

Environment & Place Overview & Scrutiny Working Group – Safe Accommodation Strategy

Key Lines of Enquiry

The Working Group undertook a deep dive into the development of the Safe Accommodation Strategy, based on three key lines of enquiry (KLOE) established by the E&P O&S Committee and set out below. In addition, the group raised detailed data and information requests to support these KLOE. These are detailed in the Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) background document available upon request.

Working Group Findings and Recommendations	
Key Lines of Enquiry	Working group findings
1.Levels of support provided through refuge/ housing provision for those fleeing domestic abuse - looking at this under previous, current and proposed future arrangements. 2.Examine the role of refuges and what they look like in a modern society.	<p>The group heard from Tracey Kybert, Ben Tomlin, Cat McMillan and Kaite Blake (officers) and received responses to a range of data and information requests raised in relation to the scope of the review. Councillors reviewed the Draft Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy and Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy consultation and engagement plan along with the BCP Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment (Standing Together, 2021). The group also took account of public comments made from Women's Aid in relation to the closure of the Bournemouth refuge.</p> <p>A significant finding of the group was that refuges were not the ideal and only accommodation solution to those fleeing domestic abuse. One size does not fit all when it comes to safer accommodation and not all survivors of abuse want to be housed in a group environment with others. Refuge places had been offered to those accessing the service and some weren't taken up because this wasn't their preferred option.</p> <p>Instead, a broad accommodation offer is required and should be the basis of the future strategy. Service users vary and those in need of safe accommodation are not limited to what may be perceived as a typical scenario of women fleeing domestic abuse. The safe accommodation offer must apply to a wide variety of needs and circumstances including different genders and ages. The group found that officers were highly mindful of this diverse need and were working hard to develop a strategy that would appropriately support all needs. The group was impressed by the wide level of information, knowledge and passion within the officer team supporting this work.</p> <p>The group found that in some cases there is a gap in survivors' understanding of available financial support, particularly regarding housing tenure complexities (e.g., shared tenancies, joint mortgages).</p>

	<p>Many survivors may remain in abusive situations due to fears around financial insecurity or housing stability. The Council could support residents by providing greater awareness and guidance around these issues.</p> <p>In relation to the closure of the Bournemouth refuge the group found that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all previous refuge residents had been appropriately housed and the quality of housing provided to those accessing the service following the closure was better than what would have been delivered by the Bournemouth refuge itself. • the decision to close the refuge resulted in negative press and community backlash, highlighting a failure to properly engage and inform councillors and the public on the proposed change and reasons for it. • Councillors weren't informed of the decision in line with agreed protocols because of the threshold level of the decision. Whilst officers followed the requirements of the constitution in this action, the group felt that a view should be taken by the council's senior officers on whether decisions such as the refuge closure are likely to be contentious or cause significant press interest, and councillors be made aware prior to such decisions. This will enable councillors to better fulfil their community role and support officers of the council by explaining the context of the decision to residents.
<p>3. Scrutinise the engagement and consultation plan that will be undertaken in developing the Safe Accommodation and Commissioning Strategy.</p>	<p>The group reviewed the engagement and consultation plan and received a detailed briefing from officers on this aspect of the work. They felt that it was essential that the engagement and consultation on the Safe Accommodation Strategy incorporated lived experience to ensure that the strategy could be appropriately based on this.</p> <p>They also felt that current and future commissioning processes for safe accommodation appear to lack transparency and would benefit from scrutiny by an O&S committee.</p>

Recommendations

That the Environment & Place O&S Committee recommends to Cabinet:

- 1. That as part of the Safe Accommodation Strategy development, officers consider an awareness campaign and/or guidance materials on the different types of financial support that are available to support those fleeing domestic abuse, in particular in relation to different types of housing tenure (e.g. shared tenancies, joint mortgages), in order to break down a potentially significant barrier to survivors accessing support to end their abuse.**
- 2. That the engagement plan for the Safe Accommodation Strategy should ensure that the voices of those with lived experience are heard and reflected within the Strategy.**
- 3. That an all councillor briefing session be added to the Safe Accommodation Strategy engagement plan, to ensure members are adequately informed about the strategy and able to contribute views, and to enable them to fulfil their role within the community by communicating the benefits of the Safe Accommodation Strategy to residents.**
- 4. a. that the provision of safe accommodation and associated commissioning process be reviewed,**
b. that scrutiny members be invited to review and input into this review, prior to the commencement of commissioning, through an additional meeting of this working group.
- 5. That the use of temporary accommodation be continuously reviewed and specific KPIs be established for monitoring the success of the new safe accommodation model, including occupancy rates, length of stay, outcomes for survivors (e.g., successful move-on to permanent housing), and survivor satisfaction. These KPIs should be reviewed regularly by the relevant scrutiny committee to ensure accountability and transparency.**
- 6. That Cabinet, with the support of the council's Corporate Management Board, be requested to take a view on forthcoming decisions that may be of significant or contentious public impact, regardless of decision-making thresholds, and an all councillor briefing be held before any such decisions are made, to enable all councillors, and particularly ward councillors, to be properly informed.**

That the Environment & Place O&S Committee:

- 7. Notes recommendation 4 to Cabinet and agrees to re-engage this working group to support commissioning work at an appropriate time.**
- 8. Notes recommendation 5 to Cabinet and assists in the development of KPIs related to the Safe Accommodation Strategy by scheduling a scrutiny item to provide test and challenge to draft measures.**
- 9. Schedules annual updates on the progress of the implementation of the Safer Accommodation strategy and the wider domestic abuse work, including monitoring of associated KPIs, and that all O&S chairs be invited to attend, so that they can schedule associated scrutiny appropriately. This may be as part of a wider annual update to scrutiny on housing matters.**