

Committee:	Date:
Housing Management & Almshouses Sub-Committee	24/09/2018
Subject: Domestic Abuse Policy	Public
Report of: Director of Community & Children's Services	For Decision
Report author: Liam Gillespie, Head of Estates	

Summary

Safeguarding adults and children is a key function of the Department of Community & Children's Services and responding to domestic violence and abuse is an important part of this work. Given their close contact with residents, front-line housing staff play a vital role in identifying and responding to cases of domestic violence and abuse and ensuring that appropriate action is taken to help victims.

A Domestic Abuse Policy has been drafted, which explains our commitment to dealing sensitively with cases of domestic abuse and ensuring that victims are supported using a multi-agency approach.

The Policy sets out how we will respond to cases of domestic violence and abuse and the steps we will take to ensure appropriate help is arranged, including addressing the victim's housing needs.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Approve the Domestic Abuse Policy for use by the Housing Service

Main Report

Background

1. The City's Housing Service is committed to supporting victims of domestic violence and abuse and working with other agencies to ensure that victims are given help that meets their needs. Front-line housing staff have an important role to play in safeguarding adults and children; they may receive reports of domestic abuse from concerned neighbours, disclosures directly from victims, or they may see concerning behaviour themselves during their work.

2. Due to the particularly sensitive nature of the issue, a Domestic Abuse Policy has been drafted, with an associated procedure for staff to follow. The policy describes our approach to cases that come to our attention and our commitment to addressing the housing needs of the victim and their household.
3. Victims are entitled to expect a sympathetic, supportive and effective response from us when they report domestic violence or abuse. The policy and procedure will underpin training given to staff in responding appropriately to cases of domestic violence and abuse. It will also address some common areas of concern for victims, particularly around housing needs, as well as underlining our commitment to taking the strongest possible action against perpetrators where we have the power to do so.

Current Position

4. The Safer City Partnership and Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence (“DA&SV”) Forum oversees the response to domestic violence and abuse at strategic level within the City. As part of the DA&SV Action Plan for 2017-19, we committed, among other things, to reviewing tenancy and lease clauses, as well as policies and procedures, to ensure they were fit for purpose.
5. Our tenancies and leases contain clauses prohibiting domestic violence and abuse and in this new policy we state our commitment to acting against perpetrators where we have the power to do so.
6. Having a clear policy and procedure will give staff confidence when dealing with reports of domestic violence and abuse and will enable them to provide more effective support to victims. The policy is also intended as a public statement of our commitment to safeguarding the interests of victims. We aim to create an environment in which victims of violence and abuse feel able to come forward to seek our help and that they get a supportive response the first time they approach us.
7. Multi-agency working is vital in dealing with domestic violence and abuse and the Housing & Neighbourhoods Team participates in multi-agency partnerships and forums in the City and in host boroughs. Further training and briefings will be arranged for staff to ensure that they feel equipped to deal with reports of domestic violence and abuse and know how it should be reported and to whom.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

8. This policy supports the Corporate aim of contributing to a flourishing society and the outcome of ensuring people are safe and feel safe. The policy also supports the Departmental objectives relating to community and personal safety, as well as health and wellbeing.

Policy Management

9. This is a new policy and there has not been a stand-alone domestic abuse policy for the Housing Service previously.

10. The Safeguarding Policy for Housing Services, last updated in 2016, does refer to domestic abuse in a safeguarding context. It was considered sensible to have a discrete policy relating to domestic abuse due to the special considerations that arise for housing management staff in responding to domestic abuse cases. This new policy adds detail but does not alter any policy approaches outlined in the Safeguarding Policy.
11. The Safeguarding Policy for Housing Services is due for review in early 2019.

Conclusion

12. The Housing Service plays an important part in identifying safeguarding concerns and in supporting victims of domestic violence. The Domestic Abuse Policy is intended to support this work and ensure that victims' interests are safeguarded. It also stresses the importance of working closely with other relevant agencies to ensure victims are assisted to remain as safe as possible.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Domestic Abuse Policy
- Appendix 2 – Equalities assessment
- Appendix 3 – Consultation comments and responses

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