

Economy and Growth Committee

Date of Meeting:	15 th November 2022
Report Title:	Housing Options Domestic Abuse Policy
Report of:	Jayne Traverse – Executive Director Place
Report Reference No:	CE/19/22-23
Ward(s) Affected:	All Wards

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. This report seeks the approval of the Housing Option's Domestic Abuse policy, which has been developed to clearly outline the services survivors/victims of domestic abuse will receive from the Housing Options Service, demonstrating our commitment to ensuring that our residents receive the support they require at a time when they may need it most.
- 1.2. The policy contributes towards the key priority within the Council's Corporate Plan 2021-25, which is "a Council which empowers and cares about people". It contributes to the aim to "protect and support our communities and safeguard children, adults at risk and families from abuse, neglect and exploitation".

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 came into force on 29 April 2021 and introduced new duties on local authorities to ensure that all victims of domestic abuse and their children can access the right support in safe accommodation.
- 2.2 Services within Cheshire East Borough Council, which includes Housing Options are committed to providing the best possible services to support our residents who are survivors/victims of Domestic Abuse.
- 2.3 The Housing Options Team wanted to ensure that their services meet expected standards and therefore worked towards gaining Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation, which is a scheme open to Housing

Associations, Local Authority Housing Teams and Homelessness Providers across the UK to help improve their response to domestic abuse.

- 2.4 The Housing Options Team worked hard to develop their services, outlining exactly what survivors/victims of domestic abuse could expect to receive from the Housing Options Team and this was outlined in the form of a Service Commitment, which was published on the services website page.
- 2.5 The team went through a rigorous assessment process to finally achieve DAHA accreditation in June 2022. As part of the assessment process, DAHA assessors put forward recommendations which could be made to further improve the service and this included developing the Service Commitment into an approved policy.
- 2.6 The Service Commitment has now been developed into a policy as recommended (Appendix One) and we are seeking approval of the policy.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. To approve the Housing Options Domestic Abuse Policy (Appendix One)
- 3.2. Delegate authority to make any future minor amendments or legislation changes to the policy to the Director of Growth and Enterprise in consultation with the Chair of the Economy and Growth Committee.

4. Reasons for Recommendations

- 4.1. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 came into force on 29 April 2021 and introduced new duties on local authorities to ensure that all victims of domestic abuse and their children can access the right support in safe accommodation. The Housing Options Team has developed a Domestic Abuse policy which clearly outlines the level of service survivors/victims of domestic abuse can expect to receive.
- 4.2. DAHA Assessors have recommended that the Service Commitment should be developed into an approved policy which demonstrates that the Council are supportive of the policy.

5. Other Options Considered

- 5.1. To retain the developed policy as a Service Commitment, however this would not be in line with the recommendations put forward by the DAHA Assessors, whose opinion was that an approved policy, would demonstrate a clear commitment to the delivery of services for survivors/victims of domestic abuse.

Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing	The Service retains a Service Commitment which hasn't been through an approval	This could impact on future reassessment through the DAHA process

	process to demonstrate it is supported by the Council	
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6. Background

- 6.1.** Domestic abuse refers to abusive behaviours which take place between two people aged over 16 who are personally connected to each other. This includes people who are, or have previously been married, in civil partnerships or in relationships; or have a child together; or are relatives.
- 6.2.** The 2021 Domestic Abuse Act states that abuse can be a single incident, but is often a pattern of behaviours, and it takes many forms including:
- physical or sexual abuse;
 - violent or threatening behaviour;
 - controlling or coercive behaviour;
 - economic abuse; and/or
 - psychological, emotional, or other abuse.
- 6.3.** In April 2021, the Government introduced the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, with the aim of providing further protections to the those who experience domestic abuse, as well as strengthening measures to tackle perpetrators. The Government have recognised the detrimental impact that domestic abuse can have on individuals and families and have introduced a number of duties in order to ensure improvements are made.
- 6.4.** The Council has a well-established Cheshire East Domestic & Sexual Abuse Partnership Board (CEDSAP), who have a long history of providing services for those experiencing domestic abuse and following the introduction of the act, incorporated the new duties into the revised Cheshire East Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership Strategy 2021 – 2023.
- 6.5.** The Housing Options Team have worked closely with Cheshire East Domestic Abuse Services including the secondment of an officer to develop the Whole Housing Approach and the secondment of a dedicated Homelessness Prevention Officer to support those who victims of domestic abuse to access safe accommodation or assist them to remain in their own homes.
- 6.6.** The Housing Options Team outlined their service commitment, which clearly explained the approaches and services customers could expect to receive from Housing Options to support them. This was published on the Housing Options website and was produced following consultation.
- 6.7.** Such is the commitment from the Housing Options Team to assist those suffering from domestic abuse they started the journey to work towards

DAHA accreditation which is the UK benchmark for how housing providers should respond to domestic abuse in the UK.

- 6.8.** In June 2022, the Housing Options team went through the assessment process and were successful in achieving the award. Part of the process is recommendations for future improvements and the Assessors whilst welcoming the Service Commitment felt and recommended that it be developed into a policy, to be formally approved.
- 6.9.** The Housing Options Team therefore produced the Housing Options Domestic Abuse policy which is appended to this report and for which we are seeking approval.

7. Consultation and Engagement

7.1. There is not a statutory requirement to have a policy in place, however as part of the development of the Service Commitment, consultation took place with the following to help produce a document which was user friendly:

- Survivors of Domestic Abuse
- Perpetrators on the behaviour change program
- The Cheshire East Domestic Abuse Team
- Standing Together
- DAHA forum

8. Implications

8.1. Legal

- 8.1.1.** The production of a Housing Options Domestic Abuse policy is not a statutory requirement, but is good practice as highlighted through the DAHA accreditation process.
- 8.1.2.** The Policy supports the legal and regulatory requirements in line with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and the new definition.

8.2. Finance

- 8.2.1.** The cost of producing the Domestic Abuse policy was met from within existing Housing budgets.

8.3. Policy

- 8.3.1.** The strategy will contribute towards the vision of the Corporate Plan 2021-2025 to be an open, fair and green Council and help to deliver the priority to be a Council which empowers and cares about people.
- 8.3.2.** The Cheshire East Council Housing Strategy 2018-23 details a number of key priorities for the Council's Housing service. One of these priorities focuses on 'Preventing Homelessness' under the remit of 'Health,

wellbeing and quality of life'. This policy contributes to achieving this priority.

- 8.3.3. The policy supports the aims and priorities set out in the Cheshire East Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership Strategy 2021 – 2023

8.4. Equality

- 8.4.1. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is to be completed for the policy.

8.5. Human Resources

- 8.5.1. There are no Human Resources implications.

8.6. Risk Management

- 8.6.1. There are no risks associated with the policy, however if the policy is not approved this could impact on future DAHA accreditation

8.7. Rural Communities

- 8.7.1. Domestic Abuse can take place in any of our communities, it is therefore essential that our residents are aware of the services on offer to assist them should they become a victim and require support.

8.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children

- 8.8.1. Domestic abuse is cruel and complex, and can affect anyone, leaving physical and emotional scars that can last a lifetime. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 statutory guidance is clear that the scale of domestic abuse is vast and its impact is significant, and that the impact on individual victims can be severe, wide-ranging and long-lasting. Research published by the Home Office estimates the social and economic costs of domestic abuse to be in the region of £66 billion for victims identified in England and Wales within the year 2016 to 2017. Physical and emotional harms (the fear, anxiety and depression experienced by victims as a result of domestic abuse) were estimated to account for the overwhelming majority of the costs.

- 8.8.2. Anyone can be a victim of domestic abuse, regardless of sex, gender reassignment, age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexuality, or background. The impacts can be detrimental on all those affected, both physically and psychologically, and it can result in long term trauma and other health issues. It is therefore essential that families are supported and provided with safe accommodation.

8.9. Public Health

- 8.9.1. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 statutory guidance outlines the impacts of domestic abuse stating that "*CSEW data can be taken to provide estimates of the prevalence of domestic abuse in England and Wales. It is clear that the scale of domestic abuse is vast and its impact is significant. Research published by the Home Office estimated the social and economic costs of*

domestic abuse to be in the region of £66 billion for victims identified in England and Wales within the year 2016 to 2017. Physical and emotional harms (the fear, anxiety and depression experienced by victims as a result of domestic abuse) were estimated to account for the overwhelming majority of the overall costs. The impact on individual victims is severe and can be wide-ranging and long-lasting.”

8.9.2. The impact of domestic abuse can have significant detrimental implications for all those affected, physical and psychological. It can result in long term trauma and other health issues. It is therefore essential that families are supported and provided with safe accommodation.

8.10. Climate Change

8.10.1. There are not implications in relation to climate change.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Karen Carsberg Karen.carsberg@cheshireeast.gov.uk 07710975438
Appendices:	Appendix One – Housing Options Domestic Abuse Policy
Background Papers:	