

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Ending Victim Blaming Together</b>		
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>1 July 2019</b>		
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Executive Director of Neighbourhoods, Communities and Housing</b>		
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Name:</b>	<b>Jo Player</b>	<b>Tel: 292488</b>
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<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	<b>All</b>		

## **FOR GENERAL RELEASE**

### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 At Council on 31 January 2019, a Notice of Motion was raised and carried unanimously calling for the Council to sign the Victim Focus Charter Pledge and detail in a report to the Neighbourhoods, Inclusion, Communities and Equalities Committee how the pledge can be fulfilled to challenge and reduce victim blaming of people who have experienced trauma, abuse or crime in our organisation.
- 1.2 Further research into the pledge suggests that this approach primarily focusses on victims of domestic or sexual violence or exploitation.
- 1.3 The purpose of the pledge is to break down stereotypical responses that influence the way that a public body views an individual's choices. It would not detract from our statutory responsibilities nor create a greater entitlement to services.

### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 The committee is recommended to agree to the proposed actions by officers to implement the Victim Focus Charter Pledge when working with victims who have experienced trauma, abuse or crime, including asking victims how they have been treated.
- 2.2 That officers provide committee with an update in 12 months on the impact signing the pledge has made to how the council works with victims who have experienced trauma, abuse and crime.

### **3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 The VictimFocus Charter Pledge contains a set of standards for professionals, organisations or individuals to combat victim blaming in cases of abuse or trauma. The pledge has ten strands as set out below:-
- 1) Never engaging in victim blaming of people who have been affected by trauma, abuse or crime.
  - 2) Never using or advocating for interventions that blame or place responsibility or trauma, abuse or crime on the victim
  - 3) Calling out victim blaming where we see it in the media or in policy
  - 4) Ensuring that we create a culture in which victim blaming is not accepted on case records of the people we help and to amend or add comments to any case record that include victim blaming descriptions of our clients
  - 5) Encouraging our partner agencies to reflect on interventions or approaches that place responsibility on victims of trauma abuse or crime.
  - 6) Ensuring that our materials, service design and individual service delivery supports our clients with their feelings of self- blame and their experiences of victim blaming from our own staff and others.
  - 7) Learning more about victim blaming and self- blame to use in policy, procedure and service development and evaluation.
  - 8) Standing up for and advocating on behalf of victims of trauma, abuse and crime who are being blamed or stigmatised by agencies, professionals or authorities.
  - 9) Providing ample training on victim blaming or self-blame to our staff, members and management.
  - 10) Reflecting critically on our own practice and values to ensure that we have challenged any biases, values or views our organisation holds or acts upon that blames victims or trauma, abuse or crime
- 3.2 Brighton & Hove City Council is aware of the difficulties facing victims of trauma, abuse or crime There are policies and procedures in place across a range of services where a believing and supportive approach is already taken.
- 3.3 In addition to the policies that are in place to ensure the protections of victims, officers will be encouraged to enhance their understanding of the emotional impact on any individual who has experienced domestic or sexual violence and training will be offered to support this, as outlined below. The primary objective is to ensure that the victim feels supported whilst accessing appropriate services.
- 3.4 It should be noted that there may be a conflict with some of the strands of the pledge for the local authority, for example strand 8. The Council must operate within the statutory framework governing local authorities, including compliance with Data Protection legislation and statutory safeguarding duties. However, the Council is able to advocate in relation to matters of general principle or policy on behalf of victims of trauma, abuse and crime and officers will ensure that any opportunities to do so are taken.
- 3.5 Appropriate training will be sourced and delivered to staff working in relevant services including Housing, Safer Communities, Health and Adult Social care.

This list is not exhaustive and it is the intention that awareness raising and training will be rolled out across the organisation.

- 3.6 Officers will ensure that the Council publicises internally and externally that it has signed up to the pledge.
- 3.7 Partners will be notified of this through forums such as the Community Safety Partnership Board and other relevant groups in order to encourage them to also sign up if they haven't already done so.
- 3.8 Measures will be developed that track the impact of signing the pledge has made to how the council works with victims who have experienced trauma, abuse and crime. These will include number of staff undertaking training, impact of the training and complaints from key services for example housing. We will also undertake a survey of service users during the course of the year to ascertain how they have been treated when accessing services.

#### **4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

This report is intended to provide information about taking the pledge forward. The alternative would be not to offer the enhanced training and support described in the report to assist the Council in implementing the pledge. This is not recommended as the pledge was agreed with the unanimous support of full Council.

#### **5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION**

- 5.1 The intention of the City Council to sign the pledge was raised at the Community Safety Partnership Board on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2019 and further work will be done to promote the scheme across the City.

#### **6. CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 This report is to provide an update of progress on work BHCC is undertaking to address victim blaming and to invite any comment. The purpose of the pledge is to make it clear that we do not blame victims for being victims as an organisation. There is a need to recognise that the Council must operate within the statutory framework which sets out its powers and duties and that there will be circumstances where the consequences of abuse as it impacts on others will need to be addressed.

#### **7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

##### Financial Implications:

- 7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report, however, any training and evaluation work undertaken by the council as a result of this report will need to be met from current budget resources.

*Finance Officer Consulted: Michael Bentley*

*Date: 4/6/2019*

Legal Implications:

There is potential for a perceived conflict in specific circumstances between the wording of the pledge and the Council's other statutory duties. For instance, where child protection duties are engaged. However, the overriding ambition of the pledge is to reflect critically on our own practice and values to ensure that any evidence of bias is acted upon and the proposals in the report set out how this will be progressed through compliance with policies and enhanced training.

*Lawyer Consulted: Elizabeth Culbert*

*Date:04.06.19*

Equalities Implications:

- 7.2 By signing the pledge, the City Council will be supporting victims of domestic and sexual violence, often predominantly women. As this is not a major policy change an equality impact assessment has not been carried out at this time.

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.3 None



