

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO HEALTH & HOUSING COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No. 9

meeting date: THURSDAY, 7 NOVEMBER 2019
title: NEW DUTY FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS
AND NEW STATUTORY GUIDANCE REGARDING ALLOCATION POLICY
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1 PURPOSE

1.1 To inform Members of a new duty for Local Authorities to provide safe accommodation for domestic violence victims and also new statutory guidance on social housing allocation for victims of domestic abuse.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:

- Community Objectives – To address housing needs of all households in the borough including the needs of domestic violence victims.
- Corporate Priorities – To deliver all statutory duties required of the Council.
- Other Considerations – None.

2 INFORMATION

2.1 Currently in the Ribble Valley any domestic violence victims and survivors in the borough are offered support from the Hyndburn and Ribble Valley Domestic Violence Services (HARV).

2.2 The contract delivers support to victims as commissioned in October 2018 and is funded through a Ministry of Housing and Communities in Local Government Grant Award.

2.3 Currently there is no safe house or refuge provision in the borough and any offer of a safe house is outside the borough.

2.4 As outlined in the Queen's Speech, the Government intends to amend the Domestic Abuse Bill to including a statutory duty of Councils to provide housing support. Ahead of the duty coming into force in 2021, the Government have announced a further £15m fund that is aimed to ensure vital safe accommodation including refuges and safe houses for victims. Local Authorities will also be required to develop and publish strategies which set out the range of support services available.

2.5 The Domestic Abuse Bill had its second reading on 2 October.

2.6 Also to update Committee, is the introduction of statutory guidance on social housing allocations for victims of domestic abuse. The purpose of the guidance is to assist Local Authorities to apply the allocation legislation to ensure that victims of domestic abuse are able to move into social housing from a refuge or other form of temporary accommodation by ensuring that they have appropriate priority under the Local Authorities allocation scheme and those who have fled to a refuge in another local authority area are not disadvantaged by any residency or local connection requirements.

- 2.7 In terms of qualification for social housing, Section 160 gives Local Authorities the power to determine who qualifies or does not to be allocated for social housing subject to any regulations made by the Secretary of State. In 2013 the Secretary of State issued statutory guidance encouraging Local Authorities to including a residency requirement of at least 2 years. As part of their qualification criteria in 2013 guidance is aimed at ensuring that only people in need who have invested in and demonstrated a commitment to their local community may be considered for an allocation of social housing. Members of armed forces and transferring tenants who need to move for work are exempt from the residency requirements.
- 2.8 The 2013 guidance advises Local Authorities to consider the need to move for other appropriate exceptions including providing protection for people who need to move to escape violence or harm. This guidance goes further and many people escaping domestic abuse may seek a place of safety in a refuge or form of temporary before they apply for social housing which may be in different parts of the country to their original home. This may be for a number of reasons and victims need to put a safe distance between themselves and their abuser. They may want to be closer to their family and support network and in some cases the choice of where they live may be constrained by the refuge spaces that are available.
- 2.9 The Secretary of State therefore strongly encourages all Local Authorities to exempt from their residency requirement those who are living in a refuge or other form of safe temporary accommodation in their district having escaped domestic abuse in another Local Authority area.
- 2.10 The details of the duty under the Domestic Abuse Bill will need to be considered further in terms of the provision of accommodation. Officers have held discussions with HARV and LCC about the provision of a safe house in a small town and the practicalities of keeping the address anonymous. The allocation policy already allows domestic violence victims priority on the waiting list; however, there will be a need to review the policy to reflect the new guidance. A further report will be presented to Committee in due course.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

MHCLG – Improving Access to Social Housing.

For further information please ask for Rachael Stott, extension 3235.

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