type of accommodation and its location.
- There is some understanding around the reason for repeat referrals to MARACs in Norfolk, but further research is required.
- Norfolk is a largely rural county. Current data is aggregated and varies in robustness; this being the case, it is not possible to determine if there is a high level of unmet need in terms of accommodation and support in rural areas compared to urban areas for example.
- It is recognised that many of the providers do not routinely collect some of the data that was requested as part of the Needs Assessment.
- Because data in relation to DA is not detailed enough, it is not possible to make any meaningful conclusions in relation to cost and evaluation either to the public purse and/or social return on investment.

### **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. In recent months one new woman's refuge has been provided and work is under way to provide a further two self-contained safe accommodation units. We are working closely with NCC and specialist domestic abuse support provider to deliver these. The units are in response to the accommodation needs identified in the needs assessment specifically in relation to broadening the accommodation offer beyond refuge. Its responds directly to Action 2 and 3 set out in the Delivery Plan contained in the Strategy.

## **2 Options Considered**

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.

### **3 Policy Implications**

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.

### **4 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 2022/2023 the Borough Council received £32,891 to support implementing additional provisions within the Act. Additionally we have also received £9,610 New Burdens funding ring fenced for Domestic Abuse. This has been awarded in addition to the Homelessness Prevention Grant Housing Authorities receive each year to support homelessness prevention activities.

It is anticipated that there will be no financial resources over and above existing budgets required in 2022/2023.

### **5 Personnel Implications**

To support the objectives of the strategy and the Domestic Abuse Act a post is actively being considered. The Central Government funding detailed above will be used to support this.

### **6 Environmental Considerations**

Any new accommodation will be provided in accordance with building regulations and relevant planning policies.

### **7 Statutory Considerations**

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 introduces statutory requirements for tier 1 authorities and necessitates the Borough Councils cooperation as a tier 2 authority. The changes that are made to housing and homelessness legislation directly impact our work.

## **8 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)**

(Pre screening report template attached)

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.

A pre-screening Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed for the Strategy and is attached . It is summarised below:

a) Domestic abuse can happen to anyone, one in four women and one in six men will experience domestic abuse during their lifetime. However, the risks of serious harm are not spread evenly. Women are at much more risk of serious violence, and those with long-term health conditions, disabilities or mental health conditions at highest risk. Similarly abuse of parents by children is more commonly experienced by mothers than fathers and is more common among single parents

b) Gay and bisexual men experience more domestic abuse compared to those in heterosexual relationships

c) Intersectionality is defined as an analytical framework for understanding how aspects of a person's social and political identities combine to create different modes of discrimination and privilege. Examples of these aspects include gender, caste, sex, race, class, sexuality, religion, disability, physical appearance and height. Intersectionality identifies multiple factors of advantage and disadvantages

d) When tackling domestic abuse taking an intersectional approach in the provision of our services will aid in the mitigation of unconscious bias, aiming to address and prevent inequality

## **9 Risk Management Implications**

The risks of not supporting and implementing a strategy to tackle domestic abuse, include the risk in not fulfilling the new statutory duty, which is placed on Tier 2 local authorities, but they go much wider than this. Domestic abuse has a wide-ranging impact on public services across multiple agencies and is a leading cause of homelessness . If we do not improve our response to domestic abuse the risks include more demand on emergency and social housing, and wider increased demand on other statutory services such as social services (children services) health services and mental health in particular.

9.2 Implementing and delivering on the objectives of the strategy will help to reduce both the likelihood of these risks occurring and their impact on councils housing service.

## **10 Declarations of Interest / Dispensations Granted**

N/A

## 11 **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)

**Pre-Screening Equality Impact Assessment**

Borough Council of  
**King's Lynn & West Norfolk**



Name of policy/service/function	Safe in Accommodation Strategy for Norfolk 2021-2024				
Is this a new or existing policy/service/function?	Existing				
<p>Brief summary/description of the main aims of the policy/service/function being screened.</p> <p>Please state if this policy/service is rigidly constrained by statutory obligations</p>					
Question	Answer				
<p><b>1. Is there any reason to believe that the policy/service/function could have a specific impact on people from one or more of the following groups according to their different protected characteristic, for example, because they have particular needs, experiences, issues or priorities or in terms of ability to access the service?</b></p> <p>Please tick the relevant box for each group.</p> <p>NB. Equality neutral means no negative impact on any group.</p>		Positive	Negative	Neutral	Unsure
Age					
Disability					
Gender					
Gender Re-assignment					
Marriage/civil partnership					
Pregnancy & maternity					
Race					
Religion or belief					
Sexual orientation					
Other (eg low income)					

