

Agenda Item 77.

TITLE	Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021 - 2024
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Wednesday 15 th December 2021
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Steve Moore
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Neighbourhood and Communities - Bill Soane

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

To seek approval for the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021 – 2024 and for this to be published.

Approval and publication will enable residents and organisations to understand the Council's approach to domestic abuse. This will include our holistic approach to support all those who are affected by domestic abuse as well as how we propose to meet our new duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 relating to support for victims of domestic abuse and their children in safe accommodation.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive approve the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021 – 2024 so that it can be released for publication.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

The Wokingham Domestic Abuse Strategy 2017 – 2020 was due for refreshing but a decision was made to wait for the Domestic Abuse Act to pass into law, in order that the relevant elements of the legislation could be included in the refresh.

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 and seek approval for agreement and publication.

Government funding has been provided to meet the council's new duty.

Once agreed, this Strategy will be published on the Council's website.

BACKGROUND

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

Following extensive engagement and public consultation, 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.

The 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 councils 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. The duty does not cover the requirement to provide the safe accommodation as this falls within existing homelessness legislation.

In order to set out the council's holistic approach for all those affected by domestic abuse, not just those who reside in safe accommodation, the Domestic Abuse Strategy this report covers refreshes the 2017-2020 strategy alongside incorporating the new duty.

BUSINESS CASE

- The decision to approve the Domestic Abuse Strategy for 2021 – 2024 ensures the council meets its statutory duty under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.
- There were statistically estimated to be 2700 women and 1500 men in Wokingham who were affected by domestic abuse in the past year.
- The expected outcome is that Wokingham residents as well as those who may need to flee to Wokingham as a result of domestic abuse are aware of the council's approach to domestic abuse.

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

The Government has committed to provide funding to meet the new duty and Wokingham BC 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.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

Consultation was undertaken with members of the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board and the Domestic Abuse Networking Group in order to produce a draft Strategy. This draft was subject to public consultation from 23rd July to 20th August 2021.

Public Sector Equality Duty

An equalities assessment has been undertaken and is included as part of 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

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

List of Background Papers

Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021 – 2024
Equalities assessment

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