

## Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2024-2027

To: Communities, Social Mobility, and Inclusion Committee

Meeting Date: 21 March 2024

From: Executive Director: Strategy & Partnerships, Sue Grace

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: No

Forward Plan ref: n/a

Executive Summary: The Council is required, by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, to produce a Safe Accommodation Strategy, and to refresh the strategy every three years.

This report provides the Committee with an overview of work delivered under the current Safe Accommodation Strategy covering the period 2021-2024, and provides details of new areas for inclusion, or removal, in the refreshed strategy covering the period 2024-2027.

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to:

Approve the Safe Accommodation Strategy for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough covering the period of April 2024 to March 2027.

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# 1. Creating a greener, fairer and more caring Cambridgeshire

1.1 The Safe Accommodation Strategy, and the work delivered under the auspices of this strategy, have been evaluated against the seven ambitions set out in the Council's Strategic Framework.

1.2 This report relates to the following Council ambitions:

Ambition 2: Travel across the county is safer and more environmentally sustainable:

Peripatetic Housing Domestic Violence Advisers offer survivors the opportunity to access domestic support close to their home and reduce need for travel. Staff delivering mobile advocacy are encouraged to consider flexible ways of working which reduce the need for sole driver journeys, reduce the amount of car travel, and increase use of public transport.

Ambition 3: Health inequalities are reduced:

Domestic abuse has a significant impact on the health of both adults and children subjected to abuse. 40% of high-risk victims of domestic abuse report mental health issues. One in five high risk victims reported repeat attendances at Accident and Emergency for injuries related to domestic abuse before accessing support ([Safe Lives report Impact of Domestic Abuse Health](#)). Moving to another area or unsuitable temporary accommodation can lead to survivors losing links with established medical support. Working with housing teams and providers to find safe accommodation for victim/survivor without losing support links is part of the strategy, as is ensuring that victim/survivors are linked in with relevant health services.

Ambition 4: People enjoy healthy, safe and independent lives through timely support that is most suited to their needs:

The strategy ensures that bespoke support is offered to the victim/survivors, considering their needs, any barriers to support and how these can be overcome and making sure the approach is always focused on the victim/survivor. The Eastern European Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) role provides support based on cultural awareness and experience of working with specific nationalities to help survivors overcome cultural barriers to accessing services.

Ambition 5: People are helped out of poverty and income inequality:

One in five women in the UK have experienced economic abuse and it is a legally recognised form of domestic abuse, leading to financial hardship and debt ([Surviving Economic Abuse: Transforming responses to economic abuse](#)). For a victim/survivor, having to 'flee' their home impacts on a person's employment, economic output and can lead to additional financial burdens for them. The strategy seeks to increase safe housing options for victim/survivors that do not result in financial hardship and loss of income. Also, with the flexible funding element it can reduce immediate hardship or financial challenges for survivors due to the domestic abuse they have experienced.

Ambition 6: Places and communities prosper because they have a resilient and inclusive economy, access to good quality public services and social justice is prioritised:

The strategy ensures domestic abuse support is delivered across rural and urban parts of Cambridgeshire and works towards providing safe accommodation options that allow survivors to remain living in their local community, being able to access work and remain linked to other local services. Staff supporting clients seek to connect with local links and gain knowledge of local services to develop 'allyship' to support and advocate and ensure equity and social justice for all groups/communities experiencing domestic abuse.

Ambition 7: Children and young people have opportunities to thrive:

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 recognises that children are victims of domestic abuse rather than witnesses to it. Children and young people living with domestic abuse are at risk of short and long-term health problems. Domestic abuse is an adverse childhood experience (ACE), and these stressful events can lead to children who experience domestic abuse being at risk of poorer educational attainment and increased inequality during their lives. In 2022/23, 99 children in Cambridgeshire were able to access trauma informed counselling and therapeutic support in the community via Embrace [Children's Charity, Supporting Child Victims of Crime | Embrace CVoC](#) and children living in local refuges were able to access specialist support from child support workers.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 This report outlines the proposed Safe Accommodation Strategy in Cambridgeshire covering the period of April 2024 to March 2027, which is attached at Appendix 1.
- 2.2 An existing strategy is in place covering the period from April 2021 to March 2024 and is published on the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership's [website](#).
- 2.3 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 set in statute that Tier One authorities, in this instance the County Council, must prepare and publish a local strategy based on a robust needs assessment that sets out the ways in which provision for accommodation-based domestic abuse support will be developed, commissioned, and delivered.
- 2.4 Safe Accommodation Strategies must be reviewed every three years.
- 2.5 Accommodation based domestic abuse support includes provision of support to victims and their children in a range of settings, including:
  - Refuge accommodation
  - Specialist safe accommodation
  - Dispersed accommodation
  - Sanctuary schemes
  - Move-on or second stage accommodation.
- 2.6 Alongside provision of safe accommodation, the following types of domestic abuse support have been provided to survivors/victims living in safe accommodation settings:

- Advocacy support – development of personal safety plans, liaison with other services (for example, GPs and social workers, welfare benefit providers).
- Domestic abuse prevention advice – support to assist victims to recognise the signs of abusive relationships, to help them remain safe (including online) and to prevent re-victimisation.
- Specialist support for victims with relevant protected characteristics and/or complex needs (for example, interpreters, faith services, mental health advice and support, drug and alcohol advice and support, and immigration advice).
- Children’s support – including play therapy and child advocacy.
- Housing-related support – providing housing-related advice and support (for example, securing a permanent home and advice on how to live safely and independently)
- Counselling and therapy for both adults and children.

2.7 Desired Outcomes from the Safe Accommodation Strategy 2024-2027 include:

- To continue provision of domestic abuse mobile advocacy across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.
- To continue provision of dispersed safe accommodation across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.
- To continue the provision of domestic support as laid out in the Safe Accommodation Strategy.
- To continue the provision of refuge spaces in Cambridgeshire.
- To increase support to those with learning difficulties experiencing domestic support across Cambridgeshire.
- To ensure that survivors of domestic abuse across Cambridgeshire can receive domestic abuse support in their first language.

### 3. Main Issues

- 3.1 The Safe Accommodation Strategy is based on a Whole Housing Approach model. The Council and its partners were one of the key delivery systems in developing and adopting the Whole Housing Approach (WHA), with funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government from 2018 to 2021 (now the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)).
- 3.2 Funding for the strategy for the financial year 2024/25 of £1,188,354 is confirmed, and a Memorandum of Understanding in place between the Council and the funder, DLUHC. The funding is distributed by a Section 31 Grant.
- 3.3 A consultation is underway with councils as to how funding will be received from April 2025. DLUHC wants to understand local authorities’ perspectives on the impact of potentially rolling the Duty Funding into the Local Government Finance Settlement. This would be from April 2025.
- 3.4 The estimated number of victim/survivors (aged 16) of domestic abuse in Cambridgeshire, based on the Crime Survey for England and Wales prevalence estimates for 2022/23, is 25,000.

- 3.5 A whole system approach is required to effectively address the key issues and barriers experienced by survivors, and to ensure they have access to a safe place to call home. The model offers a framework for the domestic abuse and housing specialists to work together to address the immediate and longer-term housing needs of survivors. The model incorporates the experiences of survivors, the expertise of system leaders, and established, evidence-based practice.
- 3.6 This approach to providing accommodation-based support has enabled victims of domestic abuse to access safe accommodation regardless of the tenure of property and enables specialist domestic abuse staff to offer a range of flexible options with regards to increasing the safety of those suffering domestic abuse and their children.
- 3.7 The following services and interventions have been commissioned until March 2025 to meet the objectives of the current strategy and will remain in the proposed safe Accommodation Strategy 2024-2027.
- **Refuge Support:** In Cambridgeshire, support costs are provided for three refuges ensuring space for 40 women and 72 children. This work is commissioned until March 2026 (with the opportunity to extend for two more years).
  - **Dispersed Safe Accommodation:** Currently there are 8 units of Dispersed Safe Accommodation across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, provided in partnership with two domestic abuse organisations (Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse/SADA and DASS/Impakt) The accommodation is for residents experiencing domestic abuse and provides access to safe accommodation to those who are not able to live in a “traditional” refuge or other temporary accommodation, including large families, those with disabilities, people with pets, families with teenage boys (many refuges will not allow boys over the age of 12), people from the LGBTQ+ community; and those with multiple disadvantages. This is commissioned until March 2025.
  - **Target Hardening:** Target hardening schemes enable people who have been subjected to domestic abuse to remain in their own homes and reduce repeat victimisation through the provision of enhanced security measures. This is delivered in conjunction with working with a domestic abuse specialist and a safety plan and legal orders as appropriate. 508 residents were assisted with target hardening in 2022/23. This is commissioned until December 2024 (with the opportunity to extend until December 2025).
  - **Mobile advocacy outreach support:** This is a service which victim/survivors can directly access, enabling them to access domestic abuse led outreach support. This service is open access for advice, information and support in a way which is needs led, trauma informed and supports the wishes of the person requiring support. 881 people were supported by mobile advocacy in 2022/23. This is commissioned until September 2024.
  - **Housing IDVAs:** Across Cambridgeshire, a team of Housing IDVAs can offer a direct service to victims/survivors who attend a housing advice service or are referred by their social landlord. They are partially co-located in the housing advice teams and support victims/survivors, offering advice on safety planning and risk management. They also offer case management support and deliver awareness raising training and advice to staff based in these departments. They also offer support to those in temporary local

authority accommodation who have suffered domestic abuse. Housing IDVAs supported 327 survivors in 2022/23.

- Flexible Funding: Flexible funding supports victim/survivors to achieve or maintain safe and secure housing. It is low-barrier and does not require victim/survivors to provide evidence of abuse and is not means tested but is available as part of an individual's domestic abuse support package. 160 survivors received flexible funding support in 2022-23.
- Managed Reciprocal: The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Housing Reciprocal agreement is a voluntary collaboration between local authorities and registered providers which allows tenants with a social tenancy at risk of harm from domestic/sexual violence to move to another local authority area and keep their social tenancy. 14 households moved via this scheme in 2022/23.
- Raising awareness of domestic abuse in the private rented sector: Working with local private landlords and local Private Rented Sector teams in the local authorities to increase the awareness of domestic abuse and how this affects their tenants, and awareness of how private landlords can assist where there is domestic abuse. Six webinars were held for private landlords in 2022/23, and three domestic abuse training and awareness sessions were provided to local housing standards teams.

### 3.8 Being introduced into the Safe Accommodation Strategy for 2024-2027:

- Shared Lives project survivors with learning disabilities: This is a pilot scheme. The Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership is working with the Council's Shared Lives team to offer support to survivors of domestic abuse with learning disabilities. The pilot, led by a Shared Lives Co-ordinator, utilises the Shared Lives approach of carers welcoming people with support needs into their own homes.
- Eastern European IDVA: Eastern Europeans are the largest migrant group within Cambridgeshire, and it is vital to have specialist IDVAs who understand the lived experience of Eastern European migrants and can communicate in their first language where possible. Having staff with relevant language skills helps survivors with low levels of English to understand services and how to access them. Staff with cultural awareness and experience of working with specific nationalities help survivors overcome cultural barriers to accessing services.
- The interests of victims of domestic abuse and their children: The Domestic Abuse Act requires that the Partnership Board has at least one person representing the interests of victims of domestic abuse and at least one person representing the interests of children of domestic abuse victims. Through this strategy, feedback mechanisms for victims and their children will be developed to ensure there is independent representation which operates from views gathered independently of the commissioned services.

### 3.9 Being removed from the existing Safe Accommodation Strategy:

- Housing First IDVA: The role of the Housing First IDVA has been removed from the Safe Accommodation Strategy going forward, as the role did not manage to reach and support the expected level of people. Supporting survivors experiencing domestic abuse

who are sleeping rough or the 'hidden homeless' (women are often missing from rough sleeping counts because they tend to be less visible than male rough sleepers due to the risk of violence on the street), will be a continuing part of the Safe Accommodation Strategy and this will be delivered by the existing Housing IDVAs.

- Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance accreditation (DAHA): The strategy no longer focuses on DAHA, as this work is well underway with all district and city councils either accredited or working towards accreditation.

### 3.10 Delivery of the Safe Accommodation Strategy 2024-2027:

- The Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategic Partnership Board and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Operations Group, will oversee the strategy in conjunction with the Tier 2 Local Authorities as part of the Sub-Regional Housing Board. Once published, an action plan will be developed to ensure all elements are working in conjunction with each other and the needs of all victims are being met appropriately. There will be mechanisms in place to ensure effective oversight.

### 3.11 Strategy options and proposals were tested against the following principles:

- (a) Consultation: The Safe Accommodation Strategy has been taken to the Housing Board for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough for consultation. It is informed by the Violence Against Women and Girls Needs Assessment.
- (b) Best practice/performance: The Council's Safe Accommodation Strategy has the 'Whole Housing Approach' at its core. This approach is endorsed by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, Nicole Jacobs, as well as being highlighted as good practice within the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 guidance.
- (c) Do proposals meet the views of those consulted? All those consulted have supported the proposals in the refreshed Safe Accommodation Strategy for 2024-2027.
- (d) Procurement activity: There are ongoing contracts for the existing providers of refuge, mobile outreach, safe dispersed accommodation, and no additional procurement activity is required for the delivery of the Safe Accommodation Strategy 2024-2027.

## 4. Alternative Options Considered

N/A - The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 set in statute that Tier One authorities must prepare and publish a local strategy based on a robust needs assessment that sets out the ways in which provision for accommodation-based domestic abuse support will be developed, commissioned, and delivered.

## 5. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

- 5.1 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 requires the council to have a Safe Accommodation Strategy for the period between April 2024 and March 2027.

- 5.2 The refreshed strategy has been carefully considered, incorporating findings from the VAWG needs assessment (available on the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership's [website](#)) and partnership consultation.
- 5.3 It is therefore recommended that the Committee approves the proposed Safe Accommodation Strategy for 2024-2027.

## 6. Significant Implications

### 6.1 Finance Implications

None.

### 6.2 Legal Implications

The Council is required, by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, to have a Safe Accommodation Strategy in place and updated every three years.

### 6.3 Risk Implications

None.

### 6.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

An Equality Impact Assessment is attached at Appendix 2.

### 6.5 Climate Change and Environment Implications

N/A (not a key decision).

## 7. Source Documents

7.1 [Cambridgeshire Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-2024](#)

7.2 [Statutory guidance for the delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse in domestic abuse safe accommodation services](#)

7.3 [Domestic Abuse Act 2021: overarching factsheet](#)