

# North Yorkshire Council

## Care and Independence and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

28th March 2024

### Domestic Abuse Policy for the Housing Service – Approval of the Proposed New Policy Following Consultation

#### Report of the Corporate Director Community Development

#### 1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To present to the Committee the Domestic Abuse Policy for the Housing Service.
- 1.2 To seek approval from the Committee to adopt the Domestic Abuse Policy for the Housing Service. Approval of the policy will allow the policy to go to executive committee for approval.

#### 2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Council is a stock holding housing authority and is required to have a domestic abuse policy from 1st April 2024 in order to comply with the Regulator of Social Housing's updated Neighbourhood and Community Standard. This includes having a policy for how to recognise and respond effectively to domestic abuse. The proposed Domestic Abuse Policy for the Housing Service provides housing staff with guidance across all localities and will provide the public with information about how the Housing Service will support victims and survivors of domestic abuse.
- 2.2 Permission is sought to adopt the Domestic Abuse Policy for the Housing Service (**Appendix A**) as soon as possible.

#### 3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 North Yorkshire Council is working towards accreditation through the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance. This is a nationally agreed standard which housing associations and local authorities can attain to prove best practice. Work commenced in November 2022 to understand and adopt best practice, including developing and delivering bespoke domestic abuse training to the housing team. The accreditation requires that a domestic abuse policy is adopted and embedded within the Housing Service.
- 3.2 The Housing Service includes Landlord Services responsible for the current housing stock primarily located across the Selby, Harrogate, and Richmond localities. It is necessary to adopt a domestic abuse policy to set out how we will respond to tenants within council owned properties who are affected by domestic abuse.
- 3.3 The local authority has a duty to prevent and relieve homelessness. Domestic abuse can affect anyone and can be a cause of homelessness. We have a duty to provide free housing advice to anyone who approaches the council, and this proposed policy will provide guidance to staff who are approached by people affected by domestic abuse.
- 3.4 This policy will contribute towards meeting our Serious Violence Duty as it sets out how we will work with partner agencies to reduce and prevent serious violence.

- 3.5 Actions resulting from this policy will contribute towards the delivery of the Strategy 'Addressing Violence Against Women and Girls in North Yorkshire and City of York 2022-24'.
- 3.6 This policy links to the new North Yorkshire and City of York Domestic Abuse Strategy 2024-2028

#### **4.0 DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY FOR THE HOUSING SERVICE**

- 4.1 This proposed policy is a new policy developed by researching best practice.

#### **5.0 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN AND RESPONSES**

- 5.1 Consultation on the draft policy has been undertaken by sharing the document with our strategic partners who are part of the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board. Feedback was received from several partners including representatives from health, probation, our commissioned domestic abuse specialists, and housing associations.
- 5.2 We have consulted with and taken advice from the specialist national agency the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance.
- 5.3 We have consulted with key staff within the council, including specialists in safeguarding, public health, and staff with lived experience of domestic abuse.
- 5.4 We have consulted with local agencies who provide specialist support. We received and incorporated feedback from specialists in substance misuse.
- 5.5 We consulted with a local charity which enables peer support for people recovering from domestic abuse and amended the policy to include their valuable input.

#### **6.0 CONTRIBUTION TO COUNCIL PRIORITIES**

- 6.1 The policy contributes principally to the following Council priority:

**“People: People are free from harm and feel safe and protected”**

#### **7.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 7.1 As a provider of social housing it is a legal requirement to adopt a domestic abuse policy as set out in the updated Consumer Standards by the Regulator of Social Housing.
- 7.2 Whilst it is a regulatory requirement for housing providers to have a domestic abuse policy, the Regulator for Social Housing does not go into detail about the requirements of the policy. We therefore propose to adopt the best practice suggested by the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance which is endorsed in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 Statutory Guidance.

#### **8.0 IMPACT ON OTHER SERVICES/ORGANISATIONS**

- 8.1 Adoption of the policy could lead to an increased number of referrals to our commissioned domestic abuse services. These service providers, commissioners and other local partner agencies are aware and have been consulted on this policy. Any increased demand for service can be seen as positive because this will help to prevent future harm to victims and demand for other related services including health services.

#### **9.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 There are no anticipated financial implications associated to the adoption of this new policy. A comprehensive domestic abuse training program for the Housing Service is already in place funded through new burdens funding which was allocated to the authority from DLUCH following introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. Training to embed this policy will be developed and funded through this fund.

9.2 There is work currently underway to develop and deliver a Domestic Abuse Communications Plan, any funding required to deliver this plan will be from the above funding source.

## **10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 In order to comply with the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 we have considered the requirements of the Social Housing Regulator and its newly updated Neighbourhood and Community Standard, taken best practice from the existing Domestic Abuse Policies and undertaken consultation.

10.3 In adopting a domestic abuse policy for the Housing Service the council will be helping to protect residents and tenants from harm and ensure they are offered support, which is appropriate to their needs, this is in line with the local authority Serious Violence Duty.

## **11.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 A full Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and reviewed internally.

11.2 No detrimental effects were identified by the Equalities Impact Assessment.

11.3 The current domestic abuse training plan being delivered in the Housing Service will raise issues around equality, intersectionality, and trauma-informed practice and this is designed to improve the services we offer to people with protected characteristics including people who have more than one characteristic which can present a challenge to accessing services.

## **12.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

12.1 A climate change impact assessment screening form has been completed acknowledging that there are no significant impacts.

## **13.0 PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS**

13.1 Adopting the proposed policy and embedding it will result in increased staff awareness of the signs of domestic abuse; As a result, it is likely that there will be some increased casework. Work is ongoing to produce procedures and to provide further guidance to operational staff and managers.

13.2 The Housing Service is currently going through a restructure and performance monitoring will be undertaken including domestic abuse case file reviews.

## **14.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

14.1 The draft domestic abuse policy will be a new policy.

14.2 All localities would adopt the new policy following approval.

## **15.0 RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

15.1 The Council (in its role as Social Housing Landlord) risks not being legally compliant if it has not adopted a domestic abuse policy by 1 April 2025.

15.2 There are risks to be monitored during the adoption of the policy for example, having sufficient resources to train staff and embed the new ways of working.

## **16.0 ICT IMPLICATIONS**

16.1 The policy does not have ICT implications.

## **17.0 CONCLUSIONS**

17.1 The Council is required by law to have a domestic abuse policy which has been drafted, considering best practice and feedback from partners.

## **18.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

18.1 The following recommendations are therefore proposed to ensure that the council meets its requirement in law to adopt a domestic abuse policy

### **19.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- i) That Committee notes the contents of the report, the proposed Domestic Abuse Policy for the Housing Service, consultation responses and the Equality Impact Assessment.
- ii) That Committee approves the Domestic Abuse Policy for the Housing Service

### **APPENDICES:**

- Appendix A – proposed Domestic Abuse Policy
- Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment
- Appendix C – Climate Change Impact Assessment Screening

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28 March 2024

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Note: Members are invited to contact the author in advance of the meeting with any detailed queries or questions.