

# Domestic Violence and Abuse Support in Safe Accommodation Strategy

Date: 17<sup>th</sup> November 2021

Report of: Director of Communities, Housing and Environment

Report to: Executive Board

Will the decision be open for call in?  Yes  No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?  Yes  No

## What is this report about?

### Including how it contributes to the city's and council's ambitions

- This report provides the Board with the Domestic Violence and Abuse Support in Safe Accommodation Strategy for approval by the Board. It outlines the partnership development process and the new regulatory framework for the development of the strategy.
- The local authority was required to publish a draft Domestic Violence and Abuse Support in Safe Accommodation Strategy by 25<sup>th</sup> October 2021 to meet the new statutory duty under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. The final strategy must be published by 5<sup>th</sup> January 2022.
- The Domestic Violence and Abuse Support in Safe Accommodation Strategy contributes towards the Council's Best City Plan objective for Safe, Strong Communities, keeping people safe from harm and protecting the most vulnerable.
- The strategy is also central to the Council's Homeless duties under the Domestic Abuse Act. It therefore contributes to the Housing objective focused on providing homes of the right quality, type and affordability in the right places and minimising homelessness.

## Recommendations

- a) The Board is asked to note the contents of this report and approve the Domestic Violence and Abuse Support in Safe Accommodation Strategy.
- b) The Board is asked to note the new regulatory context for this strategy and as a result the local authority will continue to work with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to respond to any amendments and changes to support the implementation of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.
- c) The Director of Communities, Housing and Environment will be responsible for implementing the strategy.

## **Why is the proposal being put forward?**

### **1 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021**

1.1 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (the Act) received Royal Assent, becoming law, on 29 April 2021. The Act aims to:

- Raise awareness and understanding about the devastating impact of domestic abuse on victims and their families.
- Further improve the effectiveness of the justice system in providing protection for victims of domestic abuse and bringing perpetrators to justice.
- Strengthen the support for victims of abuse by statutory agencies.

1.2 The Act places a statutory duty on tier one local authorities relating to the provision of support to victims of domestic abuse and their children residing within refuges and other safe accommodation. It also places a duty on each tier one local authority in England to:

- Appoint a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board which it will consult as it performs certain specified functions.
- Assess the need for accommodation-based domestic abuse support in their area for all victims or their children, including those who come from outside the area.
- Develop and publish a strategy for the provision of such support to cover their locality, having regard to the needs assessment.
- Give effect to the strategy (through commissioning / de-commissioning decisions).
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy.
- Report back to central government.
- Require the Secretary of State to produce statutory guidance, having consulted the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, local authorities and such as other persons as considered appropriate.
- Require local authorities to have regard to the statutory guidance in exercising their functions.

### **2 Current provision of Domestic Violence and Abuse Support in Safe Accommodation**

2.1 The current provision in Leeds that allows victims-survivors to access support in safe accommodation in Leeds is as follows:

- i) Specialist Domestic Violence and Abuse emergency accommodation and temporary accommodation
  - A commissioned women's refuge that is staffed 24 hours with adults and children's workers
  - Commissioned dispersed properties within the community for women, men and their children, support provided by the staff based at the refuge
  - 2 non-commissioned women's refuges staffed during working hours
- ii) A range of other commissioned supported housing services which can provide support directly and are able to link into the commissioned specialist community-based Domestic Violence and Abuse service.

- iii) An established Sanctuary scheme to provide security for those who wish to remain in their properties.

2.2 The main routes by which victims-survivors access these services are:

- Leeds Housing Options
- Leeds Domestic Violence Service 24-hour helpline
- Direct referral to housing providers.

2.3 Prior to the new Domestic Abuse Act and new statutory duties, Leeds City Council has annually invested approximately £1m in the provision of emergency accommodation, community-based services (i.e., IDVA team, community team, groups, drop-in and helpline) and sanctuary scheme support. This new investment will increase the current spending to approximately £2.5m in this financial year. This is supporting the delivery of the priorities outlined in the Support in Safe Accommodation Strategy.

### **3 Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board**

3.1 In preparation for the Domestic Abuse Act and the ambition of senior leaders to further integrate the city's partnership response to Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA), Safer Leeds (now the Safer, Stronger Communities Team) established a Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board (DALPB). This Board is now fully operational and has been engaged in the development of the funding proposals for the current financial year, development of the needs assessment and strategy/action plan and maintaining oversight of existing work streams.

3.2 The Board works collaboratively and has formed strategic alignments with Safeguarding Boards, the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Strategic Migration Board. The new strategic working arrangements have cognisance of the work of Women's Lives Leeds and the plans to develop a strategic response to Ending Violence Against Women and Girls, working within the context and opportunity of the West Yorkshire Mayor's Pledge on this issue.

3.3 The Board is supported by the Domestic Abuse Voice and Accountability Forum (DAVA) – a group of 40+ third sector agencies who deliver support to DVA victims-survivors either as specialist providers or providers for whom DVA is part of the needs of their service users. The DAVA acts as a critical friend to the DALPB offering support and challenge. It will have a quality assurance role in relation to equality issues. As this Forum evolves it will ensure that the Board is fully apprised of the views of victims-survivors and their families and that it uses this knowledge in delivering the strategy. The Board is grateful for the leadership from local third sector partners to ensure the voice of victims-survivors is well heard and responded to as part of the developing leadership arrangements in Leeds. The DAVA leadership is reflected in the new DALPB.

### **4 DVA Housing Needs Assessment**

4.1 The Needs Assessment focussed on gathering three sets of information:

- Contributions from a range of victims-survivors and their children.
- Qualitative data from the third sector, statutory agencies and relevant Boards.
- Numerical data and narrative from relevant services.

4.2 A range of partners were involved in the process and have contributed to shaping the scope of the assessment and to gathering and collating the information from a range of sources. The Housing Needs Assessment was used to inform the strategy.

## **5 Develop and publish a strategy for the provision of such support**

5.1 The Support in Safe Accommodation Strategy was developed through a multi-agency group. The former Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and now the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) issued guidance to enable Local Authorities to carry out their duties under the Act. The strategy has been directly informed by the DLUHC guidance and the needs assessment. The group also worked with colleagues from across West Yorkshire to share learning around this new statutory framework. The DALPB had strategic oversight of developments at key stages and there were targeted discussions with DALPB Board members.

5.2 One of the aspirations when producing the strategy was to ensure it would be succinct, readable, accessible, speak to victims-survivors and with their voice at the heart of it. There was extensive consultation through the agencies represented on the DAVA who enabled conversations to take place with victims-survivors in one-to-one sessions and via support groups. A service user panel meeting was held and attended by women from culturally diverse backgrounds, across a broad age range and at different points in their recovery journey – some were still in refuge and some were several years from their experiences of DVA. This meeting gave the opportunity to “sense-check” the strategy and to confirm that it reflected their experiences and needs. The views of victims-survivors are shown throughout the strategy document; names have been changed to protect the confidentiality and safety of those who contributed.

5.3 Separate conversations were held with male victims-survivors and with the services that support them, and their views are also reflected throughout the document.

5.4 The DALPB has approved the strategy. Whilst it has been developed in partnership, the responsibility for the strategy is with the Local Authority and it is presented here to the Executive Board for approval.

## **6 Giving effect to the strategy, and monitoring and evaluating its effectiveness**

6.1 In March 2021, Leeds was allocated £1.8 million by the MHCLG to fund the duty to provide accommodation-based support to victims-survivors and their children, with an expectation that it would be committed to deliver on the duty within the current financial year.

6.2 This strategy will enable the Local Authority (with support from the DALPB) to allocate the New Burdens funding received from the MHCLG this year and funding to be received from the DLUHC in future years.

6.3 Whilst there is an expectation that funding support will continue in recognition of the statutory burden, at this stage specific detail is unknown. As we look to enhance our capacity and capability to support victims-survivors of domestic violence and abuse, we will be cognisant of financial envelopes and liaison with colleagues in finance and other relevant stakeholders and the need to acknowledge the financial context in which the Local Authority is likely to be

operating in the medium term. We will continue to liaise with colleagues in finance as more information becomes available.

6.4 As the funding was allocated by the Government in parallel to the strategy being developed, the DALPB approved an approach to allocating the funding in an open and transparent manner, using existing commissioning needs information. This approach was confirmed with MHCLG/DLUHC through their peer support workshop arrangements. Safer and Stronger Communities Team and the Adults and Health Commissioning Team completed a process of engagement with partners and victims-survivors and an analysis of current presenting need in safe accommodation and developed a set of support to be funded in this current year which were approved by Director of Communities, Housing and Environment in July 2021. These include:

- a) Enhancing the support at current specialist refuge and dispersed accommodation commissioned and non-commissioned.
- b) Enhancing sanctuary scheme support for adults and children.
- c) Enhance support for DVA victims-survivors living in other supported housing services.
- d) Enabling the LA to carry out its additional duties under the Act.
- e) An allocation to allow more time for providers who are new to this area to develop proposals and partnerships linked to safe accommodation models.

6.5 This provision is additional to the arrangements that are currently in place to provide accommodation and support to victims-survivors in Leeds.

6.6 In future years, the Local Authority will have access to the needs assessment and strategy to inform decisions relating to the allocation of funding to give further effect to the implementation of the strategy.

6.7 A multi-agency working group has been established to produce an action plan and performance framework to accompany the strategy. This will ensure effective monitoring and evaluation of the strategy and the allocated funding and appropriate and timely reporting to central government.

6.8 The timescales set by the DLUHC in their guidance were ambitious. A deadline of 31st October 2021 was set for completing the needs assessment and then publishing the strategy. This was later changed to a deadline of 25th October 2021 for a draft version of the strategy and 5th January 2022 for the final version to be published. The DALPB took the decision to focus on Support in Safe Accommodation first and then produce a more holistic partnership DVA strategy to enable more time to be given to community consultation and co-production activity. This approach has ensured that the Local Authority is meeting its statutory duties through the publication of the Support in Safe Accommodation strategy (via the LCC website) and gives a stable platform on which to build when developing the wider strategy over the next year.

## 7 What impact will this proposal have?

**Wards affected: All**

Have ward members been consulted?  Yes  No

The Deputy Leader and Executive Board Member for Resources is the Chair of the DALPB; two other councillors (Deputy Executive Member and a Member of Safer Leeds Executive) are also on that Board and have been consulted on this proposal.

7.1 This strategy will ensure that the most vulnerable have access to support in safe accommodation to enable them to move on with their lives. DVA is a cause and consequence of inequality so the provision of accommodation-based support to this group, will help to address these challenges. The strategy addresses the challenges faced by groups with protected characteristics, especially those from culturally diverse communities by recognising the additional barriers they face in disclosing abuse and accessing support.

7.2 The new enhanced Sanctuary Support Scheme will enable many more victims-survivors to remain in their homes and to minimise the trauma and negative consequences that are an inevitable part of moving to a safe place. The Sanctuary scheme has been very effective over many years providing security measures to victims-survivors in their homes (regardless of tenure) and it is now being enhanced by the provision of a multi-agency team of support workers. The team will ensure that victims-survivors are offered practical and emotional support. It includes workers who are able to address the support needs of many groups including LGBT+ communities, culturally diverse communities and male victims-survivors.

7.3 An Equality, Diversity, Cohesion and Integration Impact Assessment has been completed and is appended to this report.

## **8 What consultation and engagement has taken place?**

8.1 The agencies represented on the DAVA were asked to engage with their service users to gather their views on the need for support in safe accommodation. This was done through one-to-one conversations with trusted support workers and by discussion at existing support groups for female DVA victims-survivors in the city. A service user panel meeting was held in September to further ensure that the draft version of the strategy reflected the views and needs of those victims-survivors. This was attended by several women from culturally diverse backgrounds at different stages of their recovery journey. The views of all the women consulted are reflected throughout the strategy.

8.2 A separate set of conversations were held with male victims-survivors and with the services that support them, and their views are also reflected throughout the document.

8.3 A practitioner "Call for Evidence" was launched in June 2021 and this gave the opportunity for services in Leeds to contribute to understand the level of need for support in safe accommodation in the city.

8.4 It has been recognised through this process, that further development and support will be needed to nurture and develop the opportunities for victims-survivors to fully contribute to the ongoing developments in the city. A proposal is in development to support this strand of activity and to expand the range of voices contributing to the process.

8.5 It was not possible to safely consult with children who have been affected by DVA in the timescales that were laid down by government. Many of the agencies who contributed to the call for evidence, were able to articulate the experiences of and challenges faced by children and young people. The intention is that the partnership will work with Children's Services partners to develop safe ways of gathering views from children and young people.

8.6 The DALPB has an extensive membership and includes elected member representation from the relevant Executive Members and the Shadow Executive Member. The DALPB has also reported to the Safer Leeds Executive to share issues and progress.

## **9 What are the resource implications?**

9.1 As outlined at 6.1, the Local Authority has received funding of £1.8 million in 21/22 with allocations in future years subject to the Comprehensive Spending Review. The Local Authority has a statutory responsibility to ensure funding is allocated in line with the strategy presented here and the guidance issued by DLUHC.

## **10 What are the legal implications?**

10.1 This strategy enables the Local Authority to meet its statutory duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

## **11 What are the key risks and how are they being managed?**

11.1 There are no immediate key risks associated with this report however, there is a risk that Government funding may change due to the Comprehensive Spending Review process and as a result any new contracts are for 12 months subject to the new funding model being agreed.

## **12 Does this proposal support the council's three Key Pillars?**

Inclusive Growth       Health and Wellbeing       Climate Emergency

12.1 This strategy supports the Health and Wellbeing Strategy's priority that: *"To be a healthy city, our environment must promote positive wellbeing. This means Leeds houses are affordable, warm, secure, and support independent living."* The Support in Safe Accommodation Strategy directly addresses the issues around providing safe accommodation to those people and their children who are affected by Domestic Violence and Abuse.

## **Options, timescales and measuring success**

### **13 What other options were considered?**

13.1 The DLUHC provided guidance (which later became statutory regulations) relating to how to conduct the needs assessment and produce the strategy document. Our partnership arrangements were already considering a refresh of the strategic approach in Leeds. There was a discussion with Board members, and it was agreed that to meet the deadlines within the now statutory guidance, it would be preferable to develop a standalone Support in Safe Accommodation Strategy. This enabled the council to ensure it would meet its statutory duty to produce the strategy and more importantly to begin to give effect to that strategy through its commissioning decisions.

### **14 How will success be measured?**

14.1 The DLUHC will require an annual return from each Local Authority showing how the funding has been spent.

14.1 Safer Stronger Communities will work with the DALPB members to establish an action planning group to develop the action plan and performance framework, and this will be reported to the DALPB in line with requirements of the Act.

14.2 As the Service User Panel is developed, there will be opportunities to gather their views on the success of the strategy.

## **15 What is the timetable for implementation?**

15.1 The allocation of funding for 2021/22 has already been approved and is being implemented. Future funding will be determined by the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review and will be announced by the end of the year. At this stage, DLUHC have been unable to confirm if funding will be announced each year or whether there will be an allocation for several years. Planning to allocate future years funding will continue when the amount of the allocation is known.

15.2 The draft Support in Safe Accommodation Strategy was published on the Leeds City Council website on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2021 as required by the changed Government guidance and after approval by the DALPB at its meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021. The new strategy will be adopted following approval by this Board and meet the statutory deadline of 5<sup>th</sup> January 2022.

15.3 The Executive Board are asked to note that the DALPB are developing a holistic early intervention and prevention Domestic Abuse Partnership Strategy over the next 12 months and this development will incorporate the annual review of the Support in Safe Accommodation Strategy for 2022/23.

## **Appendices**

16 DVA Support in Safe Accommodation Strategy.

17 DVA Support in Safe Accommodation EDCI Impact Assessment form.

## **Background papers**

18 None.