

**TITLE OF REPORT:**           **Home Group – Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation  
Funding Allocation**

**REPORT OF:**                   **Colin Huntington, Strategic Director, Housing,  
Environment and Healthy Communities**

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### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To note a decision taken under delegated powers, to allocate domestic abuse safe accommodation funding to Home Group, within the financial year 2021/22, thereby improving Gateshead's accommodation offer to victims of domestic abuse and meeting urgent funding timescale requirements.

### **Background**

2. Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places a statutory duty on local authorities to ensure that victims of domestic abuse and their children who need it, are able to access lifesaving support, in safe accommodation, including refuges. This funding needed to be spent by 31 March 2022.
3. Following completion of our Statutory Homelessness Review in 2021 and work on our Domestic Abuse Need Assessment, we have gained a clearer understanding of the existing gaps in provision across the borough as well as evidencing levels of need and demand. Domestic Abuse is the biggest reason for homelessness, but we currently only have enough safe accommodation provision to house six households within the existing refuge, which is managed by Home Group.
4. As Home Group are the only provider with existing domestic abuse specific accommodation within the borough, they were directly approached by the Council to discuss existing gaps in provision alongside our evidence of current levels of high need/demand. Discussions have led to a proposal that will see levels of provision increase across the borough to relieve existing pressures, assisted through the allocation of this funding, which is a one-off contribution.
5. Under our current Homelessness and Allocations Review the Council is currently reviewing all accommodation and support, for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Within this we have dedicated a work stream to focus on Domestic Abuse, which will look at our medium and longer term requirements for this client group, moving forward. This review includes an exercise to recommission and remodel accommodation and support, which is due to be completed in September 2022.

## Proposal

6. The funding allocation made to Home Group is £39,500.00 and is a contribution to enable the following key service requirements to be delivered:
  - An increase in overall unit numbers of accommodation from the current 6 units to 15 units.
  - An accommodation model that is a mixture of dispersed units and supported accommodation. This will enable provision for those with complex needs, male victims as well as families with older male children, which we do not currently have.
  - 24/7 access to all accommodation and first refusal of voids to Gateshead Councils Housing Solutions Service.

## Recommendation

7. It is recommended that Cabinet notes the decision taken by the Service Director for Strategic Housing and Residential Growth to award £39,500.00 domestic abuse safe accommodation funding to Home Group, in accordance with Schedule 5, Part 2 General Delegations to Managers, Paragraph (4) (e) of the Council's Constitution.

For the following reason:

To ensure allocation of the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Funding is allocated by March 2022 as per grant requirements and delivered to best meet the safe accommodation needs of victims of domestic abuse in Gateshead

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**CONTACT: Vicky Sibson, Strategic Housing Services Manager**

email: [vickysibson@gateshead.gov.uk](mailto:vickysibson@gateshead.gov.uk)

## APPENDIX 1

### Policy Context

1. The proposal outlined supports the overall vision for Gateshead, as set out in Making Gateshead a Place Where Everyone Thrives and directly relates to the following pledges:
  - Put people and families at the heart of everything we do
  - Tackle inequality so people have a fair chance
  - Support our communities to help themselves and each other
  - Work together and fight for a better future for Gateshead
2. The Housing Strategy 2019-2030 identifies a vision for housing in Gateshead, centred on three strategic themes - supply, standards, and support. This domestic abuse funding allocation directly links to the support theme and its main objectives to tackle homelessness and its root causes and to promote tenancy sustainment and wellbeing.
3. The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy sets out a clear vision to prevent and end homelessness, in all forms, in Gateshead over the next five years. The interventions which will be supported by this domestic abuse funding allocation are key to the strategic aims set out in the strategy, which are:
  - Aim 1: Make homelessness a rare occurrence
  - Aim 2: Where homelessness occurs, there will be positive outcomes for people
  - Aim 3: No-one sleeping rough or in unsuitable accommodation
  - Aim 4: Homelessness is a one-off occurrence
4. Further improving access to accommodation and support for victims of domestic abuse and their families underpins many of the aims set out in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, most notably:
  - Enable all children, young people, and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives
  - Ensure a healthy standard of living for all, in accordance with international law on economic and social rights
  - Create and develop sustainable communities
  - Strengthen the role and impact of ill health prevention.
5. As part of the new statutory duties, we have produced a draft Safe Accommodation Strategy, that outlines the key issues, gaps and challenges relating to supporting victim-survivors of domestic abuse within safe accommodation. In addition, Gateshead Community Safety Board has identified domestic abuse as a key strategic priority, to address within its Partnership Plan 2020-23.

### Background

6. Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places a statutory duty on local authorities to ensure that victims of domestic abuse and their children who need it are able to access lifesaving support, in safe accommodation, including refuges. All Councils in England were allocated funding to support the new statutory duty.

7. Following completion of our Statutory Homelessness Review and work on our Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment we were able to gain a clear understanding of the existing gaps in provision across the borough and evidence levels of need and demand. Domestic Abuse is the biggest reason for homelessness, and we currently only have enough provision to house six households within the existing refuge, which is managed by Home Group. Data and provision analysis has shown:
  - Victims of domestic abuse and their families are being placed in bed and breakfast accommodation and non-specialist statutory temporary accommodation.
  - We have no 24/7 access to specialist domestic abuse safe accommodation provision within Gateshead.
  - We have no dispersed specialist domestic abuse safe accommodation within Gateshead.
  - We have no specialist provision which can house male victims and families with older male children.
  - Victims of domestic abuse, some with complex needs are being housed in non-specialist provision that may also accept perpetrators of domestic abuse.
8. As Home Group are the only commissioned provider with domestic abuse specific accommodation within the borough, they were directly approached by the Council to discuss existing gaps in provision, alongside our evidence of current levels of high need/demand in Bed and Breakfasts and the Council's Homelessness Temporary Accommodation. Discussions led to a proposal that will see levels of provision increase across the borough to relieve existing pressures, assisted through allocation of this funding, which is a one-off contribution.
9. Under our current Homelessness and Allocations Review the Council is currently reviewing all accommodation and support for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. We have dedicated a work stream to focus on Domestic Abuse, which will look at our medium and longer term requirements for this client group, moving forward. This recommissioning and remodelling of accommodation is due to be completed in September 2022.
10. This safe accommodation funding allocation has been agreed to support the urgent delivery of the following additional changes to current Home Group provision, for victims of domestic abuse and their families, within Gateshead:
  - The existing refuge within Gateshead will increase staffing to ensure the service is covered 24/7 instead of 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday, as it is currently.
  - An additional 5 x 3 bed properties will be delivered, which can be used to house single people or men/women with children. These properties will also increase the offer to men and women who have more than one child of varying ages and gender. These units will include increased security measures including CCTV and an increased staff presence.

- An additional 4 bed property (that has the potential to house two households) will be brought into use, as well as an additional 2 self-contained properties that can be used for both male and female victims.
- The staffing structure will include an out of hours team, who will support with direct access placements through the evenings and weekends, should this be needed.
- First refusal on any voids will be given to Gateshead Council's Housing Solutions Service and a referral pathway and reporting mechanism will be developed, to support and monitor this.
- This model will allow individuals to be accommodated with more complex support needs, with appropriate levels of support.
- Overall, this will increase the current HomeGroup units for victims of domestic abuse in Gateshead from 6 to 15.

11. We have agreed to monitor the following delivery outcomes for this funding allocation, as delivery of the requirements will roll over into 2022/23:

- High levels of occupancy, to ensure families and individuals aren't residing in hotels and B&B when there is alternative specialist accommodation available.
- High levels of tenancy sustainment, when customers have moved on into their own tenancy
- A reduction of risk for those accessing the model, including MARAC victims.
- High levels of engagement with the relevant treatment providers, for those requiring treatment.
- High levels of engagement for completion of power and control awareness raising programmes, such as the Freedom Programme
- Improved wellbeing of customers using a relevant measurement tool
- High levels of engagement with residents through one-to-one session and/or group work.

An outcome monitoring report will be provided by HomeGroup to Gateshead Council as part of existing contract management arrangements in September 2022.

## **Consultation**

12. The portfolio holder for Housing and the portfolio holder for Adult Social Care have both been consulted, in the decision to allocate this funding.

13. Key internal and external partners were also collaboratively involved and consulted in the development of both our Homelessness Review and our new Homelessness and

Rough Sleeping Strategy, which has informed the allocation of this funding. This has also involved regular consultation with our new Homelessness Forum, including recent domestic abuse specific discussions regarding demand/need and gaps in existing provision.

14. The new Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board, made up of statutory and non-statutory partner agencies and Council services has also been consulted on the allocation of this funding, which was informed by the Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment that is required under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, led by colleagues in our Community Safety Team

### **Alternative Options**

15. An alternative option would have been to not allocate this funding to Home Group for the reasons outlined, but this would not be the preferred model as it would not deliver on the needs/demand for victims of domestic abuse in Gateshead, resulting in the continuation of unsuitable placements.

### **Implications of Recommended Option**

#### **16. Resources:**

- a) **Financial Implications** – The Strategic Director, Resources and Digital confirms that the cost will be met from the 2021/22 Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation funding.
- b) **Human Resources Implications** – None
- c) **Property Implications** - None

#### **17. Risk Management Implication**

Risk to service delivery is low, the Council's financial contribution to the changes outlined is minimal and the model is expected to deliver over and above the funding we are providing.

#### **18. Equality and Diversity Implications**

The extension of service provision, to include dispersed specialist provision, which is supported by the allocation of this funding, enables improved accessibility for minority groups as well as for male victims and families with older male children, who would otherwise have no access to specialist provision within the borough.

#### **19. Crime and Disorder Implications – None**

#### **20. Health Implications**

Supporting this client group will have a positive impact on health and wellbeing by enabling access to suitable accommodation and support services, including health-based services.

#### **21. Climate Emergency and Sustainability Implications - None**

**22. Human Rights Implications - None**

**23. Ward Implications - None**