

Safe Accommodation Strategy October 2021 – March 2024

Cambridgeshire County Council

1. Context

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, the first of which should be published by 31st October 2021. Thereafter, Strategies must be reviewed every three years.

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

Alongside provision of safe accommodation, the following types of domestic abuse support will be provided:

- 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.

These services are explored in more detail later in this strategy.

Combined, this strategy clearly sets out the overall and holistic approach to deliver a rounded offer of support to victims in safe accommodation.

2. Identification of Local Needs

During April – June 2021 agencies provided data to inform our needs assessment, ([Welcome to Cambridgeshire DASV Partnership \(cambsdasv.org.uk\)](http://Welcome%20to%20Cambridgeshire%20DASV%20Partnership%20(cambsdasv.org.uk)))), which found the following:

- A range of responses are required to meet the varied needs of clients, dependent on their risk, household structure, occupation, and tenure of property.
- Services need to ensure there is a focus on meeting the needs of some groups, in particular:
 - Having staff who can communicate with Lithuanian and Polish women in their native language
 - Ensuring services reach older people and provide an accessible service which meets specific needs.
- A high proportion of victims identified by the data gathered are living in social housing. This highlights the importance of housing providers and associations working towards Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation.
- Lack of supported safe accommodation for men, women with teenage boys, and for others where shared refuge accommodation would not be appropriate.
- Mental health and substance misuse are the most common needs of women in refuge accommodation. They are also a key reason why women are not able to access refuge accommodation. There is a need for specialist support for those women where there are complex needs and shared accommodation with children would not be appropriate, as well as requiring more support from staff.
- Over half of those reporting a housing need due to domestic abuse have dependent children.
- There is a need for flexible support to ensure victims are able to live in safe accommodation, which may include increasing the safety of their own home or identifying alternative accommodation. Those suffering domestic abuse must be able to have choice and control over where they live and the ability to maintain social capital (e.g., employment, schools, community support) for them and their children.
- There is often a need for emergency/temporary accommodation whilst other accommodation is arranged – this could be for days or months, depending on a range of factors.
- Victims with no recourse to public funds and uncertain immigration status can be particular issues, where there can be huge barriers in accessing accommodation, and there is need to ensure victims in this category are supported whilst applying for any relevant concessions.
- There is a need to ensure support is made available for those who are in local authority temporary accommodation due to fleeing domestic abuse.

- Relevant recommendations from the Shaping Our Lives 'A Refuge for All'¹ project should be implemented including;
 - refuge spaces that are accessible for a range of disability needs, not just wheelchair access
 - considering personal care needs of women in refuges and how these can be provided safely
 - Ensuring there are suitable accommodation options for older victims (over 60), especially those without care and support needs for whom residential or respite care would not be appropriate

Key challenges for the Domestic Abuse system, are currently:

- Provision of easily accessible accommodation to those at risk of abuse and their children, but where it is safe to stay within the county if provided with additional support;
- Provision of therapeutic support to victims and their children who have experienced domestic abuse;
- Ensuring greater support is provided to the housing sector to improve awareness and support to those experiencing domestic abuse ;
- Ensuring a consistency of support across both urban and very rural areas.

2.1 Local Need – Cambridgeshire Headline Figures, 2020-21

From April 2020 to March 2021:

- Police Incidents with a domestic abuse flag: 9,299 - up 5.7% on 2019/20 (8,798);
- Cases referred to the Independent Domestic Abuse Adviser (IDVA) Service: 1,462, up from 1,333 in 2019/20 – a 9.7% increase;
- Outreach Support: 1,779 referrals;
- Domestic Abuse victims supported by the Victim and Witness Hub: 621;
- Number using the four refuge services (across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough): 90 adults and 112 children – all but 5 victims came from outside Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, mainly from the East and South East of England – an increase of 17.7% on 2019-20;
- Number using the local Sanctuary Scheme (Cambridgeshire and Peterborough) to increase the security of their home, in conjunction with domestic abuse support: 331 and 526 children, compared with 293 in 2019/20.

Each year there is an increase in referrals to specialist domestic abuse services. It is likely that increases in awareness and of resources contribute to this growth. It is

¹ <https://www.shapingourlives.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Shaping-our-Lives-A-Refuge-for-All-findings-report-online.pdf>

anticipated that there will be continuous growth in those seeking domestic abuse support across the three years of this strategy.

3. Whole Housing Approach to Domestic Abuse

Our strategy is based on a Whole Housing Approach model. Cambridgeshire County Council and our 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 (MHCLG) from 2018 to 2021. This approach is endorsed by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, Nicole Jacobs, as well as being highlighted as good practice within the Domestic Abuse Act Guidance. The approach 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. A whole system approach is needed 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 WHA model offers a framework for the domestic abuse and housing sectors 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.

In adopting this approach, we can ensure access to a range of tailored housing options and initiatives to give people experiencing domestic abuse the choice to either relocate or remain in their existing accommodation. The full suite of housing options enables agencies and organisations to work together more collaboratively. Effective coordination efforts consider the long-term safety of the victim/survivor and their children, as well as managing crisis situations.

This strategy will ensure the needs of all victims with relevant protected characteristics are considered and met, including sex, race, gender, language, religion, sexual orientation, age, state of health and disabilities. The action plan will set out how the barriers faced by victims with relevant protected characteristics and / or multiple complex needs, will be addressed.

Based on the Whole Housing Approach model, and informed by our needs assessment and data, our strategy has three key aims:

- To achieve earlier identification and intervention for domestic abuse through access to domestic abuse support, local authority housing advice, and social and private landlords;
- To achieve a reduction in the number of people who are made homeless because of domestic abuse;
- To increase housing sustainment options so that people experiencing domestic abuse can remain safely in their home when it is their choice to do so, or do not lose their tenancy status if they relocate.



4. How we will address the Needs in Cambridgeshire

The following section describes the services and interventions that we will develop, commission and/or deliver to meet the objectives of this strategy.

4.1 Refuge Support

We will provide the support costs for three refuges, equating to space for 32 women and up to 55 children at any given time. These will be available to those fleeing from out of area, and within area if there is a significant distance and this is deemed to be safe. Within the package, there will be funding for children’s support workers and a flexible fund to enable those who need it to access talking therapies. In addition to this, refuges will have access to “Flexible Funding”, to support those moving on from refuge, who will need resources to support their new home. All refuges will be expected to be as accessible as possible to those with additional support needs, in line with “Refuge for All” principles.

4.2 Dispersed Safe Accommodation

This will increase the options and choice for survivors across Cambridgeshire. The accommodation is primarily for residents in this area who are being abused. It will provide access to safe accommodation for: victims/survivors and their children who are not able to live in a communal facility; people who need a carer; large families; those with disabilities; people with pets; male victims; families with teenage boys

(many refuges will not allow boys over the age of 12); people from the LGBT community; and BAME victims whose needs are not met with traditional refuges.

Being supported in this accommodation may mean the survivor does not have to give up their job; this is important for those who are homeowners and have a mortgage to pay. Survivors can still access their support network if safe to do so, and they will have regular support provided by the Housing IDVAs who will support them to move back to their own homes with all safety measures in place, for example Occupation Orders, Restraining Orders, and target hardening where this is safe to do so.

Homes will be sought from private landlords for a period of a year, which would be extended on announcement of further funding. The properties will be furnished and available across the county, with the aim of a minimum of two properties per local authority area (12 in total) and building upon this number. The cost of the rent is either collected by Housing Benefit payments if the client is in receipt of Universal Credit or by direct payments if they are working. The clients are responsible for the utilities and they are supported by the officers to set up payments of these. As part of our service, we will aim to have a dedicated team that are on call for extended hours, seven days a week as part of a rota system.

4.3 Housing IDVAs

A team of five Housing IDVAs (one for each Tier 2 authority) will offer a direct service to victims/survivors who attend a housing service. They will be partially co-located in the housing advice teams and will support victims/survivors, offering advice on safety planning and risk management. They also offer case management support and deliver awareness raising training to staff based in these departments. They will also offer support to those in temporary local authority accommodation who have suffered domestic abuse.

4.4 Housing First

A specialist Domestic Abuse Housing First role will focus on those who have suffered domestic abuse, and who find it difficult to engage with standard support services due to multiple disadvantages and are homeless. This post will link with the IDVA service and would receive specialist training and support.

4.5 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. Unlike most other funding sources, there is no set list of what will be funded, and victims/survivors are encouraged to ask for whatever will make the most difference to their housing situation and their lives, in order that the victim/survivor and their children can stay safe. This will only be offered in conjunction with working with a domestic abuse specialist.

4.6 Additional security

The Bobby Scheme works with domestic abuse specialists to enable households at risk of further 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.

4.7 DAHA Accreditation

The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance's (DAHA) mission is to improve the housing sector's response to domestic abuse through the introduction and adoption of an established set of standards and an accreditation process. The aim is for all local authority housing teams and all large housing associations to be DAHA Accredited by March 2023.

4.8 Managed Reciprocals

This is a mechanism whereby those suffering domestic abuse in a social tenancy are able to relocate to a different area whilst maintaining their security of tenure. This is delivered in conjunction with other resources such as the Bobby Scheme and specialist domestic abuse support.

4.9 Therapeutic Support for children experiencing domestic abuse

To provide specialist trauma informed counselling and therapeutic support for children who are victims of domestic abuse.

4.10 Mobile Advocacy Outreach Support

This is a direct service to victims/survivors, at location of their choosing including a range of community settings where the service can expand their access. Support is offered to victims/survivors to secure stable housing, which includes exploring and pursuing options for remaining in an existing property and relocating if needed for safety reasons. The specialist workers would have access to all elements within this strategy.

4.11 Awareness of Domestic Abuse Amongst Social Landlords

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.

4.12 Sheltered Accommodation/Supported Accommodation/Hostels

For all commissioned providers to have a domestic abuse policy for staff and residents. Ideally working towards or having DAHA Accreditation, or "Make a Stand²" accreditation from the Chartered Institute of Housing.

4.13 Victims with No Recourse to Public Funds

² <https://www.cih.org/policy/make-a-stand>

The Housing IDVAs and Mobile Advocacy Support Workers will work with clients with NRPF status to access the Domestic Violence Concession from the government where possible. Where a client is not eligible for this, they would still be eligible for all the options outlined within the strategy, with the exception of local refuge accommodation (if refuge is required, a placement would be sought elsewhere).

5. Delivery

This strategy will be overseen by the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board and Operations Group, in conjunction with the Tier 2 Local Authorities as part of the “Sub-Regional Housing Meeting”. Once published a working 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, and there will be mechanisms in place to ensure effective oversight.