

North Yorkshire County Council

Executive Member for Communication, Emergency Planning and Community Safety- Leader of the Council

26th April 2022

Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy

Report of the Assistant Director – (Policy, Partnerships and Communities)

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The Secretary of State has determined grant funding will be allocated for 2022/23 to North Yorkshire County Council to support victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other forms of safe accommodation.

This report aims to provide an update regarding the agreed strategy, delivery and use of the previous grant (2021/22), and seeks approval to accept the 2022/23 grant monies..

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (Part 4) introduced a new statutory duty upon Tier 1 local authorities to support victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other forms of Safe accommodation, the 'Safe Accommodation Duty'. The Act sets out definitions of what is meant by the terms 'safe accommodation' and 'support'. North Yorkshire County Council received grant funding in 2021/22 to deliver such support to victims and this report details the strategy and delivery of this support. Further grant funding is now available from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities for 2022/23.

3.0 Issues (Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Arrangements in North Yorkshire and City of York)

- 3.1 To support partners and communities the well-embedded commissioning arrangements for domestic abuse services sit across North Yorkshire and City of York. Originally the number of commissioned safe accommodation units was 42, consisting of refuge accommodation and dispersed units, in a blend of urban and rural localities. Dispersed accommodation is described as fully self-contained flats with support provided by our commissioned provider (IDAS- Independent Domestic Abuse Service), bespoke to the needs of the victim. The number of the units is increasing, by small numbers, as IDAS seek out opportunities for additional accommodation with private landlords and housing providers.
- 3.2 Gaining suitable accommodation has some challenges, during 2020/21 IDAS introduced the innovative approach of Safe Havens. Where victims and survivors live with a host family, for up to 2 months. IDAS provide training to a host family volunteer, which is consolidated with supporting the victim/ survivor in the community by specialist IDAS work. Again, during 2021/ 22 we saw a small uptake on this scheme, and this approach will continue to support delivery across our geography.

3.3 In 2020/21 more than 120 female victims/ survivors of domestic abuse accessed refuge accommodation in North Yorkshire and York. (A small number of male victims accessed dispersed accommodation). Most people seeking accommodation were 25-34 years old and the majority had dependent children. Many domestic abuse victims/ survivors will move across the county and therefore local authority boundaries, to escape abuse. Of those from outside the county who accessed refuge accommodation in North Yorkshire and York, 19% were from a West Yorkshire local authority area, 25% were from a local authority area that does not closely border North Yorkshire and York.

4.0 Policy Implications- Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy (North Yorkshire and City of York)

4.1 In January 2022, in line with the requirements of the Domestic Abuse Act (2021), a joint North Yorkshire and City of York Safe Accommodation Strategy, following wide consultation and agreement with partners, was published. [NYCC & CYC Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy \(nypartnerships.org.uk\)](https://nypartnerships.org.uk)

4.2 A strategic needs assessment in 2021 identified areas for focus, shaping the areas that require grant funding and impact on our strong partnership and commissioning arrangements:

- Meeting the wider needs of victims, ensuring parity for all victims of domestic abuse, when seeking help, despite their own physical or mental health difficulties
- Ensuring that accommodation needs are met for all and ensuring our multi-agency workforce is skilled to support all
- Tracking the journey of local victims accommodated outside of North Yorkshire and York, to understand why they have left the area and to determine whether this is because services locally do not meet their needs or whether the risk of remaining within a locality to a perpetrator is too great
- Meeting the accommodation needs for victims in both rural and urban locations
- Achieving greater depth of data and a defined set of metrics across the area, to capture needs and inform service delivery with particular reference to those with mental health, addiction and other complex needs
- Driving the single hub approach to safe accommodation access, ensuring there is a fair and proportionate approach for all
- Promoting best practice, utilising the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation and affiliation status. DAHA encourages housing organisations to take a proactive approach to supporting survivors of domestic abuse through an established set of standards and accreditation process including training for professionals.

4.3 Based on the initial needs assessment a set of principles were agreed, below gives some detail of identified local action, to meet the local need, using the grant funding.

4.4 Authentic voice of victims/ survivors and their children to inform our partnership approaches. We will:

- Use funding to create capacity (a role) that will work directly with victims, survivors and their children, to gain an understanding of their experience of local services. This approach will be underpinned by academic research and learning from other geographical areas (e.g. West Yorkshire)
- Refresh the 'wider' Domestic Abuse Strategy, following direct consultation with victims, survivors and their families
- Commission the Youth Commission to review our communication methods and online presence, to enable wider, effective consultation with young people.

4.5 Effective pathways- supporting those with 'additional needs'. We will:

- Use funding to commission further needs assessments to understand demand and need across communities
- To commission and deliver a comprehensive training programme for our multi-agency workforce, to ensure effective engagement and delivery support takes place across communities
- Funding will be used to create a specific post within Horton Housing, that will specifically support our Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities
- Those with additional needs can find accessing appropriate safe accommodation a challenge, funding to increase capacity within the IDAS Hub, will ensure time and support for all.

4.6 **It's not 'safe accommodation' if support is not in place.** The funding will be used to continue and enhance the IDAS are commissioned to deliver

- 1 to 1 emotional and practical support, including support through any police investigation and/or court proceedings
- Specialist support for children and young people living in safe accommodation provision including 1 to 1, group and play sessions and educational activities
- Parenting support, advice and information including support to access local school placements
- Support with independent living skills to assist with move on from the domestic abuse accommodation
- Supported group work and peer support networks
- Resettlement support for a period of 3 months following move on from safe accommodation provision
- Funding will be used to enhance the Sanctuary Scheme that already exists to target harden properties, when victims wish to remain in their own properties. This will not simply be the hardware but also the support to fit equipment, minimising anxiety and keeping victims and families safe and secure in their own homes.

4.7 **Clear, consistent approaches must be in place across York and North Yorkshire** We will:

- Promote and develop with funding the single access hub entry. Victims and survivors will no longer need to approach different housing associations or authorities in order to seek support
- Use funding to become affiliated and accredited members of DAHA, striving to provide the best outcome around housing provisions.

4.8 **Meeting the needs of individuals, families and communities.** The clear action plan that operationally delivers on the strategy and spend of funding will indicate how we support all communities. Clear, consistent pathways will be developed for male victims, victims fleeing illegal cultural harms, ethnic minority victims and victims from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

4.9 **Understanding our need and demand for safe accommodation.** With our enhanced understanding and information of local need, we will commission, fund and adapt local service delivery.

4.10 **Ensuring we have effective partnership arrangements (Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board)** Funding has already been used to fund a dedicated domestic abuse post, within the safer communities team. Their role is to drive forward the strategy and delivery of actions, including developing local relationships, regional and national links, including reporting to DLUHC and the office of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner.

- Funding will be used in appointing an experienced independent chair, to chair the local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board, giving strategic direction and independent oversight and scrutiny to our arrangements.

5.0 Financial Implications

- 5.1 It is proposed that North Yorkshire County Council receives £1,044,653 for 2022/23. This is a revenue grant with no match funding required from NYCC. The Secretary of State has determined that to ensure that local authorities are able to deliver the duties under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act the grant funding for 2022/23 is to be paid based on the understanding that;
“The grant only covers revenue expenditure relating to the functions set out in Part 4 of the Act on Tier 1 Local Authorities relating to the provision of accommodation based support to victims of domestic abuse and their children and on Tier 2 Local Authorities to co-operate with Tier 1 Local Authorities as far as reasonably practicable.”
- 5.2 It has taken some time to implement the spend of 2021/22 grant, regular updates have been provided to partners and points of contact in DLUHC. This is mainly due to the national timescales given around publishing a strategy and procurement, legal and commissioning discussions. The national duty to publish a Safe Accommodation Strategy was delayed until January 2022. Significant work has now been undertaken to develop an action plan and we are anticipating heightened activity on using the grant funding.
- 5.3 One of the key current tasks is the commissioning of a detailed needs assessment, alongside an evaluation from DAHA on our local arrangements, these will strongly influence our next phase and the delivery and spend for 2022/23. Progress has been made during 2021/22 with our district council community safety and housing colleagues, the DAHA framework will further strengthen these arrangements.
- 5.4 A detailed action plan on action and spend is reviewed on a fortnightly basis, via a ‘Domestic Abuse Working Group.’ The spend so far for 2021/22 has been around staff costs, a part time business support and a dedicated domestic abuse post, within the Safer Communities team. The grant will also be used to cover our contribution to the current safe accommodation service, that we commission IDAS to deliver. NYCC contribute £531,204.16 annually. Our contacts with DLUHC are aware of our plans, current levels of spend and further reporting to DLUHC will take place in June 2022.

6.0 Legal Implications

- 6.1 Under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (Part 4) Tier 1 local authorities, which includes the County Council, have a statutory duty to support victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other forms of Safe accommodation, known as the ‘Safe Accommodation Duty’.
- 6.2 The receipt of this grant does not contravene the Subsidy Control regime. The Public Contracts Regulations 2015 will be complied with in any procurement relating to the expenditure by NYCC of the grant monies.

7.0 Equalities Implications

- 7.1 The agreed approaches within the Safe Accommodation Strategy aims to address the barriers identified to ensure all victims are able to access the support they need, when they need it. Support services will be provided in locations and ways in which are accessible to victims and their children. The Strategy has taken into account different adaptations into account e.g. translation and interpreter services and wheelchair access. As the services and strategy are delivered, when gaps in service are identified, commissioning leads will explore the use of training for services already commissioned to ensure needs are being

adequately met. For example, by offering training to support staff within the area to build confidence in supporting victims with particular needs.

8.0 Recommendation(s)

It is recommended that the Executive Member for Communication, Emergency Planning and Community Safety, in consultation with the Corporate Director, Strategic Resources and the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal and Democratic Services), agrees that the County Council accept the grant monies and delegate authority to the Corporate Director, Strategic Resources to accept the grant.

Report Author Odette Robson, Head of Safer Communities