

CABINET MEETING – 7 DECEMBER 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY SHEET – PART I

Title of Report:

Sunderland Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy

Author: Executive Director of Public Health and Integrated Commissioning

Purpose of Report:

This report has been produced to seek approval of the Sunderland Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-2024.

Description of Decision:

It is recommended that Cabinet approve the Sunderland Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy appended to this report.

Is the decision consistent with the Budget/Policy Framework? ***Yes**

If not, Council approval is required to change the Budget/Policy Framework

Suggested reason(s) for Decision:

The reason for the decision is to ensure the Council can fulfil its statutory functions under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and comply with regulation 3 of The Domestic Abuse Support (Local Authority Strategies and Annual reports) Regulations 2021.

Alternative options to be considered and recommended to be rejected:

The Council is under a legal obligation through the Domestic abuse Act 2021 to undertake a number of functions including assessing the need for accommodation-based domestic abuse support for all victims and preparing and publishing a local strategy based on the needs assessment. Not to prepare and publish a strategy would risk the Council being in breach of its statutory duty.

Impacts analysed;

Equality
Privacy
Sustainability
Crime and Disorder

Is the Decision consistent with the Council's co-operative values? **Yes**

Is this a "Key Decision" as defined in the Constitution? **Yes**

Is it included in the 28 day Notice of Decisions? **Yes**

CABINET – 7 DECEMBER 2021

SUNDERLAND DOMESTIC ABUSE SAFE ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY

Report of The Executive Director of Public Health and Integrated Commissioning

1. Purpose of the Report

This report has been produced to seek approval of the Sunderland Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy.

2. Description of Decision (Recommendations)

That Cabinet approve the Sunderland Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021 – 2024.

3. Introduction/Background

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 ('the 2021 Act') received Royal assent in April 2021. Part 4 of the 2021 Act aims to ensure all survivors of domestic abuse have access to the right support within safe accommodation. [Statutory guidance](#) on Part 4 of the 2021 Act, published on 1st October following consultation during June and July 2021, sets out what local authorities should do to fulfil their statutory duty relating to the provision of accommodation-based support to domestic abuse victims-survivors and their children.

The three-year Sunderland Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy has been developed in response to the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 which places a statutory duty on Sunderland City Council (SCC) to develop and publish a Safe Accommodation Strategy ('the Strategy') for adult and child survivors of domestic abuse. There is also a requirement to conduct a needs assessment to determine the level and type of need and to reflect these needs in the Strategy.

To comply with the regulations 3 and 6 of [The Domestic Abuse Support \(Local Authority Strategies and Annual reports\) Regulations 2021](#), this Strategy should be published before 5th January 2022 and a draft of the Strategy at least 10 weeks prior to (before 26th October 2021).

4. Current Position

4.1 Domestic abuse local partnership board

Cabinet approved the appointment of a Sunderland Domestic Abuse and Violence against Women and Girls Executive Board ('the Board'), a multi-agency partnership board, on 14 September 2021 in line statutory guidance. In accordance with the 2021 Act, the Council has consulted with the Board on a draft of the appended Strategy.

4.2 Needs assessment for accommodation-based domestic abuse support in Sunderland

A needs assessment was developed in-house working with partner organisations including the Northumbria Police Force, functions within the Council (Housing, Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care), and health and local specialist domestic abuse service providers. A draft of the needs assessment was shared with the partners that supported its development, and the Board, to review and provide feedback.

As part of the needs assessment, and to inform the Strategy, the Council undertook an engagement exercise during July and August 2021 with adult victims-survivors with lived experience of domestic abuse accessing local safe accommodation and support services.

The Council also engaged with a range of stakeholders, including staff members from local providers, from statutory and non-statutory agencies including commissioners, and members of the Board as part of this engagement work underpinning the Strategy development.

The recommendations from the needs assessment and the engagement informed the Strategy's approach to seek to address the gaps identified and to deliver a more robust offer to support adult and child victims-survivors in safe accommodation in Sunderland.

4.3 Draft Sunderland Domestic Abuse Safe Strategy 2021-2024

As outlined in section 3, Sunderland City Council has a legal duty to publish its Strategy before 5 January 2022 and to publish a draft of the Strategy ten weeks prior (by 26 October 2021).

A draft of the Strategy was considered and endorsed by:

- Council Cabinet on 12 October 2021.
- Sunderland's Domestic Abuse and Violence against Women and Girls Executive Board on 24 September 2021.

Following Cabinet's approval of the draft Strategy, it was formally published on the Council's website in accordance with regulation 6 of The Domestic Abuse Support (Local Authority Strategies and Annual reports) Regulations 2021.

Engagement on the draft Strategy took place between 12th October and 8th November 2021. This timeline was determined by the requirement to finalise the draft Strategy to present to Cabinet in December 2021 to meet the publication deadline of before 5th January 2022.

The Council has consulted, via a short survey, to determine the level of support for the four priorities of the draft Strategy with:

- Sunderland's Safeguarding Children's Partnership.
- Sunderland's Safeguarding Adult's Board.
- Safer Sunderland Partnership Board.
- Stakeholders and staff who participated in the engagement exercise during July and August 2021 to inform the Strategy (section 4.2).

The survey was sent to 52 stakeholders with ten responses received. Overall stakeholders agreed with the four priorities.

A focus group on the draft Strategy was also held with survivors with lived experience who had been invited and participated in the engagement during the summer (section 4.2). Due to the time constraints regarding the engagement period, only two of the seventeen women were able to take part. They agreed that the priorities reflected the concerns and views raised at that time. They were however concerned that what is planned, as set out in the Strategy priorities, *may* not happen reiterating the importance now to '**follow through**' – to take action and deliver the priorities.

The Council has also consulted on the draft Strategy during November with:

- The Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee.
- The Children's Education and Skills Committee.

There have been no changes to the Strategy following this engagement.

4.4 **Sunderland Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy**

The appended Strategy outlines how Sunderland City Council will implement the statutory duties associated with the provision of safe accommodation, as required by the 2021 Act. This Strategy aims to improve the lives of victims-survivors and their children describing how safe accommodation and support for domestic abuse victims-survivors will be provided over the next three years and outlines four priorities that will be the focus of delivery. These include:

1. **Ensure that what we do is underpinned by a robust needs assessment;** to better understand and evidence the levels of unmet need (including needs of male victims-survivors) and the barriers that prevent victims-survivors with diverse and additional needs from accessing support.
2. **Deliver quality service interventions which contribute to improving outcomes for survivors and children:** to commission outcome-based services to meet needs identified giving priority to support services which address mental health and substance misuse and services which work directly with children.

3. **Increase safe accommodation provision:** to ensure victims-survivors achieve stable and secure accommodation with a minimum of moves which contributes to their recovery and ability to engage with specialist support services, including how pathways into accommodation for perpetrators could be developed.
4. **Strengthen our approach in hearing the voice of survivors, and children and young people, including those with protected characteristics, to ensure their views are heard and influence what we do:** to involve survivors-victims in commissioning processes to ensure support services are accessible, equitable and inclusive and outcomes for victims-survivors are understood.

The Strategy will complement existing work that is taking place in Sunderland to address the health and wellbeing, community safety and housing needs of those who experience domestic abuse.

The Strategy has been produced by Sunderland City Council and received support from the Board (4.1). The implementation of the Sunderland Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy will be overseen by the Board supported by an Operational Partnership, a multi-agency group, which reports to the Board. A delivery plan will be developed for the Strategy and monitored quarterly supported by a financial plan. The Strategy will be reviewed within the context of the requirement to refresh the needs assessment.

4.5 Timescales associated with the decision and next steps

If approved by Cabinet, the Strategy will be submitted to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and be published by 5th January 2022 to meet the legal duty.

5. Reasons for the Decision

The reason for the decision is to ensure the Council can fulfil its statutory duty under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and regulations 3 and 6 of the 2021 Regulations.

6. Alternative Options

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places a statutory duty on Sunderland Council to develop, publish and put in place a safe accommodation and support services strategy for victims-survivors of domestic abuse (and their children). There is no alternate option to fulfil this statutory function under the 2021 Act.

7. Impact Analysis

(a) **Equalities** – The Council must comply with the public sector equality duty (PSED) and this includes having due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010;
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

This is known as the “general equality duty.”

The “protected characteristics” are age, disability, gender re-assignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation and marriage or civil partnership.

Appointing a new Board, consulting them on the delivery of the authority’s statutory duties, including the development, publication and delivery of this Strategy, will have a positive impact on equality.

A full equality analysis has been completed as the accommodation-based support strategy has been developed and is appended to the report. The findings of the data analysis from the needs assessment are set out in the equality analysis (Appendix 2). Part 2 of the equality analysis focuses specifically on the intended and potential impact of the Strategy.

Existing data analyses identify that the understanding of the needs and/or barriers to access for individuals and groups with protected characteristics within the city, for example people with disabilities, men, people from Black and Minority Ethnic communities, people with complex needs and LGBT+, needs to be improved. The Strategy responds to the findings and the recommendations of the needs assessment. It is anticipated that the needs of individuals and groups identified who are victims-survivors of domestic abuse will be better understood and addressed through the delivery.

(b) **Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA)** – N/A

(c) **Sustainability** – N/A

(d) **Reduction of Crime and Disorder – Community Cohesion / Social Inclusion** - The Strategy will inform the work of the Board and contribute to reducing the prevalence of domestic abuse and other associated crimes. The Strategy also seeks to define what good specialist support services “look like”. This includes a requirement for trauma informed therapeutic work with victims-survivors and their children, accompanied by other additional practical and skilled support which includes, life skills training, support with routes into employment, which will contribute to improved social inclusion.

8. Other Relevant Considerations / Consultations

- (a) **Co-operative Values** – Sunderland’s Domestic Abuse and Violence against Women Executive Board appointed by the Cabinet will oversee the delivery of the strategy. The Board will work in a way that is consistent with the Council’s values:

“Sunderland City Council is a co-operative Council and in being so will act ethically in all its actions while adhering to and actively promoting its co-operative values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. These values will underpin its decision making and actions.”

- (b) **Financial Implications** – The Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) secured £125 million to cover the cost of new burdens placed upon local authorities in England to meet the statutory duty relating to the provision of support within domestic abuse safe accommodation. This funding covers two combined aspects: support costs, i.e commissioning services, and administrative burdens.

The Council received £666,874 grant funding for the period 01 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 to support it to fulfil the functions under the statutory duty as set out in Part 4 of the 2021 Act. This funding allocation has only been confirmed for 2021/22 by DLUHC. Future funding allocations will be confirmed as part of the local government finance settlement in December.

The financial implications for the provision of support in line with the Strategy, and having regard to the needs assessment, will be considered at the appropriate time prior to commissioning the relevant activity or service.

- (c) **Risk Analysis** - There is a risk of not meeting the requirements of the Domestic Abuse Support (Local Authority Strategies and Annual Reports) Regulations to publish the Strategy before the 5th January 2022.
- (d) **Employee Implications** – There is an outstanding employee implication in the delivery of the Strategy. A Public Health Practitioner post is to be recruited to support the work of the Board and the implementation of the Strategy.
- (e) **Legal Implications** – The Council is under a legal obligation, based on the new duty of the 2021 Act, to assess the need for support, prepare and publish a local strategy for provision of support for victims-survivors, and their children, who need to reside in safe accommodation. There is a risk of the Council being in breach of its statutory obligations if it does publish the strategy as required.

- (f) **Policy Implications** – The new duty requires the Council to prepare and publish its strategy for the provision of support to victims of domestic abuse and their children who reside in safe accommodation before 5th January 2021.
- (g) **Implications for Other Services** – the Council should ensure support is commissioned in safe accommodation to meet the needs of victims-survivors and their children in line with the local Strategy and, as soon as reasonably practicable, in line with the Council's procurement rules and commissioning cycle. When fulfilling the duty the Council should ensure all support provided under the duty to victims-survivors of domestic abuse, and their children, should meet the DLUHC Quality Standards, Women's Aid National Quality Standards and/or ImKaan Accredited Quality Standards.
- (h) **The Public / External Bodies** – The development of the Strategy has been informed by an engagement exercise and, within the time available, the Council have consulted on the priorities of the draft Strategy with stakeholders and survivors to finalise the Strategy.
- (i) **Children's Services** - The Chief Officer of Together for Children / Director of Children's Services is a member of the Board and the Board has been consulted on the Strategy. Officers from Children's Social Care and frontline managers of staff from Together for Children have been involved in the engagement exercise which has informed the Strategy.

9. Glossary

VAWG – Violence Against Women and Girls

DLUHC – The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

10. List of Appendices

Appendix 1 - Sunderland Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy

Appendix 2 – Equality Impact Assessment

11. Background Papers

[The Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#)

[Delivery of Support to Victims of Domestic Abuse, including Children, in Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Services: Statutory guidance for local authorities across England. Draft for consultation Issued under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#)

[Domestic Abuse Act 2021: Overarching factsheet](#)

[The Domestic Abuse Support \(Local Authority Strategies and Annual reports\) Regulations 2021](#)

[Statutory guidance – Delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse in domestic abuse safe accommodation services](#)

