

Policy Committee Decision Report

Title of Report: Housing Domestic Abuse Policy

Date of Decision: 5th December 2024

Report To: Housing Policy Committee

Report Of: Ajman Ali, Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services

Report Author: Darryl Smedley – Head of Service, Neighbourhood Intervention & Tenant Support

Executive Summary: Report seeking approval of a Domestic Abuse Policy for the Housing service. The Policy includes clear standards that set out our response to domestic abuse. It sets clear expectations and provides clarity for partners agencies, tenants and residents of the city. Approval of the Policy is essential to continuing work with the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) and is of benefit to our tenants.



Council Plan outcomes:

[A place where all children belong and all young people can build a successful future](#)

[Great neighbourhoods that people are happy to call home](#)

[People live in caring, engaged communities that value diversity and support wellbeing](#)

[A creative and prosperous city full of culture, learning, and innovation](#)

[A city on the move – growing, connected and sustainable](#)

Council Plan outcomes particularly relevant to this report are:

Outcome 2 - Great neighbourhoods that people are happy to call home

“We will work with partners to ensure our neighbourhoods are safe places and feel safe for all residents, tackling anti-social behaviour where it exists”.

Outcome 3 - People live in caring, engaged communities that value diversity and support wellbeing

“Work with communities to ensure people can access support and live the lives they want.” “High quality care and support at the right time and place so people can be independent for longer and stay safe”.

Policy Committee remit:

This report is to be considered by the Housing Policy Committee as its remit includes functions of the Council as Local Housing Authority, including public sector, private sector and homelessness. [[Part 3C - 3.3 Matters Delegated to Committees May 2024.pdf \(sheffield.gov.uk\)](#)]

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?

No

Recommendations:

The Housing Policy Committee is recommended to:

1. Approve the Housing Domestic Abuse Policy in the form attached at Appendix A.
2. Note that approval of the Housing Domestic Abuse Policy is essential to continuing work with the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA).

Financial Implications: Approved by: Paul Foster, Finance Business Partner

Legal Implications: Approved by: Rebecca Lambert, Legal Services.

Equality and Inclusion Implications: Approved. EIA 2826.

Approved by: Ed Sexton, Equalities and Involvement Officer

Climate Change Implications: There are no direct climate change implications arising from this report – Climate impact assessment tool completed on 19th September 2024.

Approved by: Darryl Smedley, Head of Service

Background Papers: None

Appendices: Appendix A – Housing Domestic Abuse Policy Final Draft
Appendix B – EIA 2826

1. Background to the issue

1.1. Domestic abuse in Sheffield and the importance of Housing

1.1.1. The report outlines why the Housing Service requires a dedicated Domestic Abuse Policy and what benefits this Policy will deliver. The need for a Domestic Abuse Policy can be broadly understood and summarised as follows:

- Domestic Abuse has a significant impact on the people and communities that the Housing Service deliver services to. A Domestic Abuse Policy will ensure that we have the frameworks in place to deliver the best possible services to those tenants and residents who are affected by Domestic Abuse.
- The Regulator of Social Housing requires providers to have a Policy detailing how they recognise and effectively respond to cases of domestic abuse.
- The Housing Service are committed to achieving accreditation by the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA). A Domestic Abuse Policy is crucial to this accreditation process.
- The Housing Service currently have a Domestic Abuse Procedure. The presence of a Domestic Abuse Policy will create the appropriate organisational framework for this operational procedure to sit beneath.

1.1.2. Domestic abuse is a significant issue nationally and in Sheffield. In 2022/23, there were 18,358 known victims of domestic abuse in Sheffield (Crime Survey of England and Wales 2022/23). Since 2011, there have been 21 cases in Sheffield that have met the Domestic Homicide Review criteria.

1.1.3. The impact of domestic abuse in society is felt throughout the Housing Services we provide to the people of Sheffield. Domestic abuse is one of Sheffield's top three reasons for homeless presentations, and domestic abuse victims/survivors account for the joint top cohort in temporary accommodation.

1.1.4. The Housing Services we provide offer opportunity for disclosure, through dedicated support, communication and completion of assessments with tenants, including within their homes. Officers may identify the signs of abuse or may have abuse disclosed to them. Identifying these signs earlier on and signposting victims/survivors to support that is available to them may prevent abuse from escalating to the point of serious harm or homicide. Similarly, through homelessness amelioration, the Housing Service will be the first point of contact for



members of the public in the city who face homelessness.

1.2. Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) Accreditation

1.2.1. The Housing Service is currently working towards Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance ([DAHA](#)) accreditation. DAHA includes a specific set of standards that providers need to achieve and evidence. Working towards accreditation via the best practice framework provides clear guidance, expectations and assurance. DAHA's standards require that housing providers must have a Domestic Abuse Policy in place that tenants and residents can readily access. The Policy will set out what they can expect from us should they present as a victim/survivor. DAHA states as follows:

“A standalone Policy for tenants/residents and your service users experiencing and perpetrating domestic abuse is essential to providing your tenants/residents/service users with clear and succinct reassurance about what they can expect from your domestic abuse response. It must be written in such a way that it invites, empowers and enables victims/survivors to disclose their experiences, safe in the knowledge they will be believed, validated and supported to make choices. Policies should be clear, concise, and accessible to all.”

1.2.2. Our ambition is to attain accreditation from DAHA by September 2025. Approval and launch of the Domestic Abuse Policy is pivotal to achieving this.

1.3. Regulator of Social Housing

1.3.1. As outlined by the Regulator of Social Housing in the [Neighbourhood & Community Standard](#), we must evidence the following Regulatory Standards:

- 1.4.1 Registered providers must work co-operatively with other agencies tackling domestic abuse and enable tenants to access appropriate support and advice.
- 2.3.1 Registered providers must have a Policy for how they recognise and effectively respond to cases of domestic abuse.

2. Proposal

2.1. Approval of Housing Domestic Abuse Policy

This report proposes that the Housing Policy Committee (HPC) consider and approve the 'Housing Domestic Abuse Policy' for publication and promotion with tenants and all residents of Sheffield.

1.1. Merits of the proposal

- 2.2.1. Responding to domestic abuse effectively through a housing lens is hugely important in the identification of domestic abuse and ensuring that victims/survivors are aware of the accommodation-based support available to them.
- 2.2.2. Best practice from DAHA dictates that housing providers should be working to promote their response with tenants/residents. A key vehicle for achieving this is through a published Policy. Having a Policy on this issue communicates an organisation's culture, values and philosophy. In short, that we have a zero-tolerance approach when it comes to domestic abuse.
- 2.2.3. The Policy aims to ensure that all Sheffield City Council tenants and residents of Sheffield understand what domestic abuse is and how the Sheffield City Council Housing Service will respond to both victims/survivors and perpetrators of domestic abuse. This Policy applies to all Sheffield City Council tenants and other residents of Sheffield.
- 2.2.4. The Policy adopts the Government's definition of domestic abuse, as 'any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality'. The Policy provides further clarity and guidance by defining abusive behaviour as including:
- Physical abuse – slapping, pushing, kicking, stabbing, damage to property or important items, attempted murder or murder. This also includes non-fatal strangulation, or any act that affects the ability of a person to breathe.
 - Sexual abuse – any non-consensual sexual activity including rape, sexual assault, coercive sexual activity or refusing safe sex
 - Psychological and emotional abuse – intimidation, social isolation, verbal abuse, humiliation, constant criticism or enforced trivial routines
 - Controlling or coercive behaviour – using a pattern of behaviour over time to exert power and control, can be used to isolate and intimidate individuals
 - Economic/financial abuse – controlling/withholding access to money or resources, stealing depriving or taking control of money, running up debts, withholding benefits or bank cards.

- Digital/cyber abuse – abusive behaviour via various forms of technology, demanding access to devices, controlling access, using technology to monitor an individual, sharing intimate images.
- Forced marriage – facing physical, emotional or psychological pressure to marry someone you don't want to e.g. being told that you will bring shame upon the family, threats to kill.
- Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) – cutting, piercing, removing or sewing closed any part of a girl's or woman's genitals with no medical reason.
- So-called "honour" based abuse – female genital mutilation, forced marriage, forced abortion, being denied your passport or other documentation.
- Stalking – being followed, receiving unwanted communication or gifts, someone turning up uninvited to your home or place of work, someone monitoring your use of the internet or checking your phone.

2.2.5. Having a Policy ensures that victims/survivors know what support is available to them. It also sets clear expectations for staff, partners and customers so as they know what a response to domestic abuse from the Housing Service should look like. The Policy details the support available when a person may need to leave their home in an emergency or when they may need to explore rehousing options.

2.2.6. Partnership working is key to effective practice. The Policy details the Housing Service's commitment and contribution to the city's safeguarding arrangements, including participation in multi-agencies meetings and information sharing.

2.2.7. We are aware that domestic abuse impacts all communities and groups. The Policy outlines our recognition of this regarding minoritised groups and affirms our commitment to working with individuals from these groups. We acknowledge that those with complex and multiple needs may be more at risk of domestic abuse and may struggle to access support services. There is specific reference in the Policy to how we will support those with No Resource to Public Funds (NRPF).

2.2.8. The Policy reaffirms and sets out our commitment to employees who are victims of domestic abuse. The Policy also draws links to the Council's Code of Conduct regarding illegal activity, should employees be found to have perpetrated domestic abuse.

2.2.9. As well as fulfilling DAHA criteria (outlined in 1.2. above), a Housing Service Domestic Abuse Policy assists in ensuring compliance with the Neighbourhood & Community Standard of the Social Housing

Regulator (outlined in point 1.3 above) and most importantly safeguards people from harm.

2.2.10. The Policy has been written to compliment , and be cognisant of, the [Sheffield Domestic Abuse and Safe Accommodation Strategy](#)

2.3. How will it be embedded and promoted?

2.3.1. The policy will be embedded in the service through training sessions and tailored communications that will raise staff awareness and understanding of the new policy.

2.3.2. This will include a new Domestic Abuse Essential Training online course which covers the complexities of domestic abuse and sets out how staff can best support people experiencing domestic abuse. We are also delivering in-person domestic abuse training sessions for housing staff, and through the Domestic Abuse Champion Network, which has recently been established in the service.

2.3.3. We have also prepared communications around the new Policy, including information on the intranet, information on our Housing and Neighbourhoods Digital Ringbinder. We have also prepared internal communications about the new policy to be included in staff bulletins and will be publishing guidance and information about the policy on the Council Intranet, and on our staff Sharepoint site.

2.4.1. This Policy will be promoted to tenants/residents using several different methods. The Policy will sit on a dedicated webpage on the Council's internet page (as well as being available for staff via our internal intranet). The Policy will be promoted in bulletins and social media messaging directly to tenants. Crucially, given the professional network of agencies that work within the city to tackle domestic abuse, the Policy will also be provided to partner agencies to ensure they are aware of it and can factor this into the support they offer.

3. How does this decision contribute to the Council Plan?

3.1. Council Plan outcome 2: Great neighbourhoods that people are happy to call home

3.1.1. The Housing Domestic Abuse Policy will help to ensure that our neighbourhoods are safe places and feel safe for all residents. The Policy takes a zero-tolerance approach to domestic abuse and makes clear the repercussions that perpetrators might face, including potentially seeking Possession of their tenancy.

3.2. Council Plan outcome 3: People live in caring, engaged communities that value diversity and support wellbeing



- 3.2.1. Making it clear how we will work with partners to keep vulnerable people safe, by participating in multi-agency safeguarding processes and sharing information safely with partner agencies.
- 3.2.2. Helping the Housing Service to deliver high quality support to victims/survivors by establishing a set of standards that all staff should follow.
- 3.2.3. Preventing homelessness by making sure victims/survivors of domestic abuse are aware of all options available to them, including options to help them stay safely in their homes (such as target hardening).
- 3.2.4. Championing equality and diversity by recognising the additional barriers that certain groups might face in accessing domestic abuse services because of their background and promoting the specialist support services that are available for these groups.

3.3. People – Prosperity – Planet

- 3.3.1. The overarching aim of the Policy is to help ensure that the people of Sheffield can live healthy lives free from domestic abuse. Where DA is present, we want all tenants and residents of the city to know what support is available from the Housing Service but also from the wider community and our partner organisations. We have involved tenants and residents in the creation of this Policy through our online consultation platform, and also through face-to-face consultation sessions for those who may struggle to access us online.
- 3.3.2. Being clear about our zero-tolerance attitude to domestic abuse and providing a coherent response as a housing provider can help contribute to the prosperity of the city by: reducing rent arrears that might accrue from financial abuse, reducing property damage that might stem from physical abuse, and allowing victims/survivors to live safe and happy lives so as to be able to work freely and contribute to the local economy. The Policy augments other efforts to prevent homelessness as explained in 3.2.3.
- 3.3.3. There will be no negative climate impact from the implementation of the Policy.

4. What community or partner engagement has been undertaken and how has it informed the proposal?

4.1. Partner engagement

- 4.1.1. Various partners have been involved with the creation of this Policy, including colleagues in services external to Housing (Domestic Abuse Coordination Team, Cost of Living, Customer Services, ASB & Community Safety, Repairs & Maintenance) and services external to SCC (Shelter, IDAS, DWP, Citizens Advice, Sheffield Women's Aid,

Ashiana, Framework, SWWOP, Cranstoun). Each of these services have been represented at the DAHA & homelessness prevention operational group, where ideas for what should be included in the Policy were discussed at one initial session, and at a later session consultation on a draft version of the Policy was undertaken with the group.

- 4.1.2. Partners who were unable to attend these sessions have also been given opportunity to give feedback over email. All feedback given was actioned.

4.2. Community engagement

4.2.1. Consultation on the Policy was live on our online engagement portal (Have Your Say) for just under three weeks, in which time we were able to attain fifty responses. The feedback received has been reviewed and, where appropriate and possible, amendments to the Policy have been made. Through this consultation, the following questions were asked on a four point Likert scale:

- 'The Housing Domestic Abuse Policy is easy to read.'
- 'I understand what response I will receive from SCC Housing Service if I were to present to them as a victim/survivor of domestic abuse.'
- 'I am clear on the support available to those with additional barriers to accessing domestic abuse services e.g. LGBTQ+ individuals, those suffering from so-called 'honour-based abuse', disabled individuals.'

Following each of the questions, the respondent was invited to offer further comment and detail.

- 4.2.2. The HYS survey was promoted to tenants and residents through two different mechanisms: in our tenant bulletin and through our Tenant and Resident Associations.
- 4.2.3. In recognising that our online platforms are not always accessible for all sectors of our community, we also held an in-person consultation session with specialist domestic abuse service Ashiana, who provide support to BAMER victim/survivors.
- 4.2.4. Feedback from both the HYS survey and the in-person consultation session was analysed and summarised and amendments were made to the Policy where it was suitable to do so.
- 4.2.5. The consultation engagement reporting identified that around 85% of respondents were female. Just under half had a disability and 87%

were White British. Anticipating that ethnicity needed to be a specific consideration in the consultation, as certain domestic abuse issues are more prevalent in minority communities, the consultation with Ashiana ensured specific consideration was given to the issue.

5. What alternative options did we consider?

5.1. Alternative Option 1: Continue to use the Domestic Abuse procedure only.

5.1.1. The Housing Service currently has a Domestic Abuse procedure in place.

5.1.2. Limitations/why this option was rejected:

5.1.3. This would not satisfy the requirement of the Regular of Social Housing, who detail that registered providers must have a Policy for how they recognise and effectively respond to cases of domestic abuse. Furthermore, by producing and publishing a Policy, the Council is committing itself to openness and transparency regarding the Housing Service's commitment and response to Domestic Abuse.

6. How has equality, diversity and inclusion been actively considered?

6.1. Recognition that domestic abuse impacts on all groups and communities is a key cornerstone of the Policy and the approach detailed within it. The Domestic Abuse Policy will improve access to the correct outcome and support for all tenants and residents of Sheffield, regardless of background. The Policy will be of benefit to those from minoritised backgrounds and those with protected characteristics who are more likely to suffer abuse.

7. Financial and Commercial Implications

7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

8. Legal Implications

8.1. Section 57 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places local authorities under a duty to assess the need of accommodation based support in their area, to prepare and publish a strategy for the provision of such support, and to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy.

8.2 The introduction of the Regulator of Social Housing's new Consumer Standards on the 1st April 2024 has now made it a specific regulatory requirement for all Registered Providers of social housing including local authorities to have a policy for how they recognise and effectively respond to cases of domestic abuse.

8.3 The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 (2023 Act) received Royal Assent on the 20th July 2023 and lays the foundations for changes to how social housing is managed. One of the key changes introduced by the 2023 Act are the Regulator of Social Housing's, new Consumer Standards which came into effect on 1st April 2024. The new Consumer Standards form a key part of the new regulatory framework for Social Housing. They set out the outcomes that landlords must deliver so that homes are decent, safe, and well-maintained and to ensure that tenants receive quality services from their landlord and are treated with fairness and respect.

8.4 Section 193 of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 (HRA 2008), as amended by the Schedule 5, Part 1, paragraph 17 of the 2023 Act provides the Regulator of Social Housing with the powers to set standards relating to consumer matters that registered providers must meet. Section 193 (1) states:

'The regulator may set standards for registered providers as to the nature, extent, safety, energy, efficiency and quality of accommodation, facilities or services provided by them in connection with social housing.'

8.5 The 4 new Consumer Standards are:

- **Neighbourhood and Community Standard** – which requires landlords to engage with other relevant parties so that tenants can live in safe and well-maintained neighbourhoods and feel safe in their homes
- **Safety and Quality Standard** – which requires landlords to provide safe and good quality homes and landlord services to tenants
- **Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard** – which requires landlords to be open with tenants and treat them with fairness and respect so that tenants can access services, raise complaints, when necessary,

influence decision making and hold their landlord to account. This standard incorporates the Tenant Satisfaction Measures requirements.

- **Tenancy Standard**- which sets requirements for the fair allocation and letting of homes and for how those tenancies are managed and ended by landlords

8.6. The new Consumer Standard which deals with Domestic Abuse is the Neighbourhood and Community Standard. There are four required outcomes of the Neighbourhood and Community Standard and one of these relates specifically to domestic abuse.

- **Safety of shared spaces**
Registered providers must work co-operatively with tenants, other landlords and relevant organisations to take all reasonable steps to ensure the safety of shared spaces.
- **Local cooperation**
Registered providers must co-operate with relevant partners to promote social, environmental, and economic wellbeing in the areas where they provide social housing.
- **Anti-social behaviour and hate incidents**
Registered providers must work in partnership with appropriate local authority departments, the police, and other relevant organisations to deter and tackle anti-social behaviour (ASB) and hate incidents in the neighbourhoods where they provide social housing.
- **Domestic abuse**
Registered providers must work co-operatively with other agencies tackling domestic abuse and enable tenants to access appropriate support and advice.

8.7 The Domestic Abuse Specific Expectations under the Neighbourhood and Community Standard are set out at 2.3 of the Standard. Specific Expectation 2.3.1 includes the specific requirements around Registered Providers having a policy on domestic abuse and states as follows:

'Registered Providers must have a policy for how they recognise and effectively respond to cases of domestic abuse.'



This means that in order to comply with the Specific Expectations of the Neighbourhood and Community Standard all local authorities and other registered providers must now have a policy for how they recognise and effectively respond to cases of domestic abuse.

8.8 The Consumer Standard Code of Practice states that Registered Providers' policies should set out their approach to recognising and effectively responding to domestic abuse. It states that the policy should cover among other things how they:

- raise awareness and understanding among relevant staff so they are able to recognise the signs of domestic abuse, particularly those linked to a tenant's housing circumstances
- make tenants aware of appropriate support and advice available regarding domestic abuse, including from third party organisations
- offer tenants affected by domestic abuse referrals to specialist domestic abuse agencies
- provide staff supporting tenants experiencing domestic abuse with appropriate specialist training, and
- offer appropriate staff members to support tenants experiencing domestic abuse.

9. Climate and Environmental Implications

9.1. The Policy will have no significant climate and environmental impact. The climate impact assessment tool was completed on 19th September 2024.

10. Other implications

10.1 No other implications.

11. Reasons for decision

11.1 The recommendation is for the Housing Policy Committee to approve the Policy for use.