

Equally Safe Housing and Homelessness Policy

Report by Derek Oliver, Chief Officer - Place

Report for Decision

1 Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet approves the Equally Safe Housing and Homelessness Policy.

2 Purpose of Report

To help reduce and deal with the outcomes of gender based violence, housing services have implemented a policy to highlight and promote the range of information and training to help front line housing staff report and manage gender based violence. The policy will also further upskill staff in the provision of support, advice and assistance.

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3 Background

- 3.1** Midlothian Council supports a zero tolerance approach to domestic abuse, and supports the recommendations of the “Improving Housing Outcomes for Women and Children Experiencing Domestic Abuse” report published in December 2020. This commitment to taking action to support the victims of domestic abuse has been affirmed by recently signing the “Make a Stand pledge” developed by Women’s Aid, Chartered Institute of Housing and the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance.
- 3.2** In order to provide support to survivors of gender based violence Midlothian Council’s Housing Services is seeking to implement a specific policy in relation to gender based violence. This will include the approach to the provision toward sustainment of tenancy and housing options.

Gender based violence can include the following:

- domestic abuse
- rape and sexual assault
- childhood sexual abuse
- stalking and harassment
- commercial sexual exploitation
- harmful practices - such as female genital mutilation, forced marriage and so-called ‘honour’ based violence.

This policy is gender neutral.

Domestic abuse has become an entrenched public health issue. Incidents of domestic abuse recorded by Police Scotland in Midlothian in 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020 amounted to 1,206. The victims were predominantly female.

- 3.3** The attached Policy (Appendix 1) has been developed in accordance with recent changes to The Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Bill providing an appropriate response to those households impacted by gender-based violence.

To end domestic abuse, we will look at the whole picture, seeing and responding to the whole person and linked adverse experiences, and to all family members. Due to these challenges, a flexible approach has been developed with stakeholders and public protection partners. Specialist trained domestic abuse support workers will address these variables by responding to both short and long-term factors including incorporating the Getting it Right for Every Child principle (GIRFEC) and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Housing Services staff have also completed training to enable them to deliver person centred and trauma informed approach to practice and achieving better outcomes for those affected by domestic abuse.

- 3.4** The intention of this policy is to provide positive outcomes for the survivor and provide clarity on the role of Housing and Homelessness services for those affected by gender based violence. This may also include action against the perpetrator should they be a tenant of a Midlothian Council property.

4 Report Implications

4.1 Resource

None

4.2 Risk

There are no significant identifiable risk associated with this policy.

4.3 Single Midlothian Plan and Business Transformation

Themes addressed in this report:

Adult health, care and housing

4.4 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

It will support the Council's current accreditation for gender equality safe at work policy.

4.5 Adopting a Preventative Approach

The focus of this policy is to provide housing options and information, taking an approach to prevent homelessness where possible. This assists the survivor of gender based violence and can help mitigate impacts from such violence through the provision of housing advice and support.

4.6 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

We will work alongside relevant third party partner agencies and statutory services to ensure consistent and effective support.

We will continue to share relevant information between partners;

- Midlothian Council, health and social care
- Police Scotland
- East Lothian and Midlothian Public Protection Office
- Domestic Abuse Service / MARAC (via the EMPPO)
- Women's East and Midlothian Aid
- Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
- Fear Free
- Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre

Midlothian council has signed up to the Make a Stand campaign with Chartered Institute of Housing to stand up against domestic abuse.

4.7 Ensuring Equalities

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed. No negative consequences were identified and specific actions within the policy are recognised as having positive outcomes for equality groups, such as those affected by domestic abuse.

The Policy is complimented by the Council's current accreditation for gender equality safe at work.

In addition, this Policy is complimented by the use of Domestic Abuse Awareness Raising Tool (DAART). DAART is a multi-agency e-learning tool commissioned by the Scottish Government and developed by SafeLives. It aims to support a common understanding of domestic abuse across all agencies.

4.8 Supporting Sustainable Development

Not applicable

4.9 IT Issues

Current digital services infrastructure supports this approach.