

To: Cabinet
Date: 24 January 2024
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: DAHA Accreditation and Domestic Abuse Review Group Update

| Summary and recommendations | |
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| Purpose of report: | To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations for Cabinet consideration and decision |
| Key decision: | No |
| Scrutiny Lead Member: | Councillor Lucy Pegg, Scrutiny Committee Chair |
| Cabinet Member: | Councillor Mark Lygo, Cabinet Member for Safer and Inclusive Communities |
| Corporate Priority: | Support Thriving Communities |
| Policy Framework: | Council Strategy 2020-24 |
| Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report. | |

| Appendices | |
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| Appendix A | Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee |

Introduction and overview

1. The Scrutiny Committee met on 16 January 2024 to consider a report concerning the Council's progress towards the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) Accreditation and progress made against the recommendations arising from the Domestic Abuse Review Group made in 2021.
2. The Committee would like to thank Councillor Lygo (Cabinet Member for Safer and Inclusive Communities), Richard Adams (Community Safety Service Manager) and Liz Jones (ASBIT Manager & Domestic Abuse Lead) for attending the meeting to answer questions.

Summary and recommendations

3. Cllr Mark Lygo, Cabinet Member for Safer and Inclusive Communities introduced the report. Of the 48 recommendations made by the Domestic Abuse Review Group and endorsed by the Scrutiny Committee in 2021, Cabinet had agreed 26, agreed 13 in part and not agreed 9. An update on each of the recommendations agreed or agreed in part was included in Appendix A to the report. The Committee had also requested an update on the Council's progress towards achieving the DAHA Accreditation, which was set out in the report.
4. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the condition and suitability of safe accommodation; the Council's statutory duty to provide safe accommodation; housing needs; Temporary Accommodation; support for those fleeing domestic abuse; domestic abuse training; and funding for the DAHA Accreditation.
5. In particular, the Committee discussed reports received by Members in their capacity as ward councillors from distressed residents who had fled domestic abuse and were housed in safe and/or temporary accommodation. There were concerns that the accommodation provided was not always suitable (e.g. hotel accommodation), but it was noted that there was unprecedented housing demand in Oxford which was difficult to manage; proposals would be brought forward in due course to address the surge in demand, but the situation would not change overnight and the Council was doing all it could in the meantime to address a variety of complex housing needs, including those related to domestic abuse.
6. The Committee had specific concerns in relation to the inadequacy of cooking facilities in hotel accommodation, particularly where there were children involved in domestic abuse cases. In addition, concerns were raised about the adequacy of support provided to those housed in safe and/or temporary accommodation at such a traumatic time and the Committee queried the Council's ability to ensure the provision of more dedicated and intensive 1:1 support. The Committee was assured that this type of 1:1 support was provided, and Members were requested to escalate any cases that they were aware of where adequate support was not being provided, but the Committee was not satisfied that adequate support was being delivered on the ground and urged investigation into this matter to ensure victims and survivors of domestic abuse were supported.

Recommendation 1: That the Council investigates and assesses the adequacy and clarity of the support and signposting provided to victims and survivors of domestic abuse housed in safe and/or temporary accommodation.

7. In addition, the Committee noted that the funding from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) which was being used to support the Council's work toward the DAHA Accreditation was currently expected to come to an end at the end of March 2025. There was an ongoing annual cost associated with maintaining the DAHA Accreditation once achieved; following questions, it was confirmed that maintaining Accreditation on an ongoing basis could be put at risk if no new funding streams were announced. The Committee also acknowledged that the Council had been given new statutory duties by Central Government without the

provision of additional resources to enable it to meet these new obligations, which put additional pressure on the Council's already limited resources.

Recommendation 2: That the Council proactively lobbies Central Government based on the horrific lived experiences of Oxford residents, stressing the urgent need for additional resources to support the Council in meeting its new statutory obligations relating to domestic abuse.

8. During further discussion in relation to the Council's additional statutory duties, it was noted that the legislation also covered the lived experiences of children. The Committee noted the importance of ensuring children's experiences were captured and addressed by the Council through its domestic abuse work.

Recommendation 3: That the Council ensures that the lived experiences of children are captured and addressed by the Council through its domestic abuse work.

9. The Committee held a brief discussion in relation to domestic abuse training for Members. It was noted that there were plans to deliver training, but they had not yet been finalised; the Committee noted the importance of the training being delivered annually to ensure Members had adequate knowledge of domestic abuse and how they could support victims and survivors through their role as councillors. In addition, the Committee noted that the Council currently had a number of officer Domestic Abuse Champions. The Council currently had a number of Member Champions, but the Committee was not aware that there was a Member Champion specifically for Domestic Abuse. The Committee agreed that it would be useful for a Member Domestic Abuse Champion to be appointed.

Recommendation 4: That the Council delivers domestic abuse training annually to Members going forward and appoints a Member as Domestic Abuse Champion.

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