

Divisions Affected - All

HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

30 November 2021

UPDATE ON DELIVERY OF DUTIES UNDER THE DOMESTIC ABUSE ACT

**Report by Corporate Director of Public Health,
Oxfordshire County Council**

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Health and wellbeing board is RECOMMENDED to**
 - a) Note the update on statutory duties under the Domestic Abuse Act following publication of guidance for Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act
 - b) Note the publication of the draft Safe Accommodation Strategy for consultation and plans for final publication.
 - c) Note the plans for renewing the overarching strategy for domestic abuse.

Executive Summary

1. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 was introduced in April this year and requires a needs assessment and strategic review of safe accommodation to be led by each Tier 1 local authority area. This should be overseen and evaluated by a strategic partnership board consisting of a range of partners. MHCLG (Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government, now renamed to DLUHC, Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) have provided a grant to support the delivery of the strategy. This paper summarises the actions being taken in Oxfordshire to meet the requirements of the Act, including the production of both a Safe Accommodation Strategy and an overarching Domestic Abuse Strategy.

Domestic Abuse Act 2021

2. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 was introduced in April this year. It requires each Tier 1 local authority to lead a strategic board consisting of membership from a range of organisations from the system, including Tier 2 local authorities. The local authority and strategic board are required to organise a local needs assessment with the following scope: "comprehensive assessment of need for support in safe accommodation in your area". and then use this to inform a safe

accommodation strategy. There is also a requirement to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy.

3. Statutory guidance¹ⁱ from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) for English local authorities on their functions pursuant to Part 4 of the 2021 Domestic Abuse Act (“the Act”) was published on 1st October 2021, when the duty came into force.

Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Strategic Board

4. The Terms of Reference of this board were reviewed in line with the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act. This resulted in additional members being added to the membership, including providers and the voice of lived experience. The frequency of the board has been increased to monthly whilst we plan actions to meet the requirements of the Act and allocate related funding. The board is currently chaired by Public Health.

Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy

5. Following the publication of the statutory guidance for Part 4 of the Act, which provided details of the required scope and content of the “domestic abuse support in safe accommodation” strategy, and use of MHCLG funding, the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Strategic Board agreed to publish a separate strategy to meet these requirements.
6. The strategy was informed by an assessment of need for support in safe accommodation, which was achieved using a template from MHCLG. A proportion of this data was not available from partners to the granularity requested, and we understand this has been a challenge in other areas too. Any gaps in available data will inform future data collection strategies for services across the system.
7. The Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy was produced in draft on 26th October 2021, and was consulted on according to the guidance, which states “Tier 1 authorities must consult with the Board, Tier 2 authorities within the area and such other persons as they consider appropriate, before publishing their strategy.”
8. The consultation² was live from 27th October to 24th November 2021. Feedback from the consultation is now being reviewed and the final Safe Accommodation Strategy will be published by 5th January 2021.
9. One recommendation from the draft strategy is to form a Safe Accommodation Working Group’ (SAWG) as a sub-group to the Domestic Abuse Strategic Board. This group will produce a delivery plan for the Safe Accommodation Strategy to be approved by the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Strategic Board in 2021/22. This will include developing and agreeing baseline measures and targets to monitor the impact of the Safe Accommodation Strategy. This will

¹ [Delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse in domestic abuse safe accommodation services - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/100222/dluhc-2021-domestic-abuse-act-guidance.pdf)

² <https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/domestic-abuse-safe-accommodation-strategy-2021>

also work to address the gaps in data which have been highlighted in the needs assessment.

Overarching Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment and Strategy

10. The Board agreed to undertake a needs assessment and strategy review with a wider remit than the Act requirement around Safe Accommodation. This work is being undertaken by an external Public Health agency, PHAST, and is supported by a local expert, to ensure the strategy reflects a good understanding of the Oxfordshire system.
11. The overarching strategy will be published in draft by February 2022, for consultation.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

12. The overarching Domestic Abuse Strategy will identify priorities to meet the needs of Oxfordshire residents. The Domestic Abuse Strategic Board will agree, monitor and evaluate the delivery of these priorities. The delivery plan will identify outcomes to be monitored.
13. This work will support the Vision, in the County Council's Corporate Plan to "Tackle inequality, help people live safe and healthy lives and enable everyone to play an active part in their community."

Financial Implications

14. A grant of £1.1million has been awarded by MHCLG (now known as DLUHC) to OCC for delivery of the duties under the Act. Further grants have been awarded to Tier 2 local authorities.
15. The funding allocation should be used to support the implementation of the statutory duties, as defined in the guidance. The publication of the guidance has provided clarity on the scope of activities that can be funded. A subgroup of the Tier 1 and Tier 2 local authorities are working to agree how the funding will be spent.

Legal Implications

16. There are statutory duties in Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, for Tier 1 Local Authorities¹. These have been summarised earlier in this report.

Staff Implications

17. The Public Health team have provided resource to lead the Domestic Abuse work on behalf of OCC. In addition, further resource has been funded from the MHCLG grant, working on the requirements of the Domestic Abuse Act. The Domestic Abuse Strategic Board is a partnership, attended by partners across the system, who also provide resource to this work.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

18. The Act states there should be dedicated provision of specialist support for people with protected characteristics, or needs in drug and alcohol, mental health, physical health, interpreting, and specialist counselling. This will be reflected in the Safe Accommodation strategy and overarching Domestic Abuse strategy.

Sustainability Implications

19. No sustainability implications arise from this paper

Risk Management

Risk	Action
Data: The safe accommodation needs assessment highlighted the difficulty in collecting data which helps to identify specific need.	The Safe Accommodation Working Group, will be tasked with identifying and addressing this challenge.
Delivery: Following publication of the guidance, providing clear scope for use of the MHCLG funding, there is a very short timeframe to allocate and spend the funding.	Further discussions are being held to allocate funding from Tier 1 to Tier 2. Short timeframe flagged with MHCLG, and clarity requested on future funding plans.

Consultations

20. The consultation for the draft Safe Accommodation Strategy closed on 24th November 2021². Feedback is currently being reviewed, and will inform the final strategy.
21. A consultation on the draft overarching Domestic Abuse Strategy will be undertaken during February 2022, and feedback from this consultation will be fed into the final strategy

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