

Meeting:	Decision Session - Executive Member for Housing, Planning and Safer Communities (including the local plan).
Meeting date:	05/02/2025
Report of:	Director of Housing & Communities
Portfolio of:	Cllr. M Pavlovic- Executive Member for Housing, Planning and Safer Communities (including the Local Plan)

Decision Report: City of York Council Domestic Abuse Resident and Tenant Policy.

Subject of Report

1. The report presents the City of York (CYC) Council Housing Domestic Abuse (DA) Resident and Tenant Policy 2025 - 2028 for approval. The Policy is designed to reduce the risk and consequences of domestic abuse and outlines how CYC's Housing Service and will respond to domestic abuse when it affects residents, tenants, and leaseholders.
2. The Policy builds on existing pathways, approaches and responses to domestic abuse as well as providing guidance on how the Service will improve current practice. To ensure victims and survivors of domestic abuse receive a victim centred, supportive response.
3. Supported by Public Health, Housing Services committed in 2023 to achieving the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance Accreditation (DAHA). This accreditation gives social housing providers and local authorities a framework on best practice responses for domestic abuse victims/survivors, to develop and embed within Housing Services at a strategic and operational level. Within this framework 'policies and procedures' are an area of focus to develop. A requirement for this accreditation is to have a stand-alone domestic abuse resident policy outlining CYC's commitment and response to

domestic abuse victims/survivors. This Policy meets the required standard towards DAHA and is an important step for the service and council to take.

4. The Policy is important as it provides practical advice and support regarding domestic abuse to City of York Council tenants, residents, and leaseholders, setting standards and guidance regarding practices as a housing service to staff and the public. This Policy communicates the CYC and Housing Services organisational culture, values, and philosophy, making it clear to employees, customers, and the community what they can expect from CYC as a council and housing provider.

Benefits and Challenges

5. The benefits of this proposal is that it:
 - Provides tenants/residents/service users with clear and succinct reassurance on what they can expect from the Service's domestic abuse response.
 - Provides a commitment to a co-ordinated community response for domestic abuse victims/survivors. Setting out how the Service will work together with partner agencies to tackle domestic abuse as a multi-agency approach is paramount for victim/survivor safety.
 - This Policy will support towards achieving actions for the Housing Service, from the Domestic Abuse Joint Strategy, created by CYC, North Yorkshire Council (NYC) & the North Yorkshire Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner (NYPFCC).
 - Supporting the approved 2024 – 29 Homeless & Rough Sleeping Strategy in which one of the key themes is 'tackling domestic abuse' within homelessness as well as legislative requirements within the Homeless Reduction Act 2018.
 - Meeting requirements from the Housing Regulator. An expectation from the Regulator is for social landlords to have a domestic abuse resident/tenant policy in place.
 - Supporting the council's core commitments expressed in the 2023 – 2027 Council Plan - Equality of Opportunity and Health and Wellbeing.
 - This policy will empower victims to feel confident, safe, and reassured to disclose domestic abuse and support staff to feel confident and knowledgeable on signs/indicators of domestic abuse, which in turn they will be able to provide early intervention

and support. Being firm and clear on the council's zero-tolerance approach to abuse and holding perpetrators to account provides further reassurance to victims/survivors.

- The Policy will be supported by an extensive programme of training to ensure that staff have the skills and confidence to implement the best practice set out in the Policy

6. The challenges of this proposal are:

- This Policy will require a culture shift to embed within practice. This Policy strives towards a more trauma informed victim centred approach, which may be a change to how staff currently operate. This could be a challenge to overcome while embedding the Policy, without complete buy in and support at a strategic and operational level. A plan is in development to roll out trauma informed training across the council and will be necessary for Housing staff to receive alongside the DAHA training.
- In the event this Policy is not embedded into practice across the entire Housing Service, victims/survivors may not receive a consistent service, therefore not meeting approved standards of practice, which could create an unequal response, which would have an adverse impact on victims/survivors navigating the council's various housing services.

Policy Basis for Decision

7. The Council Plan highlights that York reports a population of 202,821 residents (now over 204,000). In the 2022/2023 financial year there were 2,069 domestic abuse related crimes recorded by North Yorkshire Police that had occurred in York, but it is recognised that domestic abuse is an underreported crime. In the year 2021/2022 the national DA charity SafeLives conducted a strategic needs assessment for the City of York and their estimate tool suggests a total number of victims or adults who have experienced domestic abuse since the age of 16 is 32,500. The Council Plan demonstrates this administration's commitment to all York residents to enjoy happier, healthier, longer lives, in homes that meet their needs, able to actively participate in their communities, with access to the right support at the right time. This Policy complies directly with the ambitions set down in the Council Plan and the City's 10-year strategies on this basis as the data shows there are many York residents experiencing domestic abuse

and their specific needs require prioritising and addressing to ensure their happier, healthier, longer lives.

8. Domestic abuse has a huge effect and burden of distress placed on people's mental, emotional, social, and physical health. The Council Plan and its Core Commitment to Health recognises this. The Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2032 also states 'Take a council-wide approach to tackle domestic abuse and support victims and Survivors'.
9. The Patchwork of Provision report, released by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's office in 2022 analyses the effect of existing services on victims and survivors and assesses the accessibility and availability of resources. The report identifies UK wide, the noteworthy gaps in service, including for those with protected characteristics, multiple, complex, or additional needs, face challenges accessing services and the lack of specialised 'by and for' domestic abuse services. This Policy supports the council's Equalities and Human Rights Core Commitment, providing clear standards on how the council's response will be accessible for all, a commitment to understanding intersectionality and removing those systemic barriers for all to access and have support. As the Policy sets out a robust and supportive response to victims/survivors it also demonstrates a commitment to 'how the council operates' priority within the Council Plan, providing improvement on customer experience to make a positive difference.

Financial Strategy Implications

10. The adoption of the Policy presented in this paper will be covered within the existing annual Housing Revenue Account (HRA) operating budget. Any areas of additional cost, such as investment in properties to ensure security will be off set against the cost of managing neighbourhood incidents and tenancy moves and termination.

Recommendation and Reasons

11. The Executive Member is asked to:
 - a) Approve the Domestic Abuse Resident and Tenant Policy 2025-2028.

Reason: To provide victims/ survivors of domestic abuse the best housing response which will contribute to achieving positive outcomes supporting them to lead happy confident and safe futures, while meeting legislation and strategic requirements.

12. Approve the publication of the Domestic Abuse Resident and Tenant Policy 2025 - 2028.

Reason: To raise the profile and awareness to the public of the positive changes introduced to best support victims/survivors of domestic abuse. This will further awareness raising of domestic abuse, the impacts on those affected by domestic abuse, the support available and the councils' actions and response. This will provide reassurance and confidence to all residents of York including staff implementing this practice.

13. Approve that 6 monthly updates be provided to the executive member on the progress and implementation of this policy and the Domestic abuse housing alliance (DAHA) action plan.

Reason: To provide the executive member with confidence on the implementation of this policy across the housing service. This will also support with addressing the challenges set out in this report and collectively holding the housing service accountable to achieving the successful introduction and embedment of the policy.

11. Approval of the Policy will trigger the following management actions:

- To develop and implement a full communications plan including the development of quick and easy to read information, advice, and guidance.
- To develop a Domestic Abuse housing procedure to support the Policy.
- The development of internal training on domestic abuse and the implementation of this Policy.
- To monitor and embed within everyday practice across all Housing Services.

Background

14. In December 2019 the Government was elected with a manifesto commitment to “support all victims of domestic abuse and pass the Domestic Abuse Bill” originally introduced in the last Parliament. The Act aims to ensure that victims have the confidence to come forward and report their experiences, safe in the knowledge that the state will do everything it can, both to support them and their children and pursue the abuser. This year the Government demonstrated their commitment to tackling domestic abuse as their pledge is to halve violence against women and girls in a decade. The 2021 Domestic Abuse Act included changes to the Homeless Reduction Act that guarantees that all victims/survivors will be in priority need for housing and will keep a secure tenancy in social housing if they need to escape an abuser, demonstrating the important link between domestic abuse and housing.
15. SafeLives are a UK wide charity dedicated to ending domestic abuse for everyone for good and they work with organisations across the UK to transform the response to domestic abuse. SafeLives were commissioned to provide support and coordination to CYC and NYC in carrying out the Safe Accommodation needs assessment in line with their statutory duty under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. The charity’s report outlines their findings, following review and analysis of data provided by agencies and organisations across City of York and North Yorkshire, and from hearing the voice and experiences of victims and survivors. The report, finalised in 2023, provided insight on the areas within CYC that would need improvement, to ensure statutory duties are met and victims and survivors experience the best response. Within the report the Housing Service’s response was one of the areas highlighted for improvement, this led to the introduction of the DAHA accreditation to best support improving the Housing Service response to domestic abuse.
16. The Ministry for Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) endorses DAHA as national best practice in the national Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy. The council has committed to DAHA as the goal is to facilitate the building of new and better responses to domestic abuse within housing practices at both operational and strategic levels. The DAHA framework sets out the values, principles and 8 priority areas for the accreditation, these are detailed within Annex C. A requirement for this accreditation is to have a stand-alone domestic abuse and resident policy outlining the council and Housing Service’s

commitment and response to domestic abuse victims/survivors alongside this being the right action for victims/survivors accessing Housing services.

17. Between 1st April– 30th June 2023, the second most common reason for those owed a homeless relief duty in England was domestic abuse, accounting for 6,460 or 16.6% of households. This was an increase of 4.5% from the same quarter in the previous year (source: the then Department for Levelling up Housing & Communities 30.11.2023). This demonstrates the vast impact on housing and homelessness that domestic abuse has, highlighting the need for this area to have a focus and clear direction on how housing tackles domestic abuse.
18. The Policy at Annex A responds to these challenges and covers:
 - Introduction and policy purpose
 - Policy Scope
 - Definition of Domestic Abuse
 - Our Values: The councils' values and key priorities are at the core of the organisation. Providing guidance on how the council engages and works with communities and residents, including the how the council supports those affected by domestic abuse.
 - Our Aims & Practices
 - Standards for responding to Domestic Abuse
 - Support Services
 - How to access support if you are concerned about your own behaviour or that of someone you know
 - Confidentiality and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
 - Consultation
 - Link to other policies and policy review expectations.

Consultation Analysis

19. The proposed Policy has been developed in consultation with a range of organisations and individuals, including those working with

lived experience of domestic abuse as well as staff and organisations involved in delivering services to communities, both in York and elsewhere. The majority of those involved in the consultation were a part of an operational DAHA task and finish group, collaboratively working to achieve DAHA, these include:

- Staff working within statutory homeless services.
- Staff working in hostels, support services and local area co-ordinators.
- Staff working within allocation of social housing.
- Staff working with City of York Council tenants.
- Public Health
- IDAS charity
- Changing Lives
- Halo Project
- Foundation (+Choices)
- Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board
- Refugee Resettlement Team
- Anti-social Behaviour Team
- Neighbourhood Enforcement Team
- STADA Charity (Standing together against domestic abuse)

20. Consultees were engaged via one operational group, one-to-one conversations, group discussion and consultation in team meetings and via written submission.

21. This Policy was taken to tenant scrutiny panel on 3rd December 2024. The panel thought the Policy is excellent, easy to read and to understand although very long. The panel did have queries regarding the implementation of the Policy with staff and whether training will be offered in which panel members were assured alongside the proposal of the Policy there are actions recommended to be taken including training to ensure staff have the tools, knowledge, and confidence to commit to the response set out within the Policy.

22. The panel suggested that a summary of key points could be put together when advertised to the public linking to the full Policy. This might be more easily accessible for someone needing quick and brief information and signposting to services.

23. The conclusions drawn from the consultations supported with the development of the Policy. A few highlighted conclusions that have been included in the Policy are:
- a) Victims/Survivors need a trauma informed, victim centred approach. The response should focus on the individuals, wishes, wants, and needs as each case is different. Committing to this approach will ensure all victims/survivors feel empowered, valued, and listened to, which will support the journey to safe and happier lives.
 - b) The response must be non-judgemental and believing. Disclosing domestic abuse is a crucial and sensitive step in a victim/survivor's life. The Service must build trust with individuals by having this response to be able to work with them in securing or maintaining safe and suitable accommodation.
 - c) Multi-agency working is key to success. Individuals experiencing domestic abuse or perpetrating harmful behaviours may have complex needs (for example, substance misuse support as well as mental health care and physical medical needs) and the delivery of these services in a co-ordinated and timely way is important.
 - d) Stating the council's commitment to holding perpetrators to account is important, as well as offering support to those exhibiting harmful behaviours. The council must recognise that long-term domestic abuse prevention requires behavioural change from those who cause harm, where appropriate and safe for the victim this option should be explored with perpetrators to promote positive engagement.
 - e) Information sharing and building relationships between teams are important in successful partnership working especially for victims/survivors of domestic abuse. Information sharing is key for safeguarding and this Policy clearly sets who, how and why information may be shared after a domestic abuse disclosure, providing transparency to victims/survivors who may access our services.

Options Analysis and Evidential Basis

24. The options available are below:

- a) Approve the Domestic Abuse Resident and Tenant Policy 2025 – 2028 and publicise the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Resident and Tenant Policy 2025 - 2028 once approved.
- b) Reject the proposals above.

25. As a social housing provider, the council is required by the Housing Regulator to have a domestic abuse tenant and resident policy. The recommendations in paragraph 11 a) and 11 b) will ensure this requirement is met and will support management actions to implement and embed the Policy.

26. Rejecting or delaying the implementation of this Policy would not be advised due to the adverse long-term effects on residents and tenants without this commitment, and failure to meet the requirements set down by the Housing Regulator both in relation to domestic abuse and meeting standards around equalities.

Organisational Impact and Implications

25.

- **Financial**, there are no financial implications.
- **Human Resources (HR)** The report identifies that the development and delivery of training for staff employed across Housing Services is key in ensuring the proposed Policy can be effectively implemented. Whilst awareness workshops are currently being provided on Domestic Abuse via the Workforce Development Unit any bespoke training for specific roles and the wider housing team will need to be developed, a budget for which will initially be provided from Public Health.
- **Legal** This Policy provides the basis for City of York Council to meet its statutory duties under the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 and Domestic Abuse Act 2021 to ensure that victims of domestic abuse and their children can access the correct support and safe accommodation when needed. Ongoing consideration of these duties will be

required on development of the supporting Domestic Abuse Housing Procedure.

- **Procurement** There are no procurement implications.
- **Health and Wellbeing**, Public Health have supported Housing to undertake work to enable housing providers and housing teams to identify and respond to domestic abuse sooner, reducing the escalation of harm and homelessness, and the negative health and wellbeing impacts suffered by victims of domestic abuse and their families. Development of this policy is key to this work and its adoption helps deliver on our strategic commitment to ensure everyone can live free from abuse and harm. The Public Health team have been involved in the development of this strategy and support the recommendation for the Executive Member to approve the policy.
- **Environment and Climate action** There are no direct environmental impacts.
- **Affordability** As outlined in the attached EIA at Annex B the Policy will apply to all residents and tenants including those on a low income. An element of domestic abuse relates to economic abuse, and training will be provided to staff so that they have a better understanding of this. Economic abuse can have wide-reaching and long-lasting effects (such as bankruptcy) and can be a factor relating to homelessness and debts. By supporting people to obtain specialist support victims and survivors will be in a stronger position to move forward to rebuild their lives.
- **Equalities and Human Rights** A full EIA has been attached at Annex B and considers how this Policy will impact all of those with protected characteristics, and particularly those who are more vulnerable to domestic abuse.
- **Data Protection and Privacy** The data protection impact assessment (DPIAs) screening questions were completed for the recommendations and options in this report and as there is no personal, special categories or criminal offence data being processed to set these out, there is no requirement to complete a DPIA at this time. However, this will be reviewed following the approved recommendations and options from this report and a DPIA completed if required.
- **Communications** The communications Team supports all the recommendations regarding this important Policy. We will support the publicity of the Policy with a detailed communications plan and will advise on internal communication methods to support cultural shift.

- **Economy** There are no economy implications.

Risks and Mitigations

26. The risks associated with the options set out are detailed within the benefits and challenge section of this report. The implementation of this Policy will require the implementation of the management actions at paragraph 12 above and the delivery of trauma informed training across Housing Services.

Wards Impacted

27. All wards with Council Housing tenancies would be impacted by the implementation of this Policy.

Contact details

For further information please contact the authors of this Decision Report.

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Background papers

See Policy at Annex A – pages 17 & 18 for linked policies in addition to:

Homelessness and Rough sleeper Strategy 2024-27 Executive
12/12/2024 – Item 6:

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=733&MId=14503&Ver=4>

Annexes

Annex A: City Of York Domestic Abuse Resident & Tenant Policy

Annex B: Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

Annex C: Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) Framework

Abbreviations:

CYC	City of York Council
DA	Domestic Abuse
DAHA	Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance
DPIA	Data protection Impact Assessment
DHLUC	Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
EIA	Equalities Impact Assessment
HRA	Housing Revenue Account
HR	Human Resources
MARAC	Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference
MATAC	Multi-Agency Tasking and Coordination
MAPPA	Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements
NYC	North Yorkshire Council
NYPFCC	North Yorkshire Office of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner
CYSCP	City of York Safeguarding Children Partnership Policies & Procedures

MHCLG	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
VAWG	Violence Against Women & Girls
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
IDAS	Independent Domestic Abuse Services
STADA	Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse
ASB	Anti-Social Behaviour