

Report to Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

25 November 2021

Subject:	Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-24
Director:	Interim Director of Borough Economy, Nicholas Austin
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1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board considers and comments upon the draft Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-24

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 placed a new statutory duty for local authorities to provide specialist support for victims of domestic abuse in safe accommodation and includes a requirement for each local authority to produce a safe accommodation strategy by 5 January 2022.
- 2.2 Final [Statutory guidance](#) on the new duty for local authorities was issued by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) on 1 October 2021.
- 2.3 Under the duty, local authorities are required to:
- assess the need for victims of domestic abuse and their children in safe accommodation services in their areas;
 - produce a strategy to detail how they will respond to the duty;
 - commission support to victims and children in safe accommodation



- appoint a domestic abuse local partnership board for the purposes of providing advice to the authority about the exercise of the authority's functions;
- report back annually to central government that they have met these obligations.

- 2.4 Sandwell Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership (DASP) were already responsible for the development, co-ordination and delivery of the local domestic abuse strategy. DASP has been established as the new statutory board and the terms of reference have been updated to reflect the new requirements and responsibilities.
- 2.5 Linxs Consultancy were commissioned to undertake a full domestic abuse needs assessment and develop a new domestic abuse strategy for Sandwell. The first phase of this work has focussed on the production of a safe accommodation needs assessment which has informed the Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-24 (Appendix 1), to comply with the timescales required by the new statutory duty. Work on the wider needs assessment and strategy is continuing and it is intended that the full strategy will also be presented to Cabinet in early 2022. This work is being overseen by a multi-agency task and finish group which reports to the DASP.
- 2.6 The Safe Accommodation Strategy in Appendix 1 outlines the key points and recommendations from the needs assessment and how these will be addressed. The needs assessment has incorporated a range of data from partners; stakeholders feedback and feedback from domestic abuse victims-survivors.
- 2.7 The draft safe accommodation strategy was widely consulted on across SMBC and DASP partners and was published on the council's website on 25 October 2021 to comply with the statutory requirement to publish a draft strategy by that date. The final safe accommodation strategy is required for publication by 5 January 2022.
- 2.8 An implementation plan will be developed to underpin the delivery of the safe accommodation strategy which will be regularly monitored by DASP.



2.9 New Burdens Funding has been allocated to the council to support the delivery of the new safe accommodation duty and proposals for this are currently being developed.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>Best start in life for children and young people - The draft safe accommodation strategy outlines commitments to provide specialist support to children residing in safe accommodation who have experienced domestic abuse.</p>
	<p>People live well and age well - The draft safe accommodation strategy outlines commitments to provide specialist support to victims of domestic abuse and their children residing in safe accommodation who have experienced domestic abuse.</p>
	<p>Strong resilient communities - The draft safe accommodation strategy outlines commitments to provide specialist support to vulnerable victims and their families residing in safe accommodation and help them to cope and recover from domestic abuse.</p>

4 Context and Key Issues

4.1 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 included a new statutory duty on local authorities for the provision of specialist support for victims of domestic abuse in safe accommodation from April 2021. This duty requires that a safe accommodation needs assessment is undertaken which informs a safe accommodation strategy.

4.2 Safe accommodation is defined in the statutory guidance. This identifies that safe accommodation is classified as being refuge accommodation; specialist safe accommodation (i.e. dedicated specialist support to victims with relevant protected characteristics and/or complex needs); dispersed accommodation (safe self-contained and semi-independent accommodation); sanctuary schemes providing target hardening of properties along with specialist support and move-on and / or second stage accommodation.

4.3 Specialist support for victims is also defined in the statutory guidance to include:

- Advocacy support
- Domestic abuse prevention advice



- Specialist support for victims designed specifically for victims with relevant protected characteristics or with additional and / or complex needs
 - Children’s support
 - Housing-related support
 - Advice service
 - Counselling and therapy
- This list of support is not an exhaustive list and other relevant support services can be put in place (based on victims’ needs).

4.4 Work has been completed on the needs assessment which has informed the draft Safe Accommodation Strategy which is contained in Appendix 1. There has been wide consultation during the development of the needs assessment and strategy, which has been overseen by a multi-agency task and finish group and approved by the Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership.

4.5 The safe accommodation needs assessment has identified that the existing safe accommodation system in Sandwell is highly effective. The range of accommodation types and levels of support provided by Black Country Women’s Aid (BCWA) mean that survivors are routinely accepted regardless of the level of risk or complexity of presenting needs. There is also good outcome tracking for those who are declined a space in accommodation.

4.6 However, the needs assessment also identifies a number of issues and gaps which the safe accommodation strategy aims to address, and the following strategy themes are identified:

1. Improving the survivors’ recovery journey;
2. Enhancing the ability for survivors to stay in their own home;
3. Developing a more responsive and cohesive system.

4.7 The strategy commits to address these and outlines specific commitments including the need for: children’s support; psychologically-informed interventions for adults and children in safe accommodation; dedicated sanctuary provision for adults and children; and the need for resettlement and floating support for victims and children leaving refuge. It is proposed to address the additional needs identified by the needs



assessment using New Burdens funding and work is underway on proposals for this.

5 Implications

<p>Resources:</p>	<p>The delivery of the safe accommodation strategy will be funded via Sandwell’s New Burdens grant funding. This funding is intended to cover revenue expenditure relating to the functions set out in the new statutory duty on Tier 1 Local Authorities in Part 4 of the 2021 Domestic Abuse Act, relating to the provision of support to victims of domestic abuse and their children residing within safe accommodation.</p> <p>Government has indicated they will announce specific funding allocations after the 2021 autumn spending review for 2022-23 onwards.</p> <p>At the time of writing, these are yet to be confirmed.</p>
<p>Legal and Governance:</p>	<p>Final Statutory guidance on the new duty for local authorities was issued by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) on 1 October 2021.</p> <p>DLUHC requires that a final domestic abuse safe accommodation strategy is published by 5 January 2022.</p> <p>The guidance relates to the functions under the Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. This guidance states that local authorities should also ensure they meet existing statutory requirements including (but not limited to) those set out in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equality Act 2010 • Human Rights Act 1998 • Housing Act 1996 • Homelessness Act 2002 • Crime and Disorder Act 1998 <p>The guidance indicates that the Part 4 duties are separate to local authority housing duties under the Housing Act 1996 and Homelessness Act 2002 and</p>



	<p>does not place a requirement on authorities to provide domestic abuse victims with accommodation. However, local authorities must still comply with their duties under homelessness law in line with Chapter 8 of the Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities.</p> <p>The guidance states that local authorities should also consider their Part 4 duties alongside the following guidance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving access to social housing for victims of domestic abuse in refuges or other types of temporary accommodations: statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England. • Homelessness Code of Guidance • Keeping Children Safe in Education: Statutory guidance for schools and colleges • Working together to safeguard children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children • Violence against women and girls (including men and boys): national statement of expectations
Risk:	The recommendations from this report will mitigate the risk of specialist support to vulnerable victims of domestic abuse and their children in safe accommodation not being available during 2021-2024. It will also mitigate the risk of SMBC not fulfilling the statutory duty for local authorities outlined in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.
Equality:	An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed as part of Cabinet report process which has identified no adverse impacts or issues of concern for protected groups.
Health and Wellbeing:	The safe accommodation strategy would aim: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To increase the safety of victims and children • To improve the physical and mental health and wellbeing of victims • To improve children’s safety • To regain/retain victims’ stability, resilience and autonomy
Social Value	The safe accommodation strategy outlines commitments to provide specialist support for victims of domestic



	abuse and their children in safe accommodation. It will assist in addressing the significant issue of domestic abuse. It also aims to increase and improve the safety and wellbeing of adult and child victims, enabling them to cope and recover from the impact of domestic abuse and thus generating social value.
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6 Appendices

Appendix 1 - Final draft domestic abuse safe accommodation strategy 2021-2024.

7. Background Papers

Final [Statutory guidance](#) on the new duty for local authorities was issued by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) on 1 October 2021.

