

TITLE	Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-2024
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 18 October 2021
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Steve Moore

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Domestic Abuse affects around 2700 women and 1500 men in Wokingham each year.

The Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021 – 2024 will set out clearly the Council's response to new statutory duties introduced under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 as well as its wider response to domestic abuse.

The Strategy has wide multi-agency support from partner agencies to ensure delivery of our overall aim of improving the lives of those affected by domestic abuse who live in the Wokingham Borough or need to flee to Wokingham as a result of the abuse.

The Strategy informs a detailed action plan which will be driven by the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board and Domestic Abuse Networking Group and overseen by the Community Safety Partnership.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is requested to note the report and ratify the implementation of the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021 – 2024.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 came into effect on 29th April 2021 and places a new duty on Tier One authorities to offer a rounded offer of support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in safe accommodation. The 2021 Act includes the duty to provide support in safe accommodation to those who need to flee to our area as a result of domestic abuse.

The Wokingham Domestic Abuse Strategy 2017 – 2020 was extended to allow for the Domestic Abuse Act to pass into law, in order that the relevant elements of the legislation could be adopted.

In order to ensure that the Wokingham Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021 – 2024 sets out the Borough's full approach, this Strategy incorporates both the new duty as well as our wider response to domestic abuse.

This report sets out the process undertaken to develop this Strategy.

Once approved, the Strategy will be published on the Council's website. We are required to publish by 5th January 2022 at the latest, with a draft strategy to be published by 26th October 2021 (draft has already been published linked to public consultation undertaken from 23rd July – 20th August 2021).

Background

The Government has stated that having the right support to protect and assist victims of domestic abuse will make individuals and families safer, sooner. It further recognises the critical importance of safe accommodation and support for victims and children as they rebuild their lives after the trauma of domestic abuse.

Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (which was passed into legislation on 29th April 2021), underpinned by guidance produced by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (formerly Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government), introduced new requirements on local authorities and more accountability in the local delivery of domestic abuse support in safe accommodation.

Under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, Tier One authorities are required to assess the need for support and prepare strategies to provide support for victims (who need to reside) in relevant accommodation (also referred to as safe accommodation) and put in place a new statutory framework for delivery.

This duty is to appoint a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board which it must consult as it performs certain specific functions; assess the need for domestic abuse support in the council's area for all victims (and their children) who reside in relevant safe accommodation, including those who come from outside their area; prepare and publish a strategy for the provision of such support having regard to the needs assessment; give effect to the strategy; monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy and report back annually to central government.

Wokingham's Local Partnership Board has been established and meets bi-monthly, the first meeting having taken place on 31st March 2021. Data for the period 1/4/2020 – 31/3/2021 was collected and analysed, together with a review of support already in place and in depth interviews with individuals and organisation in order to produce a robust needs assessment. The needs assessment was considered by the Partnership Board to inform a draft strategy which was subject to public consultation from 23rd July – 20th August 2021. Consultation responses have been incorporated into the Strategy attached to this report.

The new domestic abuse duty covers only the support element for victims and children in safe accommodation and not the requirement to provide safe accommodation, which falls within existing homelessness legislation.

Analysis of Issues

- Wokingham BC must prepare and publish a local strategy based on a robust needs assessment, the first of which should be published before 5th January 2022 as set out in regulations. Thereafter, Strategies must be reviewed every three years
- The decision has been made to widen the Strategy to incorporate the Borough's wider response to domestic abuse, refreshing the 2017-2020 strategy and incorporating the new duties.
- A robust needs assessment has been undertaken and Strategy produced in consultation with the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board and Domestic Abuse Networking Group and incorporating public consultation feedback.

- Overview and Scrutiny Committee feedback on the Strategy is requested and support for this document to progress to formal ratification and publication.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	0	N/A	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	0	N/A	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	0	N/A	N/A

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

The Government has committed to provide funding to meet the new duty and Wokingham BC has received £50,000 to prepare for the new duty and £247,326 to meet the new duty costs for 2021/22. Further funding decisions will be made in the Spending Review.

Cross-Council Implications (how does this decision impact on other Council services, including properties and priorities?)

The Strategy will set out the cross-Council's approach. The new duty detailed within the Strategy impacts various Council departments. The greatest impact will be on the homelessness team but builds on the team's aspiration to gain DAHA (Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance) accreditation – DAHA accreditation being the 'gold standard' for housing providers responding to domestic abuse.
Funding received will help to mitigate the cost of the new duty.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Please confirm that due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken and if an equalities assessment has been completed or explain why an equalities assessment is not required.

An equalities assessment has been undertaken and is included within this item.

Climate Emergency – This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030

Please state clearly what the impact of the decision being made would be on the Council's carbon neutral objective.

There will be no impact as a result of this decision on the Council's carbon neutral objective.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
The Council is required to publish a Domestic Abuse Strategy relating to Part 4 (Support for victims of domestic abuse and their children in safe accommodation) of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 by 5 th January 2022.

List of Background Papers
Draft Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-2024 Equalities Impact Assessment

Contact Karen Evans	Service Place and Growth
Telephone No 07562 169321	Email karen.evans@wokingham.gov.uk