



London Borough of Enfield

Report Title	Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy
Report to	Cabinet
Date of Meeting	17th January 2024
Cabinet Member	Cllr Savva, Cabinet member for Social Housing
Executive Director / Director	Joanne Drew, Strategic Director of Housing and Regeneration
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Ward(s) affected	ALL
Key Decision Number	KD 5674
Classification	Part 1 Public

Purpose of Report

1. This report seeks approval of the new Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy for publication and implementation.

Recommendations

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| 1. To approve the Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy 2023-2026 |
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Background and Options

2. The new Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy explains the rights of all Enfield residents to access safe accommodation away from abuse. It sets out the roles and responsibilities of Enfield Council staff, contractors, sub-contractors and their agents in response to a disclosure of domestic abuse. It describes our commitment to promote early help and our approach to provide co-ordinated tailored support for victims/survivors and/or their children. The policy applies to Enfield Council tenants and Enfield residents at risk of homelessness who access support from our Housing Services, regardless of their tenure.
3. The policy has been informed by the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation framework, which is the Government-recognised

domestic abuse accreditation service for the housing sector. It has also been informed by a review of our procedures and our performance, input from professionals across council services working to support victims and survivors of domestic abuse, engagement with residents, including those with lived experience of domestic abuse; and an equality impact assessment. We have also benchmarked with other social housing providers for best practice.

4. The policy outlines our principles to prioritise safety, be non-judgemental, be person centred, amplify voices of victims, understand intersectionality and work towards a coordinated community response. Our principles enable us to provide services that are respectful, responsive and co-ordinated.
5. A targeted 10-week consultation was carried out between October and December 2023 and was published on our website, promoted at Customer Voice, shared with council tenants and leaseholders, promoted to Enfield residents receiving support from domestic abuse charity Solace and included in publications sent out to tenants and leaseholders.
6. We had 77 responses to the consultation. Of those, the largest majority were Enfield Council housing tenants at 65%, followed by Enfield Council housing leaseholders at 15.6% and Enfield residents (not in council housing) at 10.4%. Over half (53.6%) of the 77 respondents reported having experienced domestic abuse. Overall, 85% of all respondents agreed with our approach. More than half (39) of the 77 respondents agreed 'a great deal' with our approach and 47.4% of those had experienced domestic abuse. A further 9 respondents agreed 'to some extent' and 75% of those had experienced domestic abuse. The consultation will inform the implementation of the policy and we will ensure staff are appropriately trained and use a person-centred approach to support those who experience domestic abuse.
7. The new policy forms part of our work to gain accreditation for The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA). Obtaining accreditation enhances how housing providers interact with victim/survivors and strengthens the local area's coordinated community response to domestic abuse.

Preferred Option and Reasons For Preferred Option

8. There were 4075 domestic abuse incidents in Enfield in the 12-month period to September 2023, an increase of 1.3% on the previous year. Domestic abuse violence with injury offences have also increased in Enfield by 9.2% from 956 between October 2021 and September 2022 to 1044 between October 2022 and September 2023. Over the same period domestic abuse incidents and domestic abuse violence with injury offences have increased by 0.7% and 5.5% respectively in London.
9. 1,470 domestic abuse incidents involving Enfield council housing tenants have been recorded on our housing management systems between April and October 2023

10. Enfield's multi agency risk assessment conference (MARAC), where partners meet to discuss and share information on the highest risk domestic abuse cases with an aim to safeguard victims, examines over 500 cases each year. Up to May 2023, 262 cases have been discussed at MARAC, with 71 repeat referrals (27.1% of cases).
11. Domestic abuse is an increasing reason for homelessness¹ with studies showing up to 63% of victims having rent arrears that led to a Notice of Possession. Furthermore 40% of all homeless women state domestic abuse as a contributing factor and 90% of young people leaving home do so because of family conflict including witnessing domestic violence or being a victim of physical or sexual abuse.²
12. At least a fifth (18%) of children in domestic abuse households are injured as a result of the abuse³
13. The new policy is based on research and best practice, including the criteria for DAHA accreditation, and has been informed by consultation with residents and a robust equality impact assessment. It is therefore the preferred option for our future approach to supporting victims and survivors of domestic abuse.

Relevance to Council Plans and Strategies

14. Our Council Plan 2023-26 sets out our priorities for supporting residents to live happy, healthy and safe lives. This includes our priority for strong, healthy and safe communities where we improve feelings of safety and support victims of domestic abuse. The Plan also includes our priority for supporting thriving children and young people by keeping them safe and in secure and appropriate accommodation. A robust domestic abuse and housing policy will support us on delivering on these priorities. The policy will also contribute toward our delivery of the Safer Strong Communities Board Community Safety Plan 2022-2025.

Financial Implications

15. This Housing service domestic abuse policy explains the rights of all Enfield residents to access safe accommodation away from abuse. It sets out how Enfield Council staff, contractors, sub-contractors and their agents are expected to respond to a disclosure of domestic abuse. The policy applies to Enfield Council Housing tenants and Enfield residents who access support from our Housing Advisory Service, regardless of their tenure, and is for adults and children affected by domestic abuse.

¹ https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/240459/cr10198_domesticabusebill_appg_report_2019_aw_web.pdf

² <https://www.standingtogether.org.uk/housing>

³ Caada (2014), In Plain Sight: Effective help for children exposed to domestic abuse: 2nd national policy report. Bristol: Caada.

16. There are no specific budget requests within the policy and set out in the report. Any future budgetary impact to budgets as a result of this policy will be subject to HRA resources and governance approvals.

Legal Implications

17. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places a duty on local authorities in England to provide accommodation-based support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other safe accommodation statutory duty on local authorities relating to the provision of support to victims of domestic abuse and their children residing within refuges and other safe accommodation.

18. The Duties placed on local authorities includes the following:

- To appoint a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board which it will consult as it performs certain specified functions.
- To 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.
- To develop and publish a strategy for the provision of such support to cover their locality, having regard to the needs assessment.
- To give effect to the strategy (through commissioning / de-commissioning decisions).
- To monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy.
- To report back to central government

19. A statutory guidance has been issued under Section 84 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. Section 84(4) of the 2021 Act requires persons exercising public functions, to whom the guidance relates, to have regard to the guidance in the exercise of those functions. The statutory guidance is intended to increase awareness and inform the response to domestic abuse. It also conveys standards and promotes best practice.

20. The above statutory duties are being complied with as confirmed in this report.

21. Finally, section 57(4) of the Domestic Abuse Act requires local authorities to consult the members of its Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board and to consult any other persons they consider appropriate before publishing a strategy (e.g policy). The Council is undertaking a consultation which is intended to be completed by 10 December 2023.

Equalities Implications

22. An equality impact assessment (EQIA) has been completed for this policy and is appended to this report. The EQIA concludes that there is no differential impact on any protected characteristic as a result of the implementation of this policy; and implementing the policy will have a positive impact on all protected groups, providing fair and equal treatment to all residents.

23. National and local data analysis shows an over representation of women and an over representation of disabled women as victims of domestic abuse. The majority of victims/survivors are white women and the majority of perpetrators are men. Nearly 60% of those accessing domestic abuse support services have children. The draft policy sets out a consistent person-centred approach to managing all disclosures of domestic abuse ensuring all victims are treated fairly. Due to the over representation of female and disabled female victims and high percentage of cases with children present in the household, the policy is expected to have a particularly positive impact on people who share these protected characteristics by improving how we respond to disclosures of abuse.
24. The policy includes a commitment to understand intersectionality – victims/survivors will have different experiences and may face barriers related to their identity and protected characteristics such as age, sex, gender, sexual orientation, religion or belief, disability, pregnancy and maternity, marital status and socio-economic status. We will respect and seek to fully understand individual differences, experiences and needs, enabling tailored services and the right support.
25. We ran a 10-week consultation on the draft policy which closed with 77 responses. The equalities questions were answered by 55 respondents. This included 42 female, 12 male and 1 respondent who preferred not to say. The analysis showed an over representation of female domestic abuse victims. Of the 55 who answered the question, 22 (40%) reported a disability. The analysis showed a slight over-representation of disabled victims of domestic abuse. We will use the results of the consultation to inform the implementation of our policy and continue to improve the service we offer.

HR and Workforce Implications

26. No direct workforce implications have been identified by this report. If a requirement for additional resource is identified to support the implementation of this policy, a separate proposal and supporting restructure report will need to be prepared in accordance with the Council's Principles for Managing Reorganisations. This will outline the resource required and the reporting structure.

HR advice will be sought prior in relation to the above point.

Environmental and Climate Change Implications

27. The policy is not expected to result in an adverse impact on the environment or an increase in energy consumption.

Public Health Implications

28. Domestic abuse has a detrimental impact on physical and mental health and wellbeing including poor mental health, increased stress and anxiety.

It can also cause those experiencing it to live in fear and have a lower quality of life.

29. Research shows 88% of high-risk victims experience multiple forms of abuse, including physical and sexual abuse, harassment and stalking and coercive control (jealous and controlling behaviours)⁴
30. The policy explains the rights of all Enfield residents to access safe accommodation away from abuse, our commitment to promote early help and our approach to provide co-ordinated tailored support for victims/survivors and/or their children to keep them away from harm.
31. Furthermore, the policy sets out how we will help victims with additional support needs by referring to relevant agencies which provide tailored support to protect their ongoing welfare.

Safeguarding Implications (draft for review)

32. The policy sets out our commitment to keep all our residents safe and in secure housing away from harm which may then in turn impact their ability to lead healthy lives and achieve positive lifelong outcomes.
33. Implementation of the policy will be subject to Enfield's safeguarding policies. Where welfare risks or concerns are identified during the course of an investigation these will be logged and procedures followed to ensure the safeguarding of all our residents. This will be the case whether the person involved is the victim of the disclosure or resident in the household.

Crime and Disorder Implications

34. We take a zero-tolerance approach to all forms of aggressive, threatening or violent behaviour. The Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy sets out our enforcement powers and how and when we will use these, in partnership with relevant statutory services such as the police services, to tackle cases of domestic abuse and prevent escalation or recurrence.

Procurement Implications

35. Any expenditure or contracts commissioned to support implementation of this policy must be in line with the Council's contract Procedure Rules.
36. Any contracts that support this policy must be effectively managed in line with the Council's contract management framework.

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Appendices

⁴ SafeLives (2015), Insights Idva National Dataset 2013-14. Bristol: SafeLives.

37. Draft Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy
38. Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy EQIA