

CABINET
16 JULY 2024

HOUSING SERVICES DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY

Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Matthew Roche, Health and Housing Portfolio

Responsible Director - Elizabeth Davison, Group Director of Operations

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To approve the Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy 2024-2029.

Summary

2. Housing Services recognises the harm domestic abuse can cause within our homes and communities. Domestic abuse is often a hidden problem, but we want all our tenants and household members to be safe from the impact of domestic abuse.
3. The Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy 2024-2029 at **Appendix 1** sets out our commitment to tackle domestic abuse in our homes and how we will aim to manage and support any cases. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places new duties on local authorities to ensure that victims of domestic abuse and their children can access the right support in safe accommodation, when they need it. Housing Services plays an important role in tackling domestic abuse, being well placed to recognise the signs and support victims and survivors.
4. Consultation was undertaken in May 2024 with our Tenants Panel, Public Health, and local domestic abuse charities (Harbour and Family Help), with full support given to the proposed Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy.
5. This policy was considered by Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee on 19 June 2024, who agreed its onward submission for approval by Cabinet.

Recommendations

6. It is recommended that Cabinet:
 - (a) Consider the contents of this report.
 - (b) Approve the Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy at Appendix 1.

Reasons

7. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:
- (a) The Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy ensures we have a clear approach to supporting victims of domestic abuse within our homes.
 - (b) The Regulator of Social Housing’s new Consumer Standards from April 2024, places a duty on social housing landlords to work co-operatively with other agencies tackling domestic abuse and enable tenants to access appropriate support and advice.
 - (c) The adoption of a formal Domestic Abuse Policy is one of the ways to demonstrate how we will achieve this.

Elizabeth Davison
Group Director of Operations

Background Papers

- (i) Regulator of Social Housing Consumer Standards

Anthony Sandys: Extension 6926

S17 Crime and Disorder	Housing Services will work with the Police and other agencies to tackle domestic abuse within our Council homes
Health and Wellbeing	Tackling domestic abuse within our Council homes will have a positive impact on the health and well-being of victims and survivors
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There is no impact
Diversity	This policy supports the promotion of diversity amongst our Council tenants
Wards Affected	All wards with Council housing
Groups Affected	Council tenants and leaseholders
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
Council Plan	This report supports the Council plan to ensure we are able to provide our tenants with good quality, safe housing
Efficiency	There are no implications
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

8. Darlington Borough Council provides over 5,300 high quality homes for local residents. Housing Services recognises the harm domestic abuse can cause within our homes and communities. Domestic abuse is often a hidden problem, but we want all our tenants and household members to be safe from the impact of domestic abuse.
9. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places new duties on local authorities to ensure that victims of domestic abuse and their children can access the right support in safe accommodation, when they need it. Housing Services plays an important role in tackling domestic abuse, being well placed to recognise the signs and support victims and survivors.
10. The Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy 2024-2029 at Appendix 1 sets out the following aims:
 - (a) Ensure that all staff, partner agencies and contractors understand domestic abuse and give a consistent service when offering guidance and support.
 - (b) Support survivors of domestic abuse and ensure that they and their families are provided with the stability and security they need and deserve.
 - (c) Treat all disclosures of abuse seriously and give advice and assistance as a priority.
 - (d) Work with statutory and voluntary organisations to support survivors, and take action against perpetrator's tenancies, where it is safe and appropriate to do so.
 - (e) Ensure all staff are trained in line with their roles and responsibilities and are proactive in looking for indicators of domestic abuse, so that it is identified at the earliest possible opportunity, in every case.
 - (f) Ensure staff understand the role they can play in tackling domestic abuse and to develop a consistent approach across Housing Services.
 - (g) Ensure staff are trained to deal with disclosures of domestic abuse effectively.
 - (h) Act on all reports of domestic abuse and take appropriate action in all cases where an adult or child is identified as being at risk due to domestic abuse.
 - (i) Support survivors to make decisions around their housing needs, whether they wish to remain in their home or move to a new home.
 - (j) Signpost perpetrators of domestic abuse, who recognise and seek to change their behaviour, to agencies, including a Multi-Agency Task and Co-ordination (MATAC) referral, who can offer them support to prevent the abuse reoccurring.
 - (k) Raise awareness of the signs and impacts of domestic abuse to our tenants, staff and contractors, as well as how to report it.

Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) Consumer Standards

11. The RSH has published new consumer standards from April 2024. Under these new standards is a section specifically relating to how social housing landlords are to work co-operatively with other agencies tackling domestic abuse and enable tenants to access appropriate support and advice.
12. Specifically, the new standards state:
 - (a) Registered providers must have a policy for how they recognise and effectively respond to cases of domestic abuse.
 - (b) Registered providers must co-operate with appropriate local authority departments to support the local authority in meeting its duty to develop a strategy and commission services for victims of domestic abuse and their children within safe accommodation.
13. Our Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy will help us demonstrate how we will achieve these new standards.

Outcome of Consultation

14. Consultation was undertaken in May 2024 with our Tenants Panel, Public Health, Harbour and Family Help, with full support given to the proposed Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy.