
West Berkshire Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-23

Committee considering report:	Executive
Date of Committee:	10 February 2022
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Graham Bridgman
Date Head of Service agreed report: <i>(for Corporate Board)</i>	29 November 2021
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	29 November 2021
Report Author:	Jade Wilder
Forward Plan Ref:	EX4143

1 Purpose of the Report

This report has been produced for Executive to approve West Berkshire Council's (the 'Council') Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-23 ('Strategy'). The Strategy has been produced specifically to meet the Council's obligations under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (the 'Act') and will align with the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2020-23 until both documents are combined in 2023/24.

2 Recommendation(s)

It is recommended that Executive approve the Strategy, as set out in Appendix B.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	<p>The financial implications relate to costs associated with commissioning services to address gaps in service provision identified through our local needs assessment. The Council received £250,101.00 in 2021/22 in the form of a non-ring-fenced grant from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to implement Part 4 of the Act.</p> <p>This funding covers two combined aspects; support costs ie commissioning services and increased administration. Monies have been allocated to administration support and the</p>

	<p>remaining budget will be used to meet the gaps in service provision.</p> <p>Funding will be available in the form of a non-ring-fenced grant from the DLUHC for a further three years, however the amount will be determined at each appropriate government Spending Review.</p> <p>It is possible that funding could decrease in future years which may cause financial implications for any services commissioned. Funding will be closely monitored by the Domestic Abuse Board and any services commissioned are likely to be short term, in view of the uncertainty regarding government support.</p> <p>Financial Officer: Lisa Potts</p> <p>Date: 25 November 2021</p>
<p>Human Resource:</p>	<p>No HR implications.</p>
<p>Legal:</p>	<p>The Council are under a legal duty to meet the requirements as set out in Part 4 of the Act:</p> <p>(a) assess, or make arrangements for the assessment of, the need for accommodation-based support in its area,</p> <p>(b) prepare and publish a strategy for the provision of such support in its area, and</p> <p>(c) monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy.</p> <p>Statutory guidance, published on 1 October 2021, will support the implementation of the above duties. The key objectives of the guidance are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide clear information on what domestic abuse is in order to assist with its identification; • provide guidance and support to frontline professionals, who have responsibilities for safeguarding and supporting victims of domestic abuse, for example through outlining relevant strategic and operational frameworks; and • improve the institutional response to domestic abuse by conveying best practice and standards for commissioning responses. <p>The Regulations that arise from the Act state that a final version of the Council's Strategy should be published no later than 5 January 2022. A draft Strategy was published 10 weeks prior (on 26 October 2021). The public consultation could not begin</p>

	<p>until the local needs assessment had concluded (as required under the Act) and the Strategy had been drafted which was then subject to commenting by the Domestic Abuse Board – an external organisation was commissioned to complete this. The consultation was live for six weeks and once closed, the Strategy was revised and added onto the next available Executive cycle. As a result of meeting dates, the deadline of 5 January 2022 will not be met. The DLUHC have been informed but a response is yet to be received.</p> <p>The Act at Part 4 generally and section 58 specifically, requires a “relevant local authority” (which includes the Council) to appoint a domestic abuse local partnership board for the purposes of providing advice to the authority about certain functions and aspects of domestic abuse. The West Berkshire Domestic Abuse Board (the ‘Board’) has been constituted as the Council’s domestic abuse local partnership board for this purpose.</p> <p>The Act also amends the Housing Act 1996 and Homelessness Code of Guidance, expanding the scope of the Council’s housing duties.</p> <p>Legal Officer: Holly Whitwham</p> <p>Date: 30 November 2021</p>			
<p>Risk Management:</p>	<p>The main risk identified is in respect of resources to adequately address the gaps identified (as set out in our Strategy) to meet the needs of all victims of domestic abuse given the funding available and risk that this may decrease over the next three years. This will be managed by the Domestic Abuse Board who will monitor funding and decide how best the funding should be allocated.</p>			
<p>Property:</p>	<p>The Council will be required to ensure a variety of safe accommodation options are available for victims of domestic abuse.</p>			
<p>Policy:</p>	<p>The proposal relates to the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.</p>			
	<p>Positive</p>	<p>Neutral</p>	<p>Negative</p>	<p>Commentary</p>

Equalities Impact:				
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?	X			Please refer to Appendix A, EqIA assessment.
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?	X			The Strategy will have a positive impact on those with protected characteristics and/or complex needs. The Act requires the Council to meet the needs of all victims when providing support and safe accommodation, therefore more victims will be able to access support when they need it.
Environmental Impact:		X		
Health Impact:	X			The Strategy will have a positive impact on health as victims and their children will be able to flee unhealthy, abusive relationships and seek accommodation somewhere safe. Families will be better supported and have more support options available to them.
ICT Impact:		X		
Digital Services Impact:		X		
Council Strategy Priorities:	X			Ensure our vulnerable children and adults achieve better outcomes. The proposal will support this priority because it will ensure all victims of domestic abuse have access to the right support within safe accommodation when they need it so they are not at further risk or harm.

Core Business:		X		
Data Impact:		X		
Consultation and Engagement:	<p>Graham Bridgeman (Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing), Matt Pearce (Service Director, Communities and Wellbeing), Andy Sharp (Executive Director, People), Janet Weekes (Housing Service Manger), Susan Powell (BCT Team Manager), Lisa Potts (Finance Manager) and Holly Whitwham (Principal Solicitor – People Team, Legal and Democratic Services).</p> <p>Members of the public as part of a six week public consultation, members of the Domestic Abuse Board and Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse charity.</p>			

4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 The Strategy has been produced in light of legislative changes with the introduction of the Act. It has been developed specifically in line with Part 4 of the Act which requires the Council to:
 - a) conduct (or make arrangements for) a local needs assessment to determine the level of need for support within relevant safe accommodation in their area; and
 - b) prepare and publish a local Domestic Abuse Support in Safe Accommodation Strategy based on a robust needs assessment.
- 4.2 The Strategy will enable the Council to meet the statutory requirements under Part 4 of the Act and ensure support is commissioned in relevant safe accommodation to meet the needs of victims including their children in line with the local strategy.
- 4.3 The Council carried out a public consultation for the draft Strategy from 19 September 2021 to 10 November 2021. This was for a period of six weeks which complies with the requirements of the Council’s Consultation Policy.
- 4.4 A total of 50 responses were received as part of our consultation. During the cleansing process ten responses were removed from the final dataset as the questions had been abandoned (where a respondent only answers the first couple of questions ie about who they are and then either closes the survey or doesn’t answer any further questions). Please refer to Appendix C to view the feedback during consultation and how this aligns to the Council’s objectives.
- 4.5 This Council has a Domestic Abuse Strategy agreed in 2020, covering the period up to 2023. There will therefore be two concurrent strategies until 2023 - the Domestic Abuse Strategy and the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy.

- 4.6 It is being proposed that Executive approve the Strategy until combined with the Council's Domestic Abuse Strategy in 2023/24.
- 4.7 The recommendation to adopt and approve the Strategy should be agreed as it has been developed to meet all legislative requirements and in response a local needs assessment was undertaken. It has also been subjected to extensive engagement with relevant stakeholders.
- 4.8 The statutory guidance and accompanying Regulations state that a final strategy should be published before 5 January 2022. The public consultation could not begin until the local needs assessment had concluded (as required under the Act) and the Strategy had been drafted which was then subject to commenting by the Domestic Abuse Board – an external organisation was commissioned to complete this. Once the consultation closed, the Strategy was added onto the next available Executive cycle and as a result of meeting dates it has been impossible to meet this deadline.

5 Supporting Information

Introduction

- 5.1 This report seeks approval to adopt the Strategy.
- 5.2 A draft action plan has also been produced which sets out how the Domestic Abuse Board will work with stakeholders to deliver possible activities that will help address the gaps identified and support the identified themes within the Strategy. The Domestic Abuse Board will be agreeing and refining what activities are carried forward from this.

Background

- 5.3 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 received Royal Assent on 29 April 2021. Various duties have been included under the Act, but Part 4 refers to the delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse, including children, within safe accommodation. Thus, the Council is required to assess the need for support, and prepare strategies to provide support for, victims and their children, who need to reside, in safe accommodation.
- 5.4 The Council was allocated and has received £250,101.00 in the form of a non-ring-fenced grant from the DLUHC to assist the Council in meeting the requirements under Part 4 of the Act. A clear breakdown of how allocated funding has been spent will be reported back annually to the Secretary of State. Funding covers two combined aspects; support costs ie commissioning services and increased administration. It is yet to be determined how long this funding will be available for and if the amount is subject to change, but it is expected that it will be paid on an annual basis and be non-ring-fenced for the first three years.
- 5.5 Since the Act came into force the Council appointed a local Domestic Abuse Board which is responsible for complying with the requirements of the Act.
- 5.6 A local needs assessment was undertaken earlier this year and concluded in July 2021 to help determine the level of need locally. A standardised needs assessment was utilised and provided by the DLUHC. This involved engaging with a wide range of key stakeholders and victims themselves. The overall provision in West Berkshire is very

comprehensive but there are clear gaps in some services which is likely to be as a result of being a small local authority area. The findings have been used to produce our Strategy.

- 5.7 A public consultation went live from 19 September 2021 to 10 November 2021. This was for a period of six weeks and looked to explore what support and safe accommodation needed to be in place, or expanded further, in the Council's area to make sure the needs of all victims (including those with protected characteristics and/or complex needs) are met. Responses have been considered and feedback reflected (where appropriate) into the finalised Strategy.
- 5.8 This Council has a Domestic Abuse Strategy agreed in 2020, covering the period up to 2023 – this strategy extends beyond requirements under Part 4 of the Act. It was agreed at an exceptional Domestic Abuse Board meeting on 11 August 2021 that instead of revising the Council's current Strategy, a new one would be created which focussed on support within safe accommodation.
- 5.9 There will therefore be two strategies - the Domestic Abuse Strategy and the West Berkshire Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy - until both are combined in 2023/24. This will also aligns with local commissioning arrangements currently in place.
- 5.10 The Domestic Abuse Board will be responsible for agreeing and refining the current drafted action plan that accompanies the strategy to ensure any gaps in service provision are being met and funding is utilised effectively. This will be a live working document.

Proposals

To approve the Strategy.

6 Other options considered

To revise our current Domestic Abuse Strategy 2020-23 to incorporate the support within safe accommodation aspect. This was dismissed due to the nature of requirements under the Act which is very specific whereas the current strategy extends beyond this requirement. Both strategies will be combined in 2023/24 which aligns in with the re-commissioning of the local domestic abuse service in West Berkshire.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 The Strategy has been developed following an in-depth local needs assessment and public consultation. It meets all legislative requirements under Part 4 of the Act and will support the Council in meeting the needs of all victims, including children.
- 7.2 This report seeks approval to adopt the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-23.

8 Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix A – Equalities Impact Assessment

8.2 Appendix B – West Berkshire Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-23

8.3 Appendix C – Consultation Feedback

Corporate Board’s recommendation

To progress through to Executive without any changes required.

Background Papers:

[Delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse in domestic abuse safe accommodation services statutory guidance](#)

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: No:

- The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval
- Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council
- Delays in implementation could compromise the Council’s position
- Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or associated Task Groups within preceding six months
- Item is Urgent Key Decision
- Report is to note only

Wards affected:

Officer details:

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Document Control

Document Ref:	1	Date Created:	09/11/2021
Version:	0.1	Date Modified:	15/11/2021
Author:	Jade Wilder		
Owning Service	Communities and Wellbeing		

Change History

West Berkshire Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-23

Version	Date	Description	Change ID
1			
2			

Appendix A

Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) - Stage One

What is the proposed decision that you are asking the Executive to make:	To approve our Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2020-23.
Summary of relevant legislation:	<p>Part 4 of the Act requires the Council to assess the need for support and prepare strategies to provide support for victims and their children [who need to reside] in safe accommodation.</p> <p>Specifically, under this part of the Act it requires the Council to (a) produce a robust needs assessment regarding accommodation-based support for the victims of domestic abuse, and (b) prepare and publish a local domestic abuse strategy for the provision of such support.</p>
<p>Does the proposed decision conflict with any of the Council’s priorities for improvement?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure our vulnerable children and adults achieve better outcomes • Support everyone to reach their full potential • Support businesses to start develop and thrive in West Berkshire • Develop local infrastructure including housing to support and grow the local economy Maintain a green district • Ensure sustainable services through innovation and partnerships 	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If yes, please indicate which priority and provide an explanation</p>
Name of Budget Holder:	Susan Powell
Name of Service/Directorate:	Communities and Wellbeing
Name of assessor:	Jade Wilder
Date of assessment:	09/11/2021
Version and release date (if applicable):	

Is this a ?		Is this policy, strategy, function or service ... ?	
Policy	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	New or proposed	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

Strategy	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Already exists and is being reviewed	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Function	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Is changing	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Service	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>		

(1) What are the main aims, objectives and intended outcomes of the proposed decision and who is likely to benefit from it?

Aims:	To meet the support needs of diverse groups of victims and their children in different accommodation settings.
Objectives:	Meet the needs of all victims including those with protected characteristics and/or complex needs by providing appropriate accommodation based support.
Outcomes:	All victims of domestic abuse and their children are offered accommodation-based support based on their needs.
Benefits:	All victims are given a fair and equal opportunity to find somewhere safe to live be it temporarily or permanently allowing them to live free from domestic abuse.

(2) Which groups might be affected and how? Is it positively or negatively and what sources of information have been used to determine this?

(Please demonstrate consideration of all strands – Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion or Belief, Sex and Sexual Orientation)

Group Affected	What might be the effect?	Information to support this
Age	Positively	Statutory guidance on the delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse, including children, in domestic abuse safe accommodation services
Disability	Positively	
Gender Reassignment	Positively	
Marriage and Civil Partnership	Positively	
Pregnancy and Maternity	Positively	
Race	Positively	
Religion or Belief	Positively	
Sex	Positively	
Sexual Orientation	Positively	

Further Comments:
None.

(3) Result	
Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could contribute to inequality?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
The Strategy has been developed following Statutory Guidance issued under Part 4 of the Act to ensure support is offered to all victims of domestic abuse, including children of domestic abuse and those with protected characteristics and/or complex.	
Will the proposed decision have an adverse impact upon the lives of people, including employees and service users?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
There will not be an adverse impact, only a positive one to ensure all domestic abuse victims are offered accommodation-based support fairly and equally by meeting their needs.	

(4) Identify next steps as appropriate:	
EqIA Stage 2 required	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Owner of EqIA Stage Two:	
Timescale for EqIA Stage Two:	

Name: Jade Wilder

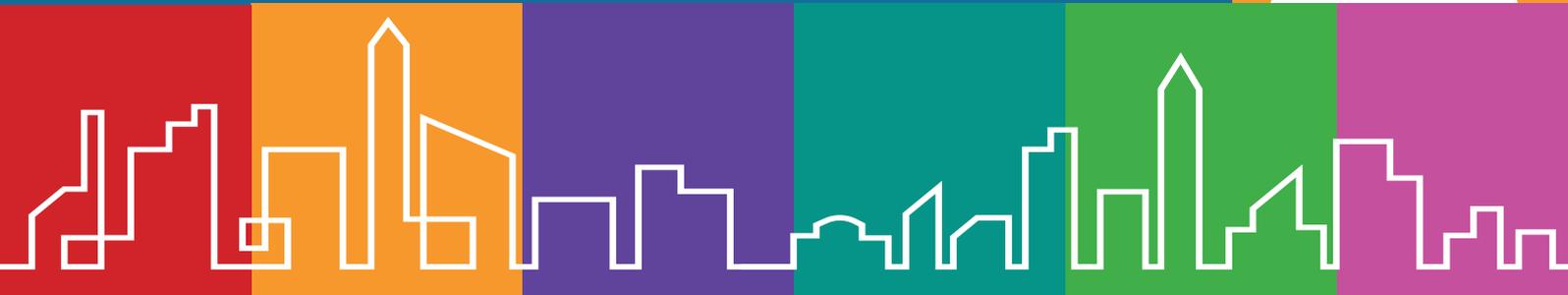
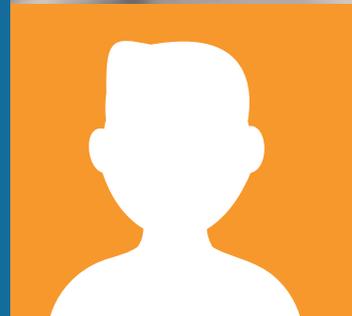
Date: 09/11/2021

West Berkshire Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy

2021-2023



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West Berkshire
COUNCIL

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1 Introduction

Domestic abuse is one of the most harmful crimes in society, with terrible and life threatening consequences for victims, including children, and long lasting consequences for society. The majority of domestic abuse is perpetrated in the home which is meant to be a place of safety and nurturing for families, but for victims of domestic abuse the home becomes a place of danger. Domestic abuse is the third most common cause of homelessness amongst women.

In West Berkshire, we aim to change this landscape for victims and welcome the opportunity provided by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (the Act) and the new Local Authority Statutory Duty to provide support within safe accommodation, to enable more victims to remain in their homes if it is safe to do so, to increase the range of support services for victims in safe accommodation, to improve long term housing security for victims while at the same time holding perpetrators to account.

The Home Office Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) ready reckoner¹ analyses the population of any given area and gives a guiding figure that 5,229 women and girls and 2,455 men and boys aged 16-59 living in West Berkshire have been a victim of domestic abuse in the past year. The problem is much bigger than shown in official statistics provided here.

This strategy is ambitious and sets out our road map to achieve the changes required that will enable victims and their children to achieve safe, fulfilled and independent lives free from domestic abuse. We have decided to broaden the scope of the strategy beyond safe accommodation support services to take a Whole Housing Approach (WHA) to domestic abuse, which considers the safe accommodation needs of victims across all tenure types (social housing, private rented and private ownership), to include the longer-term housing options for victims and to begin to address our approach to perpetrators and housing.

This Strategy will be delivered alongside the West Berkshire Domestic Abuse Strategy 2020-2023. As outlined within the Coordinated Community Response (CCR) model, the whole community, including every agency, has a role to play in response to domestic abuse.

Most public services are not designed with domestic abuse or violence against women and girls (VAWG) in mind, and as a result, they often struggle to protect people. Poor communication and gaps between services put survivors at risk. There is continuously a need for training, education and awareness raising and within West Berkshire we acknowledge the importance of our communities and how they can also be a source of help, if provided with the appropriate tools/resources. Therefore, we are committed to working more closely with residents in our communities in addition to our practitioners.

There will be a heightened focus on providing appropriate and good quality interventions to not only victims of domestic abuse but to families and how we work better with external agencies who engage in work to hold perpetrators to account for their behaviour and place responsibility on perpetrators to be accountable, and where safe and the wishes of victims, to remove perpetrators from the family home. Furthermore, we will continue to learn from our research to improve our local interventions and strengthen our community through a multi-agency partnership approach.

Our aims are aligned with two of the West Berkshire Council priorities “Ensure our vulnerable children and adults achieve better outcomes” and “Ensure sustainable services through innovation and partnerships”. In addition, the strategy links to the aims of Thames Valley Police and the Police and Crime Commissioner which are to improve the response to reports of domestic abuse, to improve outcomes for victims of domestic and sexual abuse and to identify and implement best practice in the management of perpetrators. Finally, this is also written to be aligned with the Berkshire West Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

The actions identified to meet our aims have been decided through a range of multi-agency conversations, focusing on what we can implement and change over the next three years.

It should be acknowledged that there is ongoing work being undertaken outside of our developed strategy which is ‘business as usual’ to address domestic abuse in West Berkshire.

2 Domestic Abuse Act 2021

The Act received Royal Assent on 29 April 2021. It brings wide reaching changes in protective legislation and provides a new statutory definition of domestic abuse which explicitly includes economic abuse, recognises children as victims of domestic abuse, and defines coercive and controlling behaviour between ex-partners and family members.

Part 4 of the Act introduces a Statutory Duty on all Local Authorities to provide safe accommodation support services. In line with the Act the term victim will be used to refer to people who have been or are subject to domestic abuse. The terms perpetrator will be used to refer to the person committing the abuse.

In West Berkshire, we will treat the Statutory Duty as a minimum standard and will work hard to ensure that all victims are treated fairly and justly and have access to safe accommodation at their point of need.

“It brings wide reaching changes in protective legislation and provides a new definition of domestic abuse which explicitly includes economic abuse and recognises children as victims of domestic abuse.”

Local Authority Statutory Duty

Part 4 of the Act places Duties on West Berkshire Council to:

- Appoint a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board which it must consult as it performs certain specified functions;
- Assess, or make arrangements for the assessment of, the need for domestic abuse support in their area for all victims and their children who reside in relevant safe accommodation, including those who come from outside of their area;
- Develop and publish a Safe Accommodation Strategy having regard to the needs assessment;
- Implement the strategy through commissioning / de-commissioning decisions;
- Monitor and evaluate local delivery and effectiveness of the strategy; and
- Report back to central government annually.

West Berkshire Council has appointed the West Berkshire Domestic Abuse Board (the DAB) as its Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board constituted under the Act which will be referred to throughout this strategy.

A full list of the measures can be found here: <https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2021/04/29/domesticabuseactfactsheet/>

3 Purpose of the Strategy

The purpose of the strategy is to ensure that all victims, including children, subject to domestic abuse have access to safe accommodation support services appropriate to their needs in order to live safely and that responses to perpetrators support victims/victim safety.

Aims

- To ensure all victims, including children and those from out of area and/or with No Recourse to Public Funds, have access to safe, appropriate accommodation and support services at their point of need;
- To ensure victims are able to remain safely in their accommodation if they choose and it is safe to do so;
- To provide move on accommodation options for victims to support long-term recovery and independence;
- To ensure the effective management of perpetrators enables victims to remain safe in their homes and to access safe accommodation; and
- To ensure that other duties/legislation introduced as part of the Act (secure tenancies and homelessness) are considered in the context of safe accommodation and a WHA.

4 Definition of Safe Accommodation

The Statutory Guidance defines 'safe accommodation' as:

- Refuge accommodation - a refuge offers accommodation and intensive support which is tied to that accommodation;
- Specialist safe accommodation - safe accommodation which provides dedicated specialist support, such as specialist refuges for Ethnically Diverse, LGBTQ+, and disabled victims;
- Dispersed accommodation - Safe (secure and dedicated to supporting victims of domestic abuse) and self-contained:
 - i. accommodation with the same level of specialist domestic abuse support as provided within a refuge;
 - ii. 'semi-independent' accommodation which is not within a refuge but with support;
- Sanctuary Schemes - properties with local authority installed Sanctuary Schemes or other similar schemes which provide enhanced physical security measures within a home;
- Move-on and / or second stage accommodation - projects temporarily accommodating victims before they move to fully independent and permanent accommodation. There is no expectation that every victim will require this; and
- Other forms of domestic abuse emergency accommodation - a safe place (single gendered or single sex, secure and dedicated to supporting victims of domestic abuse) with domestic abuse support tied to the accommodation.

Accommodation such as generic Bed and Breakfast accommodation and homeless hostels – in that they are not solely dedicated to providing a safe place to stay for victims of domestic abuse, including expert support are not considered relevant safe accommodation.

5 Definition of Support

The following types of domestic abuse support will be provided through the new duty:

- 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; and
- Counselling and therapy for both adults and children.

“The Whole Housing Approach is referred to within the draft statutory guidance as a form of other safe accommodation.”

²<https://www.dahalliance.org.uk/what-we-do/whole-housing-approach/>

³<https://www.dahalliance.org.uk/what-we-do/whole-housing-approach/whole-housing-toolkit/>

6 Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment

A needs assessment has been undertaken looking at the current safe accommodation offer in West Berkshire and the gaps and needs. The new duty will cover the provision of support to victims and their children residing in some/all of the following:

- Refuge accommodation;
- Specialist safe accommodation;
- Dispersed accommodation;
- Sanctuary schemes; and
- Move-on or second stage accommodation.

The review of provision and the recommendations in this report have drawn on the Whole Housing Model² which endeavours to improve the housing options and outcomes for people experiencing domestic abuse so that they can achieve stable housing, live safely, and overcome the abuse and its harmful impacts.

The model consists of 14 elements and, although some of these fall outside of the requirements of the Act, this report draws on the wider learning of the model to support West Berkshire meet the new duties. The structure is in line with the WHA Toolkit³.

The green circles below represent the accommodation/tenure types in which survivors require access to support services, and the blue circles represent the specialist support interventions that offer victims interventions that meet their needs within each form of accommodation.



7 Strategic Priorities

The following strategic priorities are based on the key elements of the Statutory Guidance for local authorities across England and a WHA.

7.1 Delivering the Safe Accommodation Statutory Duty

[Theme A: The DAB will ensure that West Berkshire has the resources and partnerships in place to undertake the Needs Assessment and implement this Strategy.](#)

We recognise that prevalence data alone is not enough for an assessment of need and does not tell us about the impact of domestic abuse or the type of support needed by the different cohorts

of victims. Therefore, this strategy draws on data from a range of local agencies and services responding to victims including their children to help us develop a more holistic understanding of unmet need. We also reference national data for comparison.

The needs assessment in West Berkshire was conducted by Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse in partnership with the Building Communities Together Team in compliance with the requirements of the Statutory Guidance:

- To determine the level of need for support within safe accommodation in West Berkshire; and
- To enable the Authority to understand the barriers to safe accommodation for the diverse communities of victims regardless of whether their original residence was out of area.

7.2 Access to Safe Accommodation

[Theme B: Every victim will be supported to access safe accommodation appropriate to their needs and at their point of need.](#)

We recognise that victims of domestic abuse are not a homogenous group, we therefore look to focus on the following areas in implementing this strategy:

- Younger victims;
- Older victims;
- Black and Ethnically Diverse victims;
- Migrant victims and victims with no recourse to public funds;
- Disabled victims;
- LGBTQ+ victims;
- Victims facing severe and multiple disadvantage;
- Victims with larger families;
- Victims with older male children; and
- Victims in employment.

Victims/survivors from these groups are less likely to access support due to factors such as social isolation, increased marginalisation, discrimination and/or vulnerability, lack of culturally appropriate services and a lack of awareness about what constitutes abuse and the services that are available. West Berkshire has a comprehensive range of services working with the identities listed above but will be looking to work in partnership with these agencies to ensure there is a joined up approach moving forward. West Berkshire is committed to providing sustainable funding and commissioning opportunities for these services to provide support to these marginalised groups.

In West Berkshire, Richmond Fellowship offers 13 units of supported housing in Newbury to anyone

over 18 diagnosed with a mental health condition. The service provides flexible support packages tailored to meet individual needs ranging from long term intensive support for up to two years to brief solution focused interventions. The service helps people manage their tenancies, maintain domestic routines and play an active part in their community.

Both West Berkshire Council and the families of service users believe that safe supported living environments offer an ideal setting for many with moderate and in some cases severe learning disabilities and should be the preferred option where possible. West Berkshire Council currently funds around 215 individuals in a range of supported living settings, with c175 in West Berkshire and 40 outside, mainly in the Reading area.⁴

7.3 Refuge Accommodation

[Theme C: The DAB will ensure there is sufficient refuge provision to meet the safe accommodation needs of women and children and explore the unmet need for refuge accommodation for male victims.](#)

Refuge services are an established, essential element in delivering support to the most vulnerable victims of domestic abuse who are no longer safe at home. A refuge service provides holistic, specialist support to meet the needs of victims, including children, in a supportive, safe, and secure environment. There is no 'typical victim' supported in a refuge- victims and children will have a range of support needs, including those related to safety, criminal and family justice, disability, physical and mental health, immigration status, children's welfare and education, financial needs including debt, and social needs.

A2Dominion are commissioned to provide refuge in West Berkshire in the form of two family units accommodating one woman plus three children and two units accommodating a single woman. A license agreement is in place that residents are able to remain at the refuge for a maximum of six months, in exceptional circumstances this has been extended.

⁴<https://ipc.brookes.ac.uk/files/market-position-statements/West-Berkshire-MPS-2020-23.pdf>

A2Dominion are able to link victims with counselling, therapy or group work, provide practical day to day support to assist victims in living independently, dedicated support for children and young people in refuge and are able to liaise with other services to ensure a coordinated approach.

It needs to be explored further in West Berkshire to determine if the number of refuge units currently available is sufficient based on the population and need for the local area.

7.4 Move-on and second stage accommodation

[Theme D: The DAB will ensure there is sufficient move on and second stage accommodation with specialist support for victims ready to leave refuge.](#)

The DAB is committed to ensuring that victims and their children have access to safe, affordable move-on housing and are supported to achieve independent and fulfilled lives free from domestic abuse.

At the present time, there is a gap in our understanding of victims housing journeys- the type of tenure victims leave when they go into refuge and the type of tenure they move to when leaving refuge. In addition to the challenges of rehousing, victims often need follow up support to enable them to rebuild their lives once they are rehoused. Staffing capacity in refuges means that this can be limited.

There is currently no move-on accommodation available in West Berkshire with victims reporting that once they leave the refuge provision they feel totally on their own. The purpose of move-on accommodation is to provide housing and support to reintegrate those leaving refuge into independent living. For many victims of abuse space for action⁵ is something that was controlled in their relationships which may have resulted in them having very limited capacity to make their own choices and decisions.

Ensuring victims and children can 'move on' from refuges is essential for supporting long-term recovery and independence and to ensure that refuge accommodation is available for women in crisis.

Second stage move on accommodation can be described as a bridge between refuge and independent living and can be particularly important for women who have continued advocacy and support needs, for example, women with unsettled immigration status who are awaiting an immigration outcome. The properties also free up refuge bed spaces for victims in crisis.

Families are able to stay in the properties while they have an active application for longer-term housing. It is anticipated that the average length of stay will be six months.

We look to monitor where victims are moving to, including refuge move on and other pathways to new accommodation as well as where they have come from to map their whole housing journeys. We will work with specialist services including; housing, refuge and other agencies to monitor the housing outcomes for victims, where there are opportunities for growth and development and what challenges and barriers might arise.

7.5 Sanctuary Scheme (Safer Spaces)

[Theme E: The DAB will ensure that West Berkshire Council continues to deliver a Sanctuary Scheme with specialist domestic abuse support for all victims who wish to remain in their home and it is safe to do so.](#)

The Sanctuary Scheme, referred to as Safer Spaces in West Berkshire, is a multi-agency centred initiative that aims to enable households at risk of violence to remain in their own homes and reduce repeat victimisation through the provision of enhanced security measures and domestic abuse support. This can, but does not have to, include a 'sanctuary room' in the victim's home. Sanctuary Schemes are only installed when the perpetrator is no longer living in the home.

⁵ Long journeys toward freedom: The relationship between coercive control and space for action-Measurement and Emerging Evidence. Liz Kelly, Nicola Sharps-Jeff, Renate Klein. February 2017.

West Berkshire Council have an agreement with Safer Partnerships Limited to deliver the Sanctuary Scheme. Referrals can be made from any organisation linked to victims. Victims can also refer themselves by contacting the Housing Operations Team.

The Scheme is available to victims who have a legal right to occupy their property including victims who are owner occupiers and those living in the private rented sector but only with the permission of the landlord. Commissioned domestic abuse support provided by a specialist domestic abuse organisation includes legal rights advice to enable victims to exercise their right to occupy.

Security measures typically include composite doors, intruder alarms, external lights, window locks/jammers and door locks. All security measures are installed at no cost to the victim or the landlord.

The Scheme is an important safe accommodation intervention for disabled victims or victims with dependents who are disabled and whose home has been adapted and is also the key safe accommodation provision in West Berkshire for male victims.

The Scheme is not available to victims with No Recourse to Public Funds (as Sanctuary constitutes use of 'public funds').

We look to identify how we can maximise the use of the scheme to keep victims as safe as possible when remaining in their homes.

7.6 Male Victims

[Theme F: The DAB will assess the safe accommodation and support needs of heterosexual, trans, non-binary, gay and bisexual victims in collaboration with local LGBTQ+ community groups and relevant national organisations to develop a safe accommodation and support pathway in response to need.](#)

There is a need to develop our understanding of the safe accommodation and support needs of male victims and to review the safe accommodation

provision in West Berkshire. A2Dominion currently support male victims through their service offer but a review should also include their longer term rehousing needs. The current picture of need is unclear.

There is currently no refuge service for male victims locally and very low provision nationally. There is demand for refuge accommodation but because it requires victims to move away from the city, this creates a barrier to access. This section identifies some of the themes emerging in connection with the safe accommodation and support needs of male victims.

West Berkshire Council looks to explore what provision can be offered to meet the needs and ensure that it is suitable and sustainable.

A report by Respect, the national male victim helpline provider, found that 1.2% of callers were signposted to refuge services and that most commonly, callers wanted help with practical issues including legal advice, help in accessing the criminal justice system and accessing a local male domestic abuse service.

We look to continue to scope the needs of male victims and ensure the provision we offer is accessible for all genders.

7.7 Children and Young People

[Theme G: In line with the Domestic Abuse Act and the Part 4 Statutory Guidance, children and young people will be recognised as victims in their own right and receive specialist support appropriate to their need including while in safe accommodation.](#)

West Berkshire Council have implemented the Family Safeguarding Model, a way of keeping families together where it is safe to do so. This is achieved through a more collaborative way of working where parents are motivated to identify the changes needed within their own families. This helps achieve better outcomes for children. Family safeguarding sees specialist adult-focused practitioners – with expertise in domestic abuse, mental health or substance misuse – integrated within children's safeguarding teams – with the aim of providing comprehensive support.

We welcome the decision to include children and young people in the new statutory definition of domestic abuse as victims in their own right.

One in seven children and young people under the age of 18 will have lived with a domestic abuser at some point in their childhood⁶.

The impact of domestic abuse on children can result in life long trauma which manifests itself in multiple ways. Very young children who are exposed to domestic violence and abuse at home can experience so much added stress that it can negatively affect brain development and impact on cognitive and sensory growth⁷.

Part 4 Statutory Guidance defines safe accommodation support services for children as:

- Children's support – including play therapy and child advocacy; and
- Counselling and therapy (including group support) for both adults and children, including emotional support.

The benefit of specialist and tailored support for children has been well evidenced as critical to their recovery and it is important to remember that children and young people as well as their mothers have experienced trauma before fleeing the perpetrator⁸.

In line with the Act, there are currently no Children's Refuge Worker posts in West Berkshire. Therefore, we look to improve our provision for children and young people who are victims of domestic abuse and ensure measures are sustainable.

7.8 Perpetrators of Abuse

[Theme H: The DAB will ensure the development of an effective risk-managed perpetrator housing pathway and support in order to increase victim safety and housing security and prevent further domestic abuse.](#)

There is an urgent need to consider what happens to the perpetrator when a victim leaves a property

as many will remain in the home consequence free. Housing providers that intervene earlier with victims can help them to remain in their home when it is their choice to do so and yield costs savings related to repairs, arrears and evictions. Safe engagement with the perpetrator is also vital and requires that housing providers work in partnership with victims to offer effective interventions.

There are currently two provisions available in West Berkshire; The National Probation Service offer Building Better Relationships (BBR), a group designed to promote lifelong changes in behaviours and attitudes which, in the past, have resulted in male service users being convicted of intimate partner violence. However, this provision is only available for those convicted and have a sentence of 18 months or it is written into their license agreement. It is not used for women who have used violence or abuse.

The Family Safeguarding Service consists of two locality teams, one based in Calcot and the other in Newbury. FSS hold two posts of DA Practitioner (Perpetrator Workers) in the Family Safeguarding Service working with Social Workers, Family Support Workers, Mental Health Workers and a Substance Misuse Worker providing comprehensive and specialist assessments of risk and need in relation to perpetrators of domestic abuse.

Rehousing perpetrators may be ethically and practically challenging and appear to incentivise harmful behaviour but the option to remove and rehouse a perpetrator will allow the victim and children to remain in their home without disruption to children's education, victim employment, existing community and support networks and the financial hardship of moving into temporary accommodation and relocation. Victims frequently do not want their ex-/partner and parent of their children to be homeless.

There are several tools, options and opportunities for removing perpetrators from the home. These will often require a multi-agency approach, for example: the new statutory Domestic Violence

⁶ <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/the-victims-handbook/children-and-domestic-abuse/>

⁷ Patchy, piecemeal and precarious: support for children affected by domestic abuse (2019) Action for Children

⁸ Nowhere to Turn for Children and Young People (2020) Women's Aid England

Protection Notices (DVPN) and Orders (DVPO) enable Police and the Courts to put in place protection for a victim in the immediate aftermath of a domestic abuse incident by removing the perpetrator from the property and liaison between Neighbourhood Community Safety Officers and Housing Patch Managers in response to complaints of anti-social behaviour.

We look to work in a CCR⁹ model and engage with perpetrators working with local services, including Thames Valley Police, to hold perpetrators to account.

7.9 Social Housing

[Theme I: The DAB will work with social housing providers in West Berkshire to ensure they have a policy setting out how they will address domestic abuse including how they will take action against perpetrators.](#)

Social housing tenancy agreements often include domestic abuse as a breach of tenancy and therefore as grounds for eviction. Paragraph 14A of Part 2 of the Housing Act 1988 provides that a social landlord may gain possession of a property where it is occupied by a couple and one partner is forced to leave the property as a result of the other's domestic abuse towards them or any of their family living with them. It is a discretionary ground meaning that a judge can decide on the reasonableness of granting possession. Social landlords can also consider using the mandatory ground for possession where there has been a criminal conviction for a serious offence including an offence under Section 5 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004.

For victims in social housing and privately rented accommodation, sharing a joint tenancy with the perpetrator presents the greatest barrier to safety and housing security¹⁰. While a perpetrator remains named as a joint tenant, he will be able to give notice to end the tenancy without the victims consent or knowledge even if he has physically left the property.

A victim will not be able to change the locks or restrict his access to the property. As joint tenants they are classed as a single legal entity meaning the victim can be left with financial liability for any damage or rent arrears if the perpetrator refuses to pay. Rent arrears are the leading reason for evictions¹¹.

Several registered providers are in place in West Berkshire with Sovereign providing the most stock in the area. Other providers include Hanover Housing Association, Stonewater and Housing 21. Stonewater is a Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accredited provider and Sovereign are currently going through the DAHA accreditation process.

We look to work in partnership with social housing providers to ensure we are meeting the statutory duty including the use of legal remedies to remove the perpetrator from the property and restrict their ability to end the tenancy. Equally, achieving DAHA accreditation will enable social housing providers to use tools/resources available for perpetrator accountability.

7.10 Privately Rented Housing

[Theme J: The DAB is committed to ensuring that victims living in the private rented sector access the support they need to achieve safety and housing security. This includes, bringing PRS stakeholders into the CCR, by supporting PRS landlords, letting agents and Local Authorities PRS professionals to respond to domestic abuse and take action against perpetrators.](#)

Domestic abuse is as prevalent in the PRS as it is in any other housing sector which means that private landlords can be the first to see the warning signs of domestic abuse whether this is evidence of deliberate damage to the property, requests for lock changes, rent arrears or complaints from the neighbours about behaviour and noise.

⁹In Search of Excellence: A refreshed guide to domestic abuse partnership work-the Coordinated Community Response. Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse 2020. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ee0be2588f1e349401c832c/t/6087f76f7e98573c85c5e3fe/1619523443499/In+Search+of+Excellence+2020.pdf>

¹⁰Policy Evidence Summary 4: Justice, housing and domestic abuse, the experiences of homeowners and private renters July 2019. https://www.dahalliance.org.uk/media/10214/bristol-uni-housing-and-dva-breifing-final-210819-_report.pdf

The specialist domestic abuse services report difficulties accessing the PRS with lettings agents and landlords reluctant to take applicants on Housing Benefit/Universal Credit, requesting professional references and guarantors who are owner occupiers, or to give permissions for Sanctuary Scheme measures.

For reasons of rent affordability and insecurity of tenure, the PRS is a last resort housing option for victims who are forced to leave due to domestic abuse. There is more work to be done to make the sector accessible to those victims who currently live in or need to access the PRS and we will work proactively with landlords to resolve matters of Housing Benefit discrimination, deposits, high rents, Sanctuary measures and secure tenancies. These are all matters that require addressing in order to make the accommodation 'suitable'.

We look to work in partnership with the private rented sector to ensure we are meeting the statutory duty and working towards keeping victims and their families safe.

7.11 Privately Owned Housing

[Theme K: The DAB is committed to raising awareness of the specialist safe accommodation and support available to victims who are homeowners, to widening the CCR to include private housing stakeholders and to increasing partner understanding of the links between privately owned housing, domestic abuse and economic abuse.](#)

Research undertaken by the Justice, Inequality and Gender Based Violence Project found that the needs of victims who were owner occupiers were largely invisible. Victims were unaware of their rights and the specialist support available and faced significant barriers to safety. The private housing sector including estate agents, conveyancing solicitors, banks and mortgage lenders, lacked an understanding of domestic and economic abuse while at the same time the domestic abuse and homeless/housing sector lacked knowledge and

understanding of privately owned housing and how perpetrators use the privately owned housing system to abuse victims through:

- Home purchase and sale;
- Mortgage lending; and
- Family law response.

Surviving Economic Abuse (SEA) is the leading UK charity working to raise awareness of economic abuse which forms one of the key elements of a WHA.

We look to work in partnership with local and national services to ensure we are meeting the statutory duty and working towards keeping victims and their families safe.



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Consultation Feedback

Feedback on Domestic Abuse and Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-23 following consultation closing on 10/11/2021

Focus Area on Draft Strategy	Issue identified by consultation	Strategy Action Plan Number	Objective
General Provision	More provision should be made available	Evidenced throughout	
	Victims should be supported to stay in their own homes	B4	All agencies to ensure that victims are informed of the full range of safe accommodation options available including making their own accommodation safe through the Sanctuary Scheme.
	Attitudes, knowledge and understanding of housing staff	A2	Commission the delivery of a programme for training and briefings to professionals to raise awareness of both domestic abuse and the Domestic Abuse Act 2021
		B2	Commission a Safe Domestic Abuse Housing Advocate service to be co-located between Housing Options and A2Dominion to provide advice, support and advocacy to victims making homeless applications.
	Support for victims with NRPF	B15	Refuges to utilise the flexible housing fund to cover accommodation costs for victims with no recourse to public funds while they are waiting for the Destitute Domestic Violence Concession.
Experiences of Children	Long and short term therapeutic support should be available	G1	Commission specialist Children's Refuge Worker posts in the refuge to provide support to children in refuge and second stage move on accommodation.
		G2	Commission a specialist peripatetic Children's Therapeutic service to provide counselling including art and play therapy to children across the refuge and move on properties.

West Berkshire Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-23

Focus Area on Draft Strategy	Issue identified by consultation	Strategy Action Plan Number	Objective
		G3	Consult with children in refuge to ensure their needs for support and barriers to access to support are fully understood and inform service provision and development.
	Parallel programmes for victims and child(ren) should be available	To be considered as part of G1-3	
Refuge Provision	More refuge provision	Evidenced throughout	
	More move-on support	D1	Utilise the Statutory Duty new burdens costs to fund specialist second stage Move On housing management and support costs from April 2022.
		D2	West Berkshire Council to proactively seek funding opportunities to purchase additional family move on properties to meet need and to purchase additional refuge and move on accommodation for single women.
		D3	Refuges to understand the support and recovery needs of victims and their children living in second stage Move On accommodation.
	Better provision for men, clients with multiple complex needs, single women and Trans clients.	F1	Commission a Male Victim Safe Accommodation Advocacy service to be hosted by a specialist domestic abuse service.
		B18	Refuges to review their access arrangements for disabled victims, take action to install adaptations where feasible and ensure their access listing on Routes to Support and in other publicity media is accurate.
		B19	Assess the provision of specialist support available to those with mental health need including learning disabilities.
		B20	Commission an LGBT+ Safe Accommodation Advocate service to provide targeted support and advocacy to be hosted by a specialist domestic abuse service.

West Berkshire Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-23

Focus Area on Draft Strategy	Issue identified by consultation	Strategy Action Plan Number	Objective
	Dispersed refuge provision	C1	Increase specialist refuge provision in West Berkshire to meet need to include the consideration of dispersed accommodation.
	Should be provided by a specialist provider		
Perpetrators	Stricter enforcements	H2	Where appropriate, ensure that Registered Providers are represented at MARAC and MAPPA in order to support the effective housing management of perpetrators including the diversion or removal of a perpetrator from a victim's home.
	Local behavioural change programme readily available	H3	Seek to engage perpetrators in behavioural change by ensuring there is sufficient provision for those using harmful behaviours. All formal provision to be accredited to Respect Accreditation Standards for perpetrator programmes.
Social Housing	More training for staff	A3	Work with key Housing Associations to achieve Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance accreditation.
	Not their problem, this issue sits with the local authority	N/A	N/A
Private Sector	Additional training should be made available	A2	Commission the delivery of a programme for training and briefings to professionals to raise awareness of both domestic abuse and the Domestic Abuse Act 2021
	Sanctuary scheme needs to be promoted	J4	Work with landlords to increase the number of Sanctuary Schemes installed in privately rented accommodation.
	Support for victims with rent arrears	J3	Where rent arrears have accrued and the landlord is seeking possession of the property, to work with the landlord to automatically screen for domestic abuse in order to prevent eviction.

West Berkshire Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-23

Focus Area on Draft Strategy	Issue identified by consultation	Strategy Action Plan Number	Objective
	More information for private landlords	J2	Provide training to landlords to enable them to identify the warning signs of domestic abuse (including economic abuse), to intervene safely and appropriately and to distinguish between anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse.
	Neighbour hotline	Could consider a bystander campaign B1	Commission awareness raising campaigns to ensure the pathways into safe accommodation are widely publicised to and understood by residents and professionals.
	Perpetrating DA should be enforced as a breach of tenancy	H5	Commission specialist training for housing professionals on responding to and engaging perpetrators safely and effectively.
Final comments	I don't know what is available	B1	Commission awareness raising campaigns to ensure the pathways into safe accommodation are widely publicised to and understood by residents and professionals.
	Provision should be prioritised over cost when awarding contracts	To note	