

Report for: Cabinet 10 December 2024

Title: **Adopting a new Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls Policy for council tenants and leaseholders and those approaching the council as homeless**

Report authorised by: Jonathan Kirby, Director for Placemaking and Housing

Lead Officer: Jahedur Rahman Operational Director-Hsg & Build Safety

Ward(s) affected: All

**Report for Key/
Non Key Decision:** Key

1. Describe the issue under consideration

- 1.1 The Council is transforming landlord services for its own tenants and leaseholders. To support that process, the Council is undertaking a full review of all policies relating to its tenants and leaseholders in its role as the landlord.
- 1.2 The new Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls Policy for council tenants and leaseholders and those approaching the council as homeless sets out an aim to improve the safety of those asking for assistance from our housing service affected by domestic abuse and other abuses that come under the 'Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)' umbrella including men and boys. This covers council tenants, leaseholders and those approaching the council as homeless.
- 1.3 This report seeks approval from Cabinet for adoption.

2. Cabinet Member Introduction

- 2.1 We take a zero-tolerance approach to domestic abuse as a Council and the safety of victim/survivors is a council priority in collaboration with our partners and registered providers.
- 2.2 The Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls Policy for our 20,000 council tenants and leaseholders and those approaching the council as homeless demonstrates our housing service's commitment to providing emotional and practical support to those who are experiencing domestic abuse in Haringey.
- 2.3 This policy helps us meet the government's Social Housing Regulator's

consumer standards. It outlines that the Council will respond rapidly and supportively to reports of domestic abuse and VAWG and commits to working positively with victim/survivors to offer support, allowing them to make informed choices about what to do next. A making every contact count approach will also be taken for all disclosures with staff ready to provide support for victim/survivors.

- 2.4 The insights and experiences of our residents, particularly through the Resident Voice Board, have played a key role in shaping this policy. This Board, comprising 15 residents from diverse tenures, reports to the Council's Placemaking and Housing Board, ensuring ongoing resident engagement and co-creation in housing policies. I want to express my gratitude to the Board for their invaluable input, which helps our policies better reflect the needs of our communities.
- 2.5 I am pleased to recommend it's adoption by Cabinet, marking another step forward in our ongoing efforts to improve housing quality and resident services in Haringey.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 Cabinet is recommended to approve the draft Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls Policy for council tenants and leaseholders and those approaching the council as homeless to come into effect from 20 December 2024.

4. Reasons for decision

- 4.1 This newly drafted Council policy will update the current Homes for Haringey (HfH) version following insourcing of HfH into the Council. The policy was published in 2019 prior to the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 becoming law. The updated policy will outline the Council's aim to improve the safety of those asking for assistance from our housing service affected by domestic abuse and other abuses that come under the 'Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)' umbrella including men and boys. This covers council tenants, leaseholders and those approaching the council as homeless.
- 4.2 The new policy will help the Council meet the Social Housing Regulator's consumer standards, specifically the Neighbourhood and Community Standard and the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard.

5. Alternative options considered

5.1 We could continue to have an outdated policy in place for this service.

This option was rejected because it would not meet the Council's needs or those of its tenants, leaseholders or those approaching the council as homeless. Introducing this new policy will assist the Council to meet the Social Housing Regulator's Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard requirement to deliver fair, reasonable, accessible and transparent policies. This option would also not meet our commitment to introduce updated policies in the Housing Strategy 2024 – 2029 and the Housing Improvement Plan 2023.

6. Background information

6.1 This updated policy will replace the previous Homes for Haringey Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls policy adopted in October 2019. It should be read in conjunction with the Council's Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy, which highlights priority areas for addressing and preventing domestic abuse and VAWG in Haringey.

6.2 In June 2022, the Council brought back in house most of the landlord and housing services that had been run on its behalf by Homes for Haringey, its Arm's Length Management Organisation. The Council immediately began a process of reviewing that service provision and in April 2023 Cabinet adopted a comprehensive Housing Improvement Plan backed by significant financial investment. Amongst many other commitments, that plan committed to reviewing housing policies including domestic abuse and violence against women and girls.

6.3 The Regulator of Social Housing's Standards requires that Registered Providers of Social Housing (RPs) demonstrate that they understand the following:

- a. The Neighbourhood and Community Standard requires RP's to have a policy for how they recognise and effectively respond to cases of domestic abuse.
- b. The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard requirement to deliver fair, reasonable, accessible and transparent policies

6.4 The Council has included thorough research into best practice in social housing, and engagement in an interactive process of policy development with key stakeholders across the Council.

6.5 Council officer service leads from Estates and Neighbourhoods, Income Management, Tenancy Management, Home Ownership and Support and Wellbeing were all involved in the development of this policy.

6.6 Council tenants and leaseholders were engaged in the design of the policy's content as part of the new resident engagement structure, which is overseen by the Resident Voice Board (RVB). The RVB is the resident forum that

assists the Housing Service by providing strategic influence on customer-facing housing strategy and policy as well as giving a resident perspective on the quality of housing services with the aim of improving customer satisfaction and organisation performance (housing services).

6.7 The RVB inputted to the development of this policy from an early stage with broad outlines and approach agreed in July 2024 by the Board. Proposals for the policy were well-received and generated a range of feedback and recommendations that have been incorporated into the policy. This included:

- Being clear that the policy is designed to improve the safety of all people affected by domestic abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) by clarifying that support is available for all victims/survivors, including men and boys.
- Clarifying the policy approach to supporting female tenants in our council housing who are subject to abusive behaviour from males with whom they have no personal connection and to say how we hold those perpetrators to account.
- Confirmation that stalking is included in section 3, the definitions and key terms part of the policy, under the definition of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

6.8 In September 2024, the Resident Voice Board reviewed and approved the newly developed policy incorporating their recommendations.

Key provisions of the draft Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls Policy for council tenants and leaseholders, and those approaching the council as homeless

6.9 The aim of the draft Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls Policy for council tenants and leaseholders and those approaching the council as homeless is to improve the safety of all people affected by domestic abuse and other abuses that come under the 'Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)' umbrella including men and boys. It confirms that the safety of victim/survivors is a council priority in collaboration with our partners and registered providers.

6.10 The draft policy sets out a series of objectives to support this aim. This Includes:

- taking a zero-tolerance approach to domestic abuse in our housing service and helping to prevent further abuse by encouraging earlier reporting.
- responding rapidly, safely and supportively, basing the council's support on the victim/survivor's individual needs whilst working positively with them to offer support allowing them to make informed choices about what to do next.
- that staff will have regular training relevant to their roles and that the latest leading practice is shared with staff and tenants as part of our continuous improvement approach.

- 6.11 This is followed up with a section on definitions and key terms used in the policy.
- 6.12 It explains the approach to reporting domestic abuse to our housing service, confirming that all reports of domestic abuse will be taken seriously, and that the safety of victims/survivors is crucial.
- 6.13 The policy confirms that a making every contact count approach will be taken for all disclosures by ensuring that staff members know how to provide support for victim/survivors by using the most appropriate language and communication methods. It also notes that the council will adopt a preventative approach through staff training and work within resident and community engagement to ensure that any support or intervention needs can be identified as early as possible.
- 6.14 A section on the action that will be taken in response to a report of domestic abuse being received explains that the council will make sure the individual experiencing domestic abuse or VAWG is always aware of our response and that they agree any actions outlined in an action plan.
- 6.15 Holding perpetrators to account has its own section, confirming that the council will take a zero-tolerance approach to domestic abuse by holding perpetrators of abuse to account for their behaviour and the consequences of their action.
- 6.16 The final two sections to note are on partnerships and awareness of domestic abuse. On partnerships, this highlights that the council will work in collaboration with relevant agencies to gather and share information to inform and reduce risk when responding to domestic abuse.
- 6.17 On awareness of domestic abuse, the policy confirms that all housing staff, contractors, and agents regularly receive high-quality training on domestic abuse awareness. It also notes that the Council will widely publicise information and support local/national campaigns to raise awareness about domestic abuse including the different types of domestic abuse, know that help is available, how they can access it, and what support typically involves.

7 Contribution to the Corporate Delivery Plan 2024-2026 High level Strategic outcomes

- 7.1 The recommendations in this report will support the Corporate Delivery Plan's theme 5, "Homes for the Future", and in particular its commitment to provide reliable, customer focused resident housing services and to undertake a full review of all policies relating to our tenants and leaseholders in our role as their landlord.
- 7.2 The recommendations in this report will also support the Corporate

Delivery Plan's theme 6 "Safer Haringey". In particular its commitment to see a reduction in violence against women and girls and continue to improve our housing response to domestic abuse by working towards Domestic Abuse Housing Accreditation (DAHA) within Housing Demand and Placemaking and Housing.

- 7.3 The recommendations in this report will also support the 2024-2029 Housing Strategy's second strategic objective, improving housing quality and resident services in the social housing sector, in particular commitments around transforming services to our tenants and leaseholders, and designing those services with them.
- 7.4 The approval of this policy will be communicated to Council tenants and leaseholders through the Council's Homes Zone newsletter and the Council will run sessions for housing staff teams that will be using the policy.

8 Carbon and Climate Change

- 8.1 The recommendation to adopt this new policy may help to reduce carbon emissions by ensuring that housing services are available locally for victim/survivors of domestic abuse and therefore reducing the need to travel as far. The Hearthstone phone service may also help to reduce the need to travel.

9 Statutory Officers comments (Director of Finance (procurement), Head of Legal and Governance, Equalities)

Finance

- 9.1 Approval of the policy does not have any financial implication. Any financial Implication due to its implementation is expected to be contained within the housing services budget and such will be assessed and with be subject to relevant governance process.

Assistant Director of Legal & Governance

- 9.2 The Assistant Director Legal and Governance has been consulted in the drafting of this report.
- 9.3 In its capacity as a local housing authority the Council must comply with the Standards adopted by the Social Housing Regulator. The policy adoption of which is recommended by this report meets the requirement of the Neighbourhood and Community Standard to have a policy for how the Council recognises and effectively responds to cases of domestic abuse.
- 9.4 There is no statutory requirement to consult in relation to this policy. The policy has been co-designed as set out in the body of this report.

- 9.5 In considering adoption of the report's recommendations, Members must have due regard to the Equality Impact Assessment accompanying the report.
- 9.5 There is no legal reason why the recommendations set out in this report should not be adopted.

Strategic Procurement

- 9.6 Strategic Procurement have been consulted in the preparation of this report.
- 9.7 Strategic Procurement note the report recommendation to approve the draft Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls Policy for council tenants and leaseholders and does not require a procurement related decision.

Equality

- 9.8 The Council has a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) under the Equality Act (2010) to have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share protected characteristics and people who do not
 - Foster good relations between people who share those characteristics and people who do not
- 9.9 The three parts of the duty apply to the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy/maternity, race, religion/fait, sex, and sexual orientation. Marriage and civil partnership status applies to the first part of the duty.
- 9.10 Although it is not enforced in legislation as a protected characteristic, Haringey Council treats socioeconomic status as a local protected characteristic.
- 9.11 The policy considered here will apply to Council tenants and leaseholders. Haringey Council's tenant population shows the following characteristics compared to the wider borough population:
- a significantly higher proportion of young people (under 24) and older people (over 50).
 - a significantly higher proportion of individuals who have a disability under the Equalities Act.
 - a slightly higher proportion of individuals who report their gender identity as different from sex registered at birth.
 - a significantly lower proportion of individuals who are married or in a registered civil partnership.
 - a significantly higher proportion of individuals who identify as Muslim, and slightly higher proportion of individual who identify as Christian, Buddhist or another religion. This is countered by a significantly lower proportion of

tenants who don't associate with any religion or identify as Jewish, Hindu or Sikh.

- a significantly higher proportion of female individuals.
- a significantly lower proportion of individuals who report their sexual identity as something other than Straight or Heterosexual.

9.12 A full analysis of the impact of the policy on people with protected characteristics is contained in the Equality Impact Assessment found at Appendix 2.

9.13 The policy will have a positive impact on the protected characteristics of age, disability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation and socio-economic status. It will have a neutral impact on those with other protected characteristics

9.14 The Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls Policy for council tenants and leaseholders, and those approaching the council as homeless confirms that:

- We will take a zero-tolerance approach to domestic abuse in our housing service and help to prevent further abuse by encouraging earlier reporting.
- Although domestic abuse can affect anyone, certain people may be disproportionately affected or particularly vulnerable and some groups are affected by specific forms of domestic abuse.
- It is important to remember that disclosing abuse will often be a particularly vulnerable and frightening time for victim/survivors. Safeguarding concerns and referrals should be communicated considerately and without victim/survivors feeling blamed for the risks that they and their children have been subjected to.
- Our publicity will ensure that victims/survivors from different identity groups see themselves represented and are encouraged to disclose confidently knowing that their needs will be recognised, understood, and addressed.

9 Use of Appendices

Appendix 1 — Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls Policy for council tenants and leaseholders, and those approaching the council as homeless

Appendix 2 — Equality Impact Assessment of the Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls Policy for council tenants and leaseholders, and those approaching the council as homeless

10 Background papers

- **Haringey Housing Strategy 2024 – 2029:**
https://new.haringey.gov.uk/sites/default/files/202405/haringey_housing_strategy_2024_-_2029.pdf
- **Housing Services Improvement Plan:**
<https://www.minutes.haringey.gov.uk/documents/s138660/Appendix%201.pdf>

