

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| TITLE | Council's Anti-Abuse Charter |
| FOR CONSIDERATION BY | Council on 20 January 2022 |
| WARD | None specific |
| LEAD OFFICER | Director, Place and Growth - Steve Moore |

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

- Increased awareness, education and training in relation to violence and abuse including domestic abuse through the commitment of a local Anti-Abuse Charter.
- Increased access to levels of help and support for those experiencing violence and abuse.
- Implementation of a trauma-based approach across the Council.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council approve the adoption of a local Anti-Abuse Charter.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Nationally there is clear recognition that deeper more conscious understanding and actions need to take place to successfully tackle violence in our society. As part of this wider strategic context is the important work of the Violence Against Women and Girls agenda. In response the government set out a new Domestic Abuse duty and The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 came into effect in April 2021.

Locally, in December 2021 the Council agreed a new Wokingham Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021 – 2024 which sets out the Borough's approach, this strategy incorporates both the new duty as well as our wider response to domestic abuse. In turn this strategy makes an important contribution to our localised approach to addressing the wider response to violence under the umbrella of work being undertaken by the Wokingham Community Safety Partnership.

The Council is proud of the large amounts of work already underway and in place to ensure those reaching out for help and assistance receive the right help at the right time.

However, the journey to deliver change for victims and survivors is challenging and arduous. It requires commitment to change from all sections of society and continued full commitment from all.

Therefore, to help ensure that the Wokingham Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-24 is implemented and to champion the guiding principles within it. The Council has been working closely with local domestic violence charity Kaleidoscopic UK, to develop a Charter for all Officers and Councillors. The Charter makes the Council's intent clear and will help residents, including victims and survivors understand the Council's commitment towards fostering a deep-rooted culture and step change.

The Charter

Wokingham Borough Council stands committed to preventing any form of violence or abuse against anyone in the Borough. Officers and Councillors pledge to champion a culture of high standards by reporting abuse and supporting victims throughout their recovery journey. This includes being informed on recognising signs of trauma and preventing victim blaming.

Background

Nationally there is clear recognition that deeper more conscious understanding and actions need to take place to successfully tackle violence in our society. As part of this wider strategic context is the important work of the Violence Against Women and Girls agenda. In response the government set out a new Domestic Abuse duty and The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 came into effect in April 2021.

Locally, in December 2021 the Council agreed a new Wokingham Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021 – 2024 which sets out the Borough's approach, this strategy incorporates both the new duty as well as our wider response to domestic abuse. In turn this strategy makes an important contribution to our localised approach to addressing the wider response to violence under the umbrella of work being undertaken by the Wokingham Community Safety Partnership.

The Council is proud of the large amounts of work already underway and in place to ensure those reaching out for help and assistance receive the right help at the right time.

Wokingham has 43 different domestic abuse stakeholders including Cranston our local commissioned Domestic Abuse Service Provider and SupportU, a service offering support for LGBT+ victims.

These 43 stakeholders share key service information and work hand in hand to help victims and survivors of domestic abuse. Other local organisations such as Kaleidoscopic UK, a peer support charity for victims has been at the heart of championing local domestic abuse provision and been working closely with the Council on the proposed Charter. This further demonstrates the Council's commitment to the already comprehensive Domestic Abuse Strategy and work plan.

Already in train is a strong Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board which has made considerable amounts of progress on delivering our Domestic Abuse Duty which came into force on 29th April 2021. This local board has attendance and expert input from the National Domestic Abuse Commissioners Office as well as The Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities.

Work has started on securing Domestic Abuse Housing Accreditation (DAHA) for our Council Housing Services. This will ensure that we are taking clear actions focused steps, in both our policies and practice to deliver the safest and most effective response for domestic abuse victims seeking help from the Council.

The Council has one of the most comprehensive Home Security Schemes, often referred to as a Sanctuary Scheme. Which offers practical home security adaptations to secure properties for victims. This offer of help is for all residents, in privately owned, rented, Council or housing association properties. The scheme provides an essential and practical offer of help for victims of domestic abuse and assists them to stay in their own homes. Something victims have told us they would prefer to do, were safe and possible.

Furthermore, in recent months we have undertaken a comprehensive audit and review of training for officers and frontline staff to ensure that they are equipped to help victims. We have put in place Workplace Domestic Abuse Guidance to ensure that managers can recognise and spot the signs to help support staff members that maybe victims and in need of help.

A communications strategy that underpins the Wokingham Domestic Abuse Strategy. together with regular press and social media posts has been rolled out. Together with information and ways to access help, which has been provided at Covid clinics and testing locations.

In addition to all this good work, we are active members of a number of national accredited programmes including; the Employers Initiative on Domestic Abuse (EIDA).

The Council is also exploring a number of other good practice and inclusive accreditation schemes including, UK Safe Spaces and Call for Action on Perpetrators. A workstream which shares research findings, best practice and drives national policy work on perpetrators. We are in talks with Ask for ANI which will allow the use of nationally recognised stickers on office buildings to signal staff are aware of domestic abuse and can provide a room where victims can call helplines for support.

And whilst we are proud to say that our efforts have been commended by the National Domestic Abuse Commissioners Office, who have recognised the level of commitment and good practice being undertaken locally. We still have more to achieve to ensure we make the borough a safe place for all victims.

The journey to deliver change for victims and survivors is challenging and arduous. It requires commitment to change from all sections of society. To help ensure that the Wokingham Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-24 is implemented inclusively and to champion the guiding principles within it.

Analysis of Issues

Violence in Society is a serious problem which destroys families and communities. As part of this agenda, is the widespread issue of domestic abuse which affects parts of all communities.

A local Charter for all Officers and Councillors is proposed for adoption. It will make the intent of the Council clear and will help residents, including victims and survivors understand the Council's commitment towards fostering a deep-rooted culture and step change on violence and abuse.

The Charter will assist to champion the Council’s new Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-2024 and help embedded its approach to raising education, awareness and training of wider forms of abuse.

The Charter

Wokingham Borough Council stands committed to preventing any form of violence or abuse against anyone in the Borough. Officers and Councillors pledge to champion a culture of high standards by reporting abuse and supporting victims throughout their recovery journey. This includes being informed on recognising signs of trauma and preventing victim blaming.

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) | None | None | None |
| Next Financial Year (Year 2) | None | None | None |
| Following Financial Year (Year 3) | None | None | None |

| |
|--|
| Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision |
| None |

| |
|-----------------------------------|
| Cross-Council Implications |
| None |

| |
|---|
| Public Sector Equality Duty |
| A full equalities impact assessment has been undertaken as part of the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-24. It has also been undertaken as part of the full Community Safety Strategy 2021-24. Therefore an EqlA is not required. |

| |
|---|
| Climate Emergency – <i>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</i> |
| None |

| |
|-----------------------------------|
| List of Background Papers |
| Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-2024 |

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Contact Narinder Brar | Service Place |
| Telephone No 07979255308 | Email Narinder.Brar@wokingham.gov.uk |