

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**Report by the Chief Officer, Housing and Employability****Housing and Communities Committee: 1 September 2021**

Subject: No Home for Domestic Abuse: West Dunbartonshire Council Housing and Homelessness Services Domestic Abuse Policy Update

1. Purpose

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the updated “No Home for Domestic Abuse, West Dunbartonshire Council’s Housing and Homelessness Services Domestic Abuse Policy”.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** It is recommended that the Housing and Communities Committee:
- (i) Approves the updated “No Home for Domestic Abuse, West Dunbartonshire Council’s Housing and Homelessness Services Domestic Abuse Policy”, attached as Appendix 1
 - (ii) Requests that the Chief Officer Housing and Employability ensures the effective implementation of the updated policy.

3. Background

- 3.1** Domestic Abuse is a crime in Scotland. Domestic Abuse is also a violation of basic human rights and it is recognised that children who live with domestic abuse are themselves experiencing abuse.
- 3.2** The most recently published figures from Police Scotland show that in 2019/20 there were 62,907 incidents of domestic abuse recorded in Scotland, a rise of 3.7% compared to the previous year.
- 3.3** This equates to 115 incidents of domestic abuse per 10,000 population in Scotland. At a local level, West Dunbartonshire recorded 150 incidents per 10,000 population, which was the fourth highest rate of all local authorities in Scotland.
- 3.4** In 2018, West Dunbartonshire Council became the first social landlord in Scotland to introduce a zero tolerance approach to domestic abuse within its properties with the launch of our pioneering “No Home for Domestic Abuse” approach.
- 3.5** Figures recorded by the Council between 2019 and 2021 for those approaching for assistance show that women are disproportionately impacted

as victims of domestic abuse and men are much more likely to be the perpetrators, highlighted that domestic abuse is a gendered issue. Since 2019 there have been

- 153 female victims. In 152 of these cases the perpetrator was male;
- 6 male victims. In five of these cases the perpetrator was female and in one case the perpetrator was male.

Homelessness Presentations (2020/21)

- Domestic abuse presentations accounted for 22% of all homelessness presentations (232 households) in 2020/21;
- Of these 82% were female;
- A fifth were aged between 16-24.

3.6 This wider policy incorporates our No Home for Domestic Abuse approach in existing council homes and our wider Homelessness and housing options approach to ensure the best possible service for everyone living in West Dunbartonshire, regardless of tenure.

4. Main Issues

4.1 As a local authority we have a responsibility to prevent and respond to domestic abuse in accordance with Equally Safe (Scotland's strategy for preventing and addressing violence against women and girls).

4.2 The approach is being updated in response to the the Domestic Abuse Protection (Scotland) Act 2021, which became law on the 5 May 2021. This gives social landlords the ability to apply to the courts for a recovery of possession of a house from a perpetrator of domestic abuse, with the view that the tenancy can be transferred to the victim.

4.3 While omitted from the 2021 Act, The Scottish Government has committed that within the new housing legislation planned for this parliament, a mandatory requirement for all housing providers to have a Domestic Abuse policy in place will be introduced.

4.4 The key objective of the policy is to provide a proactive housing response to preventing and addressing domestic abuse by:

- Providing a sensitive and supportive response to victims/survivors;
- Working collaboratively to enable victims/survivors to access a range of housing options, advice, information and support; and
- Holding perpetrators to account.

4.5 No Home for Domestic Abuse sets out a zero tolerance approach to domestic abuse within council homes. It ensures that victims/survivors of domestic abuse have immediate access to practical help and specialist legal assistance

following any incident of domestic abuse and support to remain in their own home where this is the preferred option. The main aims are to:

- Respond effectively to those who are experiencing or perpetrating domestic abuse;
- Support tenants who are victims/survivors of domestic abuse;
- Minimise disruption to tenants and their children so they can maintain family and community, connections, employment, education and so on;
- Hold tenants who perpetrate domestic abuse to account;
- Prevent domestic abuse from occurring/re-occurring;
- Provide safe and secure accommodation for those households escaping domestic abuse;
- Help victims/survivors of domestic abuse to make informed decisions about their housing and accommodation;
- Collaborate with partners to provide a co-ordinated response to the accommodation/support/other needs of women and children experiencing domestic abuse; and the accommodation needs of perpetrators.

4.6 The zero tolerance approach of the No Home for Domestic Abuse policy helps:

- victims/survivors feel safe, supported and encouraged to come forward for help;
- tenants and residents within West Dunbartonshire feel safe and secure;
- victims/survivors to remain in their tenancy by removing the perpetrator;
- prevent homelessness.

4.7 The policy will be reviewed on an annual basis and the commitments within the policy will be monitored to ensure they are being met.

5. People Implications

5.1 There are no direct people implications from this policy as implementing and meeting the requirements of the policy will be delivered from existing resources within Housing and Employability. However, this will continue to be reviewed depending on resourcing requirement.

6. Financial and Procurement implications

6.1 There are no direct financial or procurement implications as a result of this policy. The supports referenced are already in place through our Homelessness and Housing Options Service and to council tenants through our No Home for Domestic Abuse approach. However, we will continue to monitor resource requirements as part of the delivery of the policy.

7. Risk Analysis

- 7.1** Given the high number of domestic abuse incidences in West Dunbartonshire and it is important that a formal policy is in place. This reflects best practice and having no approved policy risks reputation damage.

8. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 8.1** An Equalities, Health and Human Rights Impact Assessment and Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIA) have been undertaken and are available as background papers to this report.

9. Consultation

- 9.1** This policy was developed in close collaboration with West Dunbartonshire's Violence against Women and Girls Partnership (VAWP). This ensured that all key partner organisations including Women's Aid have been consulted with and been fully able to influence the policy.
- 9.2** As part of the consultation process, the draft policy was also brought to the attention of the WDTRO at the liaison meeting held in June 2021. A briefing note and the draft policy was shared in advance of the meeting and comments and questions were invited.
- 9.3** Following feedback, some changes and amendments were made, which included providing some up to date figures contextual figures around domestic abuse in Scotland and also highlighting clearly within the policy document that the overwhelming majority of victims of domestic abuse are women and girls and that the overwhelming majority of perpetrators are men, signifying domestic abuse is.
- 9.4** In addition to this wider consultation, a more specific consultation is being planned which aims to capture the views of women who have lived experience of domestic abuse. By sharing their stories and experience there is the opportunity to influence the service provision and commitments outlined in the draft policy. This exercise is currently being planned in conjunction with the VAWP.
- 9.5** We also plan to develop and carry out a survey to capture the voices of children and young people and are exploring with partners the best way to carry this out.
- 9.6** Recommendations arising from the wider consultation with those with lived experience and children and young people will be considered as part of the annual review referred to at 4.7 of this report.

10. Strategic Assessment

- 10.1 Having considered the Council's strategic priorities, this policy and the subsequent positive outcomes will support all of the Council's key strategic priorities.

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Date: 18 August 2021

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Appendices: Appendix 1: No Home for Domestic Abuse, West Dunbartonshire Council's Housing and Homelessness Services Domestic Abuse Policy

Background Papers: Equalities Impact Assessment
Children's Rights and Welfare Impact Assessment

Wards Affected: All

