

**Meeting:** Informal Cabinet      **Date:** 5<sup>th</sup> October 2021

**Wards affected:** All

**Report Title:** Domestic Abuse Act – Safe Accommodation Strategy

**When does the decision need to be implemented?** Immediately

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## 1. Purpose of Report

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- 1.1 This report and accompanying presentation provide the Cabinet with an outline of the emerging findings of the Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment that is required under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021; and the draft Safe Accommodation Strategy action plan resulting from the recommendations of the Needs Assessment.
- 1.2 This report also provides an update on the progress of work relating to sexual violence and the safety of women and girls in Torbay, following the outcomes of the Sarah Everard murder.

### Background

- 1.3 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 requires Tier 1 Authorities to undertake an assessment of the support need of victims of domestic violence and their children in safe accommodation.
- 1.4 A Safe Accommodation Strategy must be produced by 31<sup>st</sup> October 2021 outlining how the needs identified in the assessment will be met.
- 1.5 The Safe Accommodation Duty commences on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2021.
- 1.6 The Needs Assessment has been undertaken as part of a wider review of domestic abuse in Torbay, that will inform the new DASV Strategy to be produced next year.
- 1.7 Due to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) deadline for the submission of the Strategy, consultation on the draft Strategy has been necessarily

limited to the statutory partners attending DASV Executive and Operations Groups. The draft Strategy will require some updating once the full strategic review has been completed. It is therefore proposed that the current ongoing governance processes are to seek approval for the direction of travel and that full and robust consultation on the Safe Accommodation Strategy will take place as part of the consultation for the new DASV Strategy.

## **Headline Findings from the Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment**

1.8 Prevalence and visibility of domestic violence victims approaching the current safe accommodation service (Torbay Domestic Abuse Service) does not match the local demographic profile

1.9 Low numbers of people with disabilities, older people and people with specific or intersecting/complex needs are accessing safe accommodation in Torbay

1.10 Consistency and quality of data recording has been highlighted as an issue across agencies

1.11 The needs assessment captures the voices of 25 people with lived experience in Torbay, many of whom reflected on the challenges they experienced in seeking accommodation (either temporary or permanent) and the impact this had upon them and their children.

1.12 The current model of dispersed accommodation units as opposed to a refuge is seen to be favourable. Torbay has adequate capacity however more units are required due to the local housing situation and the changes brought in by the DAA21 with regard to cross border referrals.

## **The Safe Accommodation Strategy**

1.13 The Strategy sections represent different parts of a victim's journey to safety:

- Finding a safe place to stay
- Getting support for victims and their children in safe accommodation
- Moving on to a permanent home

1.14 Each section then describes what there is in Torbay, how it is experienced by victim survivors and what is needed, missing or could be better, as described by those who have used services.

1.15 The recommendations follow the same headings and include:

- Adoption of elements of The Whole Housing Approach (a toolkit of housing related interventions related to domestic abuse including preventing the need to access safe accommodation, and housing options)
- A safe accommodation pathway including improving information and communications to victim survivors
- Increasing the capacity of safe accommodation (by expanding existing provision within TDAS by a minimum of 7 additional units)
- Improving the accessibility of safe accommodation

- Ensuring all staff working with victims of domestic abuse have appropriate skills and training and understand the new legal requirements
- Suggestions for options that would benefit Torbay but would need to be undertaken in collaboration with other Peninsula Authorities

## 2. Reason for Proposal and its benefits

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We want Torbay and its residents to thrive.

We want Torbay to be a place where we have turned the tide on poverty and tackled inequalities; where our children and older people will have high aspirations and where there are quality jobs, good pay and affordable housing for our residents.

We want Torbay to be the premier resort in the UK, with a vibrant arts and cultural offer for our residents and visitors to enjoy; where our built and natural environment is celebrated and where we play our part in addressing the climate change emergency.

- 2.1 The proposals in this report help us to deliver this ambition by Building Safer Communities and specifically enabling Torbay Council to work with partners to tackle domestic abuse and sexual violence and its effects
- 2.2 The reasons for the decision are to enable the Council to meet its statutory responsibilities under the DA Act 2021 and protect Torbay's victim of domestic abuse from harm.

## 3. Sexual Violence and Safety Update

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3.1 Safer Communities Torbay, the police and OPCC are in advanced discussions, soon to be finalised, regarding funding being made available by the OPCC to contribute to the widening of Torbay's CCTV infrastructure and upgrading of street lighting around the Torquay Town Centre area. This funding would also cover some community based crime reduction measures. We would anticipate the CCTV and street lighting work to be completed by the start of Spring of 2022.

3.2 Torbay, along with our Peninsula partners Devon, Plymouth and Cornwall Councils, Devon and Cornwall Clinical Commissioning Groups and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner have been named the first NHS England Pathfinder for Adult Victims and Survivors of Sexual Assault and Abuse with Complex Trauma Related Mental Health Needs. This comes with a substantial funding of nearly £1m over three years, to test and develop new ways to increase access to skilled professionals responding to the mental health needs of adult victims and survivors experiencing complex trauma resulting from sexual violence.

3.3 The Pathfinder allows us to take forward many activities identified from our joint work with the Innovation Unit over the last year. In addition, we have held a further successful engagement event with various stakeholders that has resulted in several workstreams that will be taken forward to test new approaches. These workstreams relate to:

- supporting disclosure of sexual violence and abuse in communities
- raising awareness in early years settings and schools
- awareness raising campaign to address the silence and stigma surrounding sexual violence and abuse, and
- operation no waiting – to tackle waiting lists for sexual violence support services

The workstreams will align with and/or complement existing good practice and ongoing programmes of work (for example in education) to avoid duplication.

3.4 The Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group is actively considering whether to develop a specific Sexual Violence Strategy as the current Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy ends in 2022. This would ensure more focussed attention on identifying and addressing sexual violence and the safety of women and girls in Torbay and enable clearer oversight of activities and interventions. This will be crucial considering the amount of scrutiny that the Sarah Everard case has generated; including the End to End Rape Review, the Ofsted thematic report into the sexual harassment of girls in education settings; and the recent report on the effectiveness of the Police in tackling violence against women and girls. We can expect more of the same as the enquiry into the Sarah Everard case continues.

3.5 Torbay Council is seeking to renew its White Ribbon Campaign Accreditation that expired in 2020. The White Ribbon Campaign seeks to engage and facilitate men speaking out about violence against women and girls with a view to ending it. In doing so we aim to recognise, amplify and facilitate the role men can play in challenging violence perpetrated by men.

## 4. Recommendation(s) / Proposed Decision

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- 4.1. That the outline commissioning and action plan is approved in principle as set out at Appendix 1
- 4.2. That full consultation on the Safe Accommodation Strategy and action plan is undertaken as part of the consultation on the new DASV Strategy. A wider DA Needs Assessment has been commissioned alongside the production of the Safe Accommodation Strategy Needs Assessment, these will inform and enable the production of a new Strategy for Domestic Abuse in Torbay. This new DASV Strategy will involve a full consultation process and therefore come back to Cabinet as will form part of the Council's governance framework. Hence why at this stage it is recommended to approve this direction of travel ahead of full consultation next year.
- 4.3 That the progress on work to protect the safety of women and girls and to address sexual violence is noted and that the Council fully support not just the White Ribbon accreditation process, but encourage Officers and Councillors alike to become White Ribbon Ambassadors (men) or Champions (women).

## Appendices

## Appendix 1: Safe Accommodation Strategy DRAFT Commissioning and Action Plan