

Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation- Based Support for Victims/Survivors of Domestic Abuse

A summary of the 2024 Mayoral needs assessment for
London

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Introduction

This report sets out the findings from the Mayor's London needs assessment on domestic abuse safe accommodation-based support. It provides findings and recommendations provided to the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) and the Greater London Authority (GLA) to best meet the current need for domestic abuse safe accommodation-based support. Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021¹ details a duty on Tier One authorities (the GLA in London) to provide safe accommodation-based support to those experiencing domestic abuse. The wider duties include:

- Appointing a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board which it must consult as it performs certain specified functions (below).
- Assessing, or making arrangements for the assessment of, the need for domestic abuse support for all victims/survivors (and their children) who reside in relevant safe accommodation in their area, including those who require cross-border support.
- Preparing and publishing a domestic abuse strategy for the provision of such support to cover their area that has regard to their domestic abuse needs assessment.
- Giving effect to the strategy (through commissioning decisions)
- Monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the strategy
- Reporting annually to central government, the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)

In November 2021, MOPAC and the GLA published the first London needs assessment. This informed the Mayor's subsequent Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation (DASA) Strategy². In September 2023, MOPAC and the GLA commissioned Crest Advisory³ to build on this earlier work to inform the refresh of the Mayor's Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy and in turn, inform future commissioning approaches for safe accommodation-based support services for victims/survivors in London. This needs assessment reviews the extent to which domestic abuse safe accommodation-based support provision in London meets the statutory duty placed by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 on Tier One local authorities. The needs assessment reviews how demand and provision has changed since 2021 and focuses on victims/survivors' needs and current demand, current DASA provision and service gaps; and the impact of newly commissioned services.

¹ Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (legislation.gov.uk)

² Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy | London City Hall

³ Crest Advisory | Crime and justice specialists | United Kingdom

Research methods, engagement and data collection

Developing the needs assessment

Quantitative analysis of published and local data was completed by Crest Advisory along with engaging a range of practitioners in interviews and focus groups, and engaging victims/survivors through interviews and a survey.

A diverse range of stakeholders relevant to the DASA landscape were engaged through over 40 interviews with representatives of statutory and commissioning bodies, Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) coordinators⁴, the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and victims/survivors. A survey for victims/survivors was conducted that resulted in over 40 responses and interviews were held with 8 victims/survivors of domestic abuse. This includes a male victim/survivor, and victims/survivors from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. Further workshops were held with VCS providers, boroughs and other statutory agencies to ensure many viewpoints were captured in this needs assessment.

Mayoral commissioned domestic abuse services included in the data collection reported 11,472 referrals in 2022/23. This does not include all safe accommodation services in London, meaning the demand is likely to be much higher as there is no single source of data that consistently captures demand and provision for safe accommodation-based support. Therefore, a range of data sets have been analysed in the needs assessment to create as complete a data picture as possible. These are:

- **DLUHC Homelessness - Case Level Collection (H-CLIC):** Data spans 2021/22-2022/23 and represents 5,980 households. Statutory homelessness statistics provide information about those who local authorities have a duty to accommodate due to homelessness. The statistics include information about new statutory duties created by the Homelessness Reduction Act to try and prevent and relieve intentional homelessness or homelessness for single people, regardless of priority need.
- **MOPAC DASA commissioned services:** In 2022/23, 63 services are listed in the Mayoral commissioned programme portfolio. This forms the overarching picture of services involved in DASA provision under Mayoral commissioning.
- **The Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN):** CHAIN is a multi-agency database that records information about rough sleeping in London. The 2022/23 data provided includes information on 68 rough sleeping domestic abuse victims/survivors.
- **Pan London Housing Reciprocal (PLHR):** PLHR is a collaborative scheme among all London boroughs and housing associations, providing long-term, affordable housing for people facing serious harm, including domestic abuse victims/ survivors. Safer London data spanning 2017 to 2023 on 3,298 referrals is available. Campbell Tickell conducted

⁴ VAWG coordinator is a local authority post. The responsibilities of VAWG coordinators can vary between local authorities, but may include: coordinating the multi-agency response to VAWG; supporting the implementation of the local VAWG strategy and any relevant delivery plans; and managing the local authorities VAWG portfolio

a review of the scheme in 2023 which evaluated its progress and effectiveness, and highlighted key issues.

- **Local authority survey:** Crest Advisory sent a data collection form to all London Tier 2 local authorities, aligned to the standardised data collection form provided by DLUHC. 21 local authorities contributed, with data spanning 2020-2023 on DASA service provision.
- **Routes to Support:** Routes to Support is the UK-wide online Women's Aid database for domestic abuse and other VAWG services. It provides details of available refuge provision for women and children. The dataset for the needs assessment captures 1,791 successful referrals and 978 unsuccessful referrals in 2022/23.
- **On Track provided by Women's Aid:** On Track is Women's Aid's case management and outcomes measurement system which is used by 100+ domestic abuse organisations and providers. This needs assessment used On Track data, including services in London. The database includes detailed case information on 12,632 victims/survivors in the 2020 to 2023 time period.
- **Published datasets:** Datasets utilised include the Crime Survey of England and Wales⁵ (CSEW), police recorded crime⁶ on where crimes have been reported to and recorded by law enforcement agencies from all police forces nationally and the Metropolitan Police dashboard⁷ The Met police dashboard is an online data tool using data from the last four years. It covers multiple crime types including domestic abuse.

Data caveats and barriers

The true demand for and provision of safe accommodation-based services cannot be quantified with current recording processes. There is no single source for unmet demand and provision of domestic abuse safe accommodation or DASA-based support. This is due to differing data recording processes and funding streams. Therefore the following limitations should be considered:

- Baseline demand is based on recorded referrals which may not include demand where victims/ survivors have not been referred or include multiple referrals for the same person and has necessitated aggregating multiple sources to cover different services
- Demand by characteristic or need is not consistently recorded therefore existing data only paints a partial picture
- Unmet demand is visible through unsuccessful referrals but does not include those who have not been referred and may not include those who have been successful in other services
- Analysis of provision is based on each source and there may be some unknown overlap

Therefore, data analysis is used to give the scale of demand, provision and unmet need.

⁵ [Crime Survey for England & Wales](#)

⁶ [Police recorded crime and outcomes open data tables - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

⁷ [Stats and data | Metropolitan Police](#)

However, these limitations should be considered when examining the quantitative analysis below and taken together with the findings from the qualitative analysis.

Summary of recommendations

The needs assessment sets out seven recommended areas for improving domestic abuse safe accommodation-based support in London. These are, in summary:

- **Commissioning focus:** To ensure there is a range of refuge provision to reflect the diversity of victim/survivors and their children and for City Hall and local authorities to partner with more specialist voluntary and community (VCS) providers around challenges such as mental health and substance misuse.
- **Commissioning approach:** Long term funding from government to be provided so staff do not leave posts due to funding insecurity. Feedback from victims/survivors receiving support from 'by and for' services has been positive, and commissioning of these services should continue.
- **Balancing London's DASA system:** To encourage boroughs to invest in more DASA provision and explores two/three borough joint commissioning to better enable the provision of acute mental health support or dedicated substance misuse support.
- **Addressing housing provision:** To increase joint working between MOPAC and the GLA on DASA and housing strategies. Furthermore, the DASA programme to explore other forms of safe accommodation such as sanctuary schemes and accommodation for those rough sleeping.
- **Updated guidance for voluntary providers and boroughs:** Clearer government definitions and guidance to support those with insecure immigration status and victims/survivors experiencing multiple disadvantage and complex needs.
- **Further research:** Some of the gaps in support include for male victims/survivors, older female victims/survivors and children as victims/survivors of domestic abuse. This recommendation is to have a better understanding of how DASA-based support could better meet the needs of these cohorts.
- **Data recording:** Data recording around domestic abuse and DASA provision should be improved by becoming more systematic. On Track Data is very rich and could be a model for other partners. In order to commission more bespoke services for victims/survivors with multiple disadvantages, there needs to be better recording practices around this from VCS providers and boroughs.

Summary of learnings

The needs assessment sets out key learnings for commissioners and delivery partners leading the provision of DASA-based services and support. These learnings are taken from the qualitative and quantitative data reviewed. The learnings provide a view of the context of demand and need for domestic abuse victims/survivors in London, of current DASA provision and of gaps identified during the needs assessment in the delivery of services.

Context of domestic abuse victims/survivors' demand and need in London

- Domestic abuse has increased by 14.4% nationally as a police-recorded crime since March 2020. In London, the Met Police recorded an increase in the population experiencing domestic abuse. London's rates of domestic abuse crime recorded by police remains lower than its most comparable forces. However, the rate of domestic abuse crimes per 1,000 population recorded by the Metropolitan Police from 2019 to 2023 has increased by 8.1%. London's volume of domestic abuse is significantly higher than its most comparable forces, but proportionate to population it is lower than other forces.
- The number of households in London owed a prevention or relief duty from homelessness, as a result of domestic abuse, has increased 15% since 2020/21. 80% of main housing applicants owed a duty and safe accommodation support were female.
- Demand for housing support among rough sleeping victims/survivors of domestic abuse is beginning to rise following a stabilisation during the pandemic. Safe accommodation-based support service providers are clear that both volume and degree of need for both housing and DASA-based support have increased in recent years. Practitioners in the needs assessment reflected that this may be connected to long-term austerity, COVID-19 and cost of living.
- CHAIN data shows 52% of domestic abuse victims/survivors rough sleeping in London are male, an increase in the proportion of men rough sleeping from 2020/21. However, women are more likely to experience 'hidden homelessness' and are therefore less likely to be captured as 'rough sleeping' in existing data collection methods. Prior to accessing safe accommodation-based support in 2022/23, 51% of women, stayed in unsafe circumstances such as rough sleeping, living in a house in the perpetrators name, emergency temporary accommodation, and living with family/friends.
- In 2022/23 over a third of temporary accommodation provided to households impacted by domestic abuse was nightly-paid self-contained. Households with children were more likely to receive private sector leased or Local Authority/Housing Association stock accommodation.

Current DASA provision and service gaps in London

- London has proportionately higher refuge availability than elsewhere in England and has a volume of bed spaces 2% higher than Council of Europe⁸ recommendation. Refuge capacity in London has been higher than anywhere else in England since 2010, relative to population size. London has also been meeting the Council of Europe minimum recommendation since 2018. However this is a rough measure of minimum requirement that has not been adjusted for actual need.
- Most safe accommodation in London is refuge accommodation. As of March 2023, 56% of commissioned bed spaces for domestic abuse victims/ survivors and their children were provided in refuges. The most common form of DASA in London is refuge. However, the capacity is not sufficient to meet demand and this type of safe accommodation does not meet everyone's needs.
- Most (80%) of the referrals reported through domestic abuse safe accommodation services commissioned by the Mayor in 2022/23 were successful. This is encouraging but as these numbers are based only on Mayoral commissioned service data, it is therefore likely to not reflect all unmet demand
- Many safe accommodation services in London, with the necessary facilities and capacity to offer support, are making a profound, positive impact on the lives of victims/ survivors of domestic abuse.
- There are a wide range of safe-accommodation-based support types. The highest volume of provision of safe accommodation-based support is general support, followed by advocacy and specialist support. However, services have reported that many deliver a wider range of types of support to meet victims/survivors needs. Victims/ survivors can receive multiple types of support whilst in accommodation.
- There are multiple ways in which holistic support was provided to victims/survivors across London, including through specialist roles.
- Specialist accommodation accounted for 18% of bedspace capacity by Mayoral commissioned services, including accommodation for victims/ survivors who share particular protected characteristics and/or vulnerabilities requiring additional support.
- Data from On Track shows that self-referrals have the highest success rate (83%) whilst referrals from MARAC have the lowest success rate (28%). Analysis of On Track data and engagement with practitioners indicate that there can be several reasons why a referral may be successful or unsuccessful. This includes capacity and an ability to meet victim/survivor needs. Practitioners also reported a variation in how needs are assessed at the point of referral.
- Safe accommodation and DASA-based support services commissioned by MOPAC and

⁸ [The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence \(Istanbul Convention\) - Gender Matters \(coe.int\)](#)

the GLA do not entirely meet demand. Of the unsuccessful referrals to Mayoral commissioned DASA-based services, almost a third were due to capacity constraints and a fifth due to not being able to meet the individual needs of victims/ survivors. The needs assessment also finds that practitioners and stakeholders connect this to the long- term effects of austerity, to the impact of COVID-19 and cost of living crisis.

- The needs assessment found that service providers are experiencing a growing need for safe accommodation services, coinciding with rising constraints on their ability to deliver services to the capacity and quality they would like.
- Service providers reported increased demand for safe accommodation services, especially during the peak of COVID-19. Some attribute this increase during COVID-19 to heightened awareness of domestic abuse. Others suggest that needing to stay home for public health reasons during the pandemic resulted in increased risk for domestic abuse victims/ survivors. Providers also explained that this spike has not subsided and is potentially linked to an increased awareness of available support that is starting to reach the unmet need.
- A snapshot of Mayoral commissioned domestic abuse services included in the data collection illustrates this gap in demand and provision. Mayoral commissioned domestic abuse services safe accommodation services reported 11,472 referrals in 2022/23. (This does not include all safe accommodation services in London, meaning the demand is likely to be much higher). 10,614 (93%) were received by Mayoral commissioned services. 9,188 people were supported by Mayoral commissioned services (or 80% of 11,472). 2,115 households were unsuccessful in their referral to Mayoral commissioned services. 29% of these unsuccessful referrals were due to service capacity constraints.
- Where safe accommodation-based support services were unable to meet the needs of victims/survivors, in 26% of cases, this was because the victims/survivors had no recourse to public funds while 17% was because the victims/survivors had mental health support needs.
- Stakeholders⁹ in the needs assessment reported concerns that some victims/survivors are unable to access support in the first place. This could be because they lack awareness of what support is available or do not know how to access support. It may be due to barriers in physically accessing support. For example, not all victims/survivors have access to a phone or the internet (particularly if they are homeless) or cannot afford transport costs of the bus or train involved in receiving support (such as attending office-based appointments)
- Victims/survivors are staying longer in safe accommodation due to cases being more complex and challenges in securing move-on accommodation. This creates barriers for other victims/ survivors in gaining access to safe accommodation. In 2022/23, most victims/survivors needed to stay in their safe accommodation for over 6 months.
- In the context of high overall demand for housing support across London, including high

⁹ The term practitioner(s) is used throughout the deck which only refers to VAWG coordinators, VCS, and statutory bodies and commissioners. The term stakeholder(s) refers to both practitioners and victims/ survivors

demand and limited supply for social housing, temporary accommodation is overused to plug the gaps in the availability of safe accommodation and is often of poor quality. It is also a barrier to victims/survivors receiving DASA-based support as forms of temporary accommodation such as 'Bed and Breakfast' accommodation is not considered relevant safe accommodation within government guidance. Support cannot be provided through the Duty in accommodation that is not stipulated within MHCLG's government guidance.¹⁰

- Sanctuary schemes¹¹ were discussed with practitioners in the needs assessment as a housing option which enabled victims/survivors to stay safely within their own home. As of March 2023, sanctuary schemes amounted to 3% of Mayoral commissioned domestic abuse safe accommodation spaces. Interviewees stated that sanctuary schemes can be effective in supporting victims/survivors who do not want to leave their home. It is unclear how many boroughs are implementing sanctuary schemes and in what way – the engagement indicates that there is significant variation in how sanctuary schemes are delivered locally.

¹⁰ Delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse in domestic abuse safe accommodation services - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

¹¹ [Sanctuary Scheme guidance \(dahalliance.org.uk\)](http://dahalliance.org.uk)

Summary of demand, provision and gaps in service delivery by identified need and characteristics of victims/survivors

The needs assessment sets out an illustration of London's victims/survivors' demand for services, the provision currently in place and gaps identified in the delivery of services. Key findings are highlighted according to victims/survivors' identified needs and protected characteristics.

Gender

Women are disproportionately victims/ survivors of domestic abuse and make up the largest proportion of those requiring safe accommodation and support. There is substantial demand for DASA services from women with children. Provision of safe accommodation and accommodation-based support is not sufficient in meeting demand from female victims/ survivors. More research is required to understand what the demand for safe accommodation-based support looks like for male victims/ survivors, and how to meet this demand. There is a substantial proportion of male victims/ survivors rough sleeping due to domestic abuse. This suggests an unmet need for housing related services for male victims/ survivors.

- The majority of victims/survivors of domestic abuse are women and they make up the largest proportion of victims/survivors needing safe accommodation. However, provision of safe accommodation does not currently meet demand for women.
- Women, both with and without children, have the highest need for housing support from their local authority when they are at risk of homelessness or already homeless because of domestic abuse; 80% of main housing applicants owed a duty and safe accommodation support were female.
- Nearly half of all women supported by Women's Aid had children. Refuge capacity for women with 2+ children has been decreasing over the last 6 years. Practitioners highlighted a lack of provision for women this group as well as for women with older male children.
- 51% of London's population are female, with 97% accessing services through On Track data and 96% accessing mayoral commissioned services recorded as female. Comparing the gender of victims/ survivors seeking and accessing support services on the Women's Aid On Track data system to the Census data on London's population highlights that women are overwhelmingly more likely to be requiring and receiving support from DASA and other domestic abuse services.

- There is a need for more services for male victims/survivors, particularly those who are rough sleeping. The provision of safe accommodation bed spaces in London for men impacted by domestic abuse is limited and there was no record of refuges or bed spaces for male victims/ survivors available for analysis although Women's Aid data records that wider support services have increasingly offered support to men from 21% of services in 2016 to 28% in 2023.
- A service provided by Victim Support is one service which offer male specific DASA support. They provide tailored support for up to 150 male victims/ survivors (including people with insecure immigration status) a year. This support can include emergency safe accommodation, help with accessing move-on accommodation, resettlement support, and IDVA support.
- Service providers reported that finding a safe space for male victims/ survivors is challenging, particularly for men with intersecting protected characteristics and support needs. CHAIN data shows that the majority of domestic abuse victims/ survivors rough sleeping in London are male, an increase in the proportion of men rough sleeping from 2020/21. Local authorities' efforts to prevent children from sleeping rough (who are most often with mothers), and a shortage of emergency support for men, may explain this increase in the proportion of men rough sleeping.
- However, women that are rough sleeping are more likely to experience 'hidden homelessness', where they stay in 'precarious or insecure arrangements with relatives, friends or acquaintances, because they have nowhere else to go'. They are therefore less likely to be captured as 'rough sleeping' in existing data collection methods.

Age

The mid 20s-30s age range has the highest demand for support. Practitioners believe the scale and nature of older victims/ survivors need is not understood. Victims/ survivors in early adulthood are more likely to receive support. More support is required for children who are victims/ survivors of domestic abuse.

- Data from commissioned services showed domestic abuse victims/survivors who reported are disproportionately likely to be aged mid 20s to mid 30s compared to the general London population. This mirrors the average ages of the rough sleeping population, those seeking homeless duties or support services through On Track
- Victims/survivors aged mid-30s to mid-40s have a high level of need compared to the general London population, again mirroring the age distribution of those seeking homeless duties and support services through On Track.
- There is a gap in knowledge and provision for older victims/survivors. Practitioners were clear the needs of these victims/survivors are not adequately met, and more research is required to understand how best to support older victims/survivors.

- Children may be provided with therapy or counselling, but support will largely focus on the parent. Any support provided to children is usually an extension of meeting the needs of the parent victim/survivor. Practitioners recognised that the needs of children have not yet been systematically captured or fully addressed by the system. Findings suggest that the safe accommodation-based support for children is limited.
- There has been a decrease in the proportion of women placed in refuge with children. 719 children were placed in refuges in 2022/23, a decrease from 1,011 in 2018/19. Similarly, 47% of women placed in refuges had children in 2022/23, a decrease from 56% in 2019/20. Service providers expressed that safe accommodation-based support for children is limited.

Ethnicity

Those seeking safe accommodation, and accommodation-based support are broadly proportionate to the London 2021 census based on the known data. Some data is unknown. Lack of overall provision affects all ethnicities. However, victims/ survivors from minority ethnic groups are more likely to require support services tailored to their needs

- Black and minoritised victim/survivors make up just under half of the need for safe accommodation. This need reflects London's population as outlined in the 2021 Census. Research highlights the different experiences of Black and minoritised victims/survivors, and the need for services to be tailored.
- 4,576 victims/survivors from Black and minoritised ethnic groups were supported by known Mayoral commissioned services which makes up 49% of all survivors supported by commissioned services in the year ending 2022/23.
- 550 (53%) women placed in refuges through Women's Aid via On Track were from Black and minoritised backgrounds whilst 466 (48%) women were not placed in refuges were from Black and minoritised backgrounds.
- While no significant gaps in the proportion of provision were identified by the needs assessment for any one Black or minoritised group of victims/survivors, the needs assessment acknowledged a lack of disaggregated data exists to fully identify the scope and scale of any gaps. The wider evidence base also shows that Black and minoritised individuals are disproportionately affected by domestic abuse in relation to their White counterparts.¹² Black and minoritised victims/survivors also face additional barrier at all stages of seeking support and accessing safe accommodation and housing support¹³, therefore the need for and demand for services from Black and minoritised victims/survivors is likely to be higher and it should not be assumed that demand is proportionately met.
- Needs assessment research also highlights the different experiences of Black and minoritised victims/survivors, and the need for services to be tailored. Victims/survivors from Black and minoritised backgrounds may need specific support services that reflect

¹² [Evidence Hub: Reframing the links: Black and minoritised women, domestic abuse and mental health - Women's Aid](https://evidencehub.org.uk/research/Black-and-minoritised-women-domestic-abuse-and-mental-health-Women's-Aid) (womensaid.org.uk)

¹³ [Mkaan Position Paper Series \(1\)](https://mkaan.org.uk/position-paper-series-1/) (squarespace.com)

the different ways and contexts in which they experience abuse.

- Practitioners working with women from Latin America suggested that Brexit had created an additional layer of complexity and need for these victims/survivors. Many of these victims/survivors hold European passports. If they do not have settled status, are they have pre-settled status, they can face challenges in accessing services in the UK.

Language

- Women's Aid On Track data shows a fifth of victims/ survivors referred to support have English as a second language; although only 9% required an interpreter.
- The most common second language for ESOL victims/survivors between 2020 and 2022 was Bengali, with 416 known victims/survivors having this as their first language, followed by Arabic, with 272 known victims/survivors.

Immigration status

There is considerable demand for support for victims/survivors who have an insecure immigration status. Despite an increase in bedspace available for those with an insecure immigration status, there remains an unmet need for those with no recourse to public funds (NRPF). This is partly due to the challenges in securing funding for victims/ survivors with NRPF.

- Victims/survivors with insecure and unknown immigration status¹⁴ face systemic barriers accessing support services. Many service providers discussed the challenges in providing safe accommodation and support to victims/survivors with an insecure immigration status.
- 2,072 (4%) of victims/survivors referred through On Track had no recourse to public funds¹⁵ and are unable to access forms of state welfare, including income support, housing benefit, universal credit, and local authority housing.
- The current commissioning system provides little support for these victims/survivors meaning that they must cover the costs themselves or rely on limited charitable donations. Without added financial support, women also struggle to obtain basic necessities such as food and clothes.
- A victim/survivor's insecure immigration status is often used by perpetrators as a means of coercion and control. Victims/survivors are reluctant to report their abuse to relevant authorities for fear of the impact on their immigration status or that their children could be taken away.
- Bedspace capacity in refuges for women with no recourse to public funds is low but has been increasing. The percentage of refuge vacancies available to women with no

¹⁴ This is a broad term that refers to people that 'do not have the right to live and work in the UK for an unlimited period of time'.

¹⁵ This refers to a specific group of people with insecure immigration. Those who have no recourse to public funds do not have access to state benefits. However, in some circumstances (including where there has been evidence of domestic abuse) there are a few schemes which mean the person might be eligible for temporary resource support including benefit and housing support

recourse to public funds was 9% in 2022/23 according to Women's Aid data. This is higher than previous years, following a steady increase from 3% in 2016/17.

- Where refuge vacancies require funding to be secured before considering women with no recourse to public funds, service providers emphasised this remains a barrier. An example of a system barrier is that the Home Office can take a long time to respond to an immigration case, during which time, victims/survivors need to be supported, but cannot access funds.

Sexual orientation and gender identity

LGBTQ+ victims/ survivors are more likely to be male and experience homelessness compared to other victim/ survivor cohorts. While data indicates that need is largely met, practitioners reflected a high level of unmet demand. LGBTQ+ victims/ survivors are also more likely to require specialised, tailored support services. Expert views reported in the needs assessment indicate that more provision is required to fully meet need.

- LGBTQ+ victims may need specific support that reflects the different contexts in which they experience abuse. While data indicates that need is largely met, practitioners have reflected that there is a high level of unmet demand.
- LGBTQ+ people are at higher risk of experiencing homelessness, poor mental health, and substance use issues. The ways these issues intersect and are experienced by LGBTQ+ victims/survivors will be unique to their community.
- 'By and for' providers stated that their service users tend to be younger and predominantly male.
- Some providers reported that there could be a gap in provision for trans and non- binary people. MOPAC and GLA commissioned the Outside Project to deliver the refuge accommodation to trans and non-binary victims/survivors in July 2023.

Disability

The needs of disabled victims/survivors are often not met. This can be for a number of reasons, including provision that is physically inaccessible. As well as commissioning specialist services, more consideration should be given to how current provision can be made accessible for disabled victims/ survivors.

- Disabled victims/survivors have specific needs but they are not fully met. More specialist commissioning should be considered, taking into consideration physical and other needs.
- 1,456 (16%) of victims/survivors supported through Mayoral commissioned services had a disability.
- Services supporting disabled people require a substantial amount of time finding appropriate accommodation to begin service delivery, thus impacting on the services' ability to demonstrate impact.
- Mainstream refuge provision can be physically inaccessible to disabled victims/ survivors and staff may not have the relevant skills and expertise to support them. Disabled

victims/survivors often require a greater degree of flexibility in support provision. For example, certain disabilities may render safe accommodation as defined under the Duty inappropriate and mean support is better placed at their home.

Substance use

Victims/ survivors with substance use needs can require a more intense and specialist level of support which is currently often not met. Practitioners indicate that many refuges do not have the specialist skills to support substance related needs. Partners indicated a lack of other available appropriate provision. Specific commissioning is required to better provide for these needs and co-commissioning with health services should be explored.

- Practitioners suggest there is not enough support available to meet demand in supporting victims/survivors with substance use needs.
- 365 (4%) of victims/survivors supported through Mayoral commissioned services had a drug support need.
- Victims/survivors require support from specialist staff which is often not available in mainstream refuges. They sometimes need to be placed in environments separate to other victims/survivors. It remains difficult to accommodate victims/survivors with substance use needs in a mainstream refuge. The refuge may not have the resources or the skills to support these victims/survivors, for instance due to a lack of addiction specialists or 24-hour staff. It may not be appropriate for other victims/survivors in the refuge, particularly those with children, to be in close contact with someone that has support needs related to substance use.
- Some voluntary sector and statutory partners spoke about increases in demand from victims/survivors with substance use needs. However, the lack of data means it is unclear to what extent there has been an increase across London

Mental health needs

Demand for mental health support is high. There is also a growing demand for support for more acute and complex mental health needs. Provision for those with mental health needs is also high. However, it is not enough to fully meet demand and practitioners indicated that the most severe levels of need were often not met.

- Demand for mental health support alongside safe accommodation is high. Referrals to DASA and DASA-based provision include details on mental health needs and mental health disability.
- 'Mental health needs' as described by practitioners contributing to the needs assessment captures a wide array of conditions and needs. At the lower end of the spectrum, practitioners described victims/ survivors whose needs could be met by therapy and counselling. Mental health conditions at the higher end of the spectrum of needs were frequently labelled as 'disorders' and were often deemed too complex to accommodate in mainstream refuges. 36% of victims/survivors supported through Mayoral commissioned services in 2022/23 had mental health needs.

- Mayoral commissioned services highlighted that 19% of all unsuccessful referrals were due to services not being able to meet victims/survivors' needs, and of all of these unmet needs, 17% were unable to meet mental health needs. The proportion of successful referrals with these needs is higher than those who were unsuccessful.

Multiple disadvantages

A number of practitioners described an increase in victims/survivors presenting with complex needs. Whilst the definition of 'complex needs' varied, all relevant practitioners discussed the need for intensive, specialist and longer lasting support

- Stakeholders described an increase in victims/survivors presenting with 'complex needs' and/or multiple disadvantages. Practitioners discussed the need for intensive, specialist and longer lasting support for these victims/survivors.
- The way 'complex needs' was defined by contributors to the needs assessment varied.
- The most common definitions of 'complex needs' were of victims/survivors with high support needs that cannot be accommodated in a mainstream refuge (usually victims/survivors with acute mental health needs or substance use issues. Victims/survivors experiencing multiple disadvantages were also described as suffering from multiple and intersecting inequalities such as poor mental and physical health, substance use, different types of violence and abuse and involvement with the criminal justice system. Victims/survivors with overlapping and intersecting characteristics or needs were also described as requiring specialist support across several different areas, for example, male victims/ survivors of domestic abuse that have insecure or unknown immigration status.
- Despite the variation in definition, it has been widely acknowledged during the needs assessment that complex needs do not affect survivors in isolation. Instead, victims/survivors often suffer from multiple inequalities that coalesce and compound each other in different ways to create unique experiences of domestic abuse. As a result, all practitioners reported that victims/ survivors with complex needs require more intensive, specialist and longer-lasting support.

Challenges to DASA commissioning and provision

The needs assessment outlined key challenges to DASA commissioning and the current delivery of services and support. They include the following themes:

- The statutory definition of 'safe accommodation' can be restrictive and limits some victims/ survivors' access to DASA-based support. Due to the limited availability of legally defined safe accommodation, victims/survivors may be placed in alternative provision such as temporary accommodation. In these cases, they cannot often access DASA- based support.
- Some local authorities also did not appear to fully understand the Duty guidance, specifically the requirement to treat victims/ survivors of domestic abuse as priority need. This could make it harder for victims/survivors to access move-on accommodation.
- Practitioners reported that there was a lack of clear definitions of the key terms in the Duty's guidance and relevant documents. This resulted in different interpretations of the Duty's terms and thus not being adhered to consistently. For example, the Duty does not state a clear definition of specialist 'by and for' services. As a result, some organisations have defined 'by and for' as 'led by and for women', whereas others defined it as 'being for minoritised women.'
- The current short term funding model does not facilitate sustainable funding for DASA service providers - this can affect service delivery and services' ability to demonstrate their impact.
- Short and cyclical commissioning cycles create a lack of financial security and a sense of uncertainty around service providers' future finances. This fear of being stripped of funding if a commissioning bid is not accepted prevents long term planning and risks letting victim/survivors down if support becomes unavailable at short notice.
- Practitioners reflected that demonstrating impact within a 12- or 13-month period is very difficult. This was in reference to the time it took to set up the commissioned service which requires recruiting the right people and training to a specialist level. This poses a challenge for organisations to demonstrate the impact of service delivery when only being able to rely on 6 months of evidence.
- Providers stated the current funding model also impacts recruitment and retention. These issues impacted the support victims/survivors received and limited the benefit they were able to have.

- 'Led by and for' services¹⁶ were felt to be most acutely impacted by the funding model. Often these services were smaller in size, therefore resourcing bid writing was difficult.
- The majority of local authorities' refuge demand comes from other London boroughs, as well as outside of London. Placing victims/survivors in a different borough to where they lived at the time of experiencing domestic abuse and/or accessing support is often for their safety. However, this causes challenges for London boroughs in predicting demand for DASA-based support and commissioning local services to meet this demand. Although there are geographical patterns to need, victims/ survivors placed across boroughs make it challenging for local authorities to plan provision, because they are not commissioning based on the demand, needs and characteristics of their own population. It can also cause unequal provision across London.
- The Pan-London housing reciprocal (PLHR) is a housing scheme that allows individuals with social tenancies facing serious harm to secure an alternative social tenancy in a different London borough, aiming to provide them with housing support to provide a safe alternative. PLHR faces systemic barriers, including gaps in effective partnership working, to its ability to deliver housing support to victims/survivors as intended. COVID-19 and the cost-of-living crisis have exacerbated these issues, making the scheme more challenging to deliver. However, many practitioners acknowledged the benefits of housing reciprocals, particularly how it allows victims/survivors to leave their home and move to a safe area without having to lose their social tenancy. Practitioners were keen to suggest that a smaller and more localised reciprocal would be beneficial for victims/survivors of domestic abuse.

¹⁶ [Womens-Aid-Definitions-Specialist-Womens-DA-Services-By-For-Services-January-2024.pdf](#) ([womensaid.org.uk](https://www.womensaid.org.uk))

Impact of commissioned services on victims/survivors

The needs assessment outlined the impact of commissioned services delivered under the Duty as experienced by victims/survivors. Overall, victims/survivors that were engaged described their experience of receiving safe accommodation and accommodation-based support as positive. Those that had negative experiences described issues around the quality of accommodation and the access to and provisioning of counselling and therapy.

- There are a wide range of safe-accommodation-based support types. The highest volume of provision of safe accommodation-based support is general support, followed by advocacy and specialist support. However, services have reported that many deliver a wider range of types of support to meet victims/ survivors needs. Victims/ survivors can receive multiple types of support whilst in accommodation.
- Of the 9,188 supported victims/ survivors recorded by the Mayoral commissioned services and placed in safe supported accommodation: 6,686 (73%) received general support; 5,801 (63%) received advocacy support; 4,870 (53%) received specialist support (according to the MHCLG definition¹⁷); 4,522 (49%) received housing-related support; 4,074 (44%) received domestic abuse prevention support; 3,158 (34%) received advice services such as financial and legal; 2,803 (31%) received children's support; 1,364 (15%) received counselling and therapy; 2,284 (25%) received other support including: life skills; education; employment training; sexual health; safeguarding; risk planning; peer support; donations; mental health; access to benefits

Positive impacts of commissioned services on victims/survivors

- The support received by victims/survivors is largely experienced as extremely positive. Current DASA support provision has been of high quality and has helped victims/survivors. Safe accommodation can have a profound and positive impact on victims/ survivors of domestic abuse. Survivors shared that safe accommodation and DASA-based support, in many cases, met their needs.
- Victims/ survivors receiving support from Mayoral commissioned services highlight the essential work being done to support them in finding safety and regaining confidence when fleeing the abuse they experienced.
- As a form of 'crisis' intervention, safe accommodation addresses many of the immediate needs of victims/survivors and provides them with a safe environment where they can feel heard and believed.
- Accommodation based support (such as financial support, advocacy and counselling) has an important and positive impact on victims/survivors. Several victims/survivors who were

¹⁷ [Delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse in domestic abuse safe accommodation services - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/614441/delivery_of_support_to_victims_of_domestic_abuse_in_domestic_abuse_safe_accommodation_services.pdf)

engaged described how this support went above and beyond what they were expecting to receive.

- Practical and emotional support provided to victims/ survivors is highly valued and empowered them to become independent and rebuild their lives in the longer term. victims/ survivors providing feedback to safe accommodation services commissioned by the Mayor highly valued practical support provided by these services. Support with securing housing, domestic abuse awareness and prevention work, and wider financial and day-to-day support (such as vouchers), were all reported by victims/ survivors as essential in allowing them to move away from their abuse.
- Victims/survivors reported that the emotional support they received helped them build their confidence and empowered them to rebuild their lives.
- A single point of contact (SPOC) for the victim/survivor was greatly advocated by practitioners in the needs assessment. Such initiatives where the victim/ survivor only engages with a single point of contact means a reduced possibility of the victim/survivor feeling re-traumatised; that mediation with other support services is more effective and reduced the likelihood of appointment 'no-shows' as the professional SPOC supports the victim/survivor to engage and attend these.
- Ensuring that DASA services are channeled through one person means that support can be more effectively tailored towards victim/survivor needs. Practitioners highlighted the benefits of survivor-led DASA provision in which services are centered around the needs of the victims/survivors

Negative impacts of commissioned services on victims/survivors

- In terms of accommodation-based support, counselling and therapy were the most common support types in the needs assessment's survey that did not meet victims/ survivors' needs. The majority of victims/survivors' comments focused on the short duration of support, lack of meaningful outcomes, and quality of counsellors/therapists. Interviews with victims/ survivors added that there could be long wait times to receive counselling and therapy
- In terms of housing needs, 6/13 responses to the victims/survivor survey focused on the facilities themselves, noting inadequate amenities and discomfort with shared living arrangements.
- Some victims/survivors reported issues experienced with the quality and suitability of temporary accommodation.

Victim/survivor accounts of DASA services and support

"I now have someone to turn to for support and help. I have had help with clothing, food and equipment and I have had so much emotional support. Being able to meet with [staff member] once a week has made me feel that someone is on my side, that someone believes me and will offer real tangible support. I didn't know anyone in this area and the support from (staff member) has been so helpful and made me feel settled. Being able to receive support has been life changing I have never had this before and I feel less alone"

"I was told the abuse was my fault, I have now learnt that he was the abuser and I have the confidence to never go back."

"I think the counselling service went well. It's quite comforting to know that us women, with difficult backstories, are able to speak in a safe place. It's really lovely"

"When I look back at where I was almost two years ago, I realise how much [DASA service] have helped me. I was nearing a breakdown and unrecognisable. I was supported to heal at the refuge, and began to learn my rights, improved my English, accessed support and legal services and have become more independent. I'm no longer dependent nor scared of my perpetrator, I feel so very lucky and grateful for all the support I have received"

Summary of Deep Dive findings

Partnership working in London

Partnership working in the London ecosystem was found to be good overall, with some working relationships requiring improvement. Strong partnership working was identified within the voluntary sector. Whilst some issues around partnership working were identified with statutory stakeholders, on the whole it was not a key barrier in providing safe accommodation and accommodation-based support

- Voluntary partners discussed strong partnership working within the sector - with providers taking a coordinated approach to supporting victims/ survivors of domestic abuse. Partnership working tended to be weaker with statutory partners, particularly local authority housing teams and children's services.
- However, this was not identified as the biggest barrier in providing safe accommodation and accommodation-based support. Practitioners identified short-term funding cycles; resources and capacity; staff recruitment and retention; and the on-going housing crisis as bigger barriers.
- Practitioners felt there tended to be good partnership working within the voluntary sector. This manifested in well-functioning referral pathways between different voluntary sector providers and coordinated approaches to supporting victims/survivors, where victims/survivors can be referred to multiple different providers to support their varying needs
- Practitioners, particularly those from 'by and for' services, recognised how important well-functioning referrals and signposting to specialist services was in effectively supporting victims/ survivor and managing provider capacity.
- However, some practitioners discussed the potential for more joined up training, shared resources, and networking within the sector - something that the existing commissioning structure did not necessarily facilitate.
- Some challenges in partnership working were identified between voluntary sector partners and local authority partners. Some of this stemmed from differing communication and cultural practices
- Whilst this did not apply to every local authority housing team, some partners discussed communication challenges with local authority housing teams. This could affect their ability to support a victim/ survivors in accessing move on accommodation. Communication issues identified by practitioners included a lack of responsiveness and delays in sharing the progress and outcome of cases. It was widely acknowledged by practitioners, that some of these communication issues were linked to high demand and limited capacity in local authority housing teams.
- Another barrier to partnership working was culture. Some housing teams were described as having good cultural practices, where housing officers would believe victims/survivors and take greater ownership over progressing their cases. These were often housing teams that had a co-located practitioner or were undergoing DAHA accreditation.

- Other housing teams were described as having poor cultural practices, where officers were likely to not listen to the needs of victim/survivors or believe their cases. These attitudes could negatively impact working relationships with housing teams and make it harder to support victims/ survivors in accessing move on accommodation.
- Several voluntary sector practitioners discussed the challenges in navigating housing systems and processes within some local authorities.
- Practitioners said that processes could be unclear or inconsistently applied. There could also be significant variations between boroughs, particularly around the application of priority need, interim duties and 'local connection' requirements. Practitioners reported that these challenges in navigating housing processes made it harder to work with local authority housing teams and support victims/ survivors into move on accommodation.
- Section 17 of the Children's Act places a duty on local authorities to 'safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area'. This can include providing accommodation and financial assistance to children and their families. In the context of domestic abuse, this means that victims/survivors of domestic abuse who have children are entitled to support from their local authority when fleeing domestic abuse. This also applies to victims/ survivors with no recourse to public funds. A number of practitioners said that it could be challenging in getting children's services to support victims/ survivors of domestic abuse and their children. Some of these challenges are linked to the wider pressures that children's services are under - with high levels of demand and need.
- DAHA accreditation and the co-location of professionals were cited as some examples of best practice in relation to partnership working. Practitioners cited that both can improve communication and cultural practices within local authority housing teams.

The Whole Housing Approach

The Whole Housing Approach¹⁸ (WHA) is a framework for addressing the housing and safety needs of victims/ survivors of domestic abuse. Existing guidance and resources on the WHA were reviewed, including the WHA toolkit and the pilot reports. This created a baseline understanding of the WHA, its rationale and its different components. Four key practitioners who were involved in the implementation of the WHA were interviewed and were asked to consider the strengths and weaknesses of the approach. Questions on the WHA were also incorporated in interviews with housing directors and commissioners. The intention was not to evaluate the WHA, but rather gain light touch insight on the WHA as it relates to the DASA landscape. Findings should be understood as preliminary.

By looking at the Whole Housing Approach (WHA), it was possible to understand how safe accommodation sits within the wider housing ecosystem and how it can be better connected to different accommodation types, housing options and support initiatives. This is an important consideration for demand management: the WHA can help identify ways to divert victims/ survivors away from safe accommodation or leave safe accommodation into long-term and sustainable housing. The Whole Housing Approach was found to be beneficial overall, especially as it can be incrementally implemented.

- Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation is a first step towards adopting

¹⁸ [What is the Whole Housing Approach? - daha - Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance \(dahalliance.org.uk\)](https://dahalliance.org.uk/what-is-the-whole-housing-approach/)

a whole housing approach. It was widely recognised by partners to support cultural change and enhance knowledge and partnerships

- The WHA encourages local authorities to undergo DAHA accreditation. A number of practitioners said that DAHA accreditation had a positive impact on organisational culture, with strategic leads committing to principles on how the organisation should treat victims/ survivors of domestic abuse. DAHA accreditation also had a positive impact on how frontline staff understood domestic abuse (including the different types of domestic abuse), perceived victims/survivors (including their needs) and responded to victims/survivors.
- The WHA can be adapted by each local authority. Elements of the WHA can be implemented individually based on a local area's needs, making implementation of the WHA more feasible.
- Each component of the WHA requires resources and funding to implement. Whilst the amount required will vary depending on the component, this can form a barrier for implementation. Securing buy-from senior stakeholders, and frontline staff, as well as issues around recruitment and retention for the posts required to implement the WHA are also barriers in implementing this approach.

Recommendations in full

Commissioning focus

- More refuge space should be commissioned as capacity is the greatest barrier preventing successful referrals
- More commissioning of suitable safe accommodation and safe accommodate based support for women with more than two children and/or older male children is recommended
- More specialist provision for certain acute needs and victims/ survivors with multiple disadvantages, especially for those with severe mental health needs should be commissioned. This may include providing specialist provision or specialist staff in general provision.
- MOPAC, the GLA and local authorities in London should partner with more specialist providers around mental health and substance use. They should explore opportunities to bring these providers into safe accommodation settings to increase the opportunity for victims/ survivors to be in safe accommodation that meets their needs.
- This report has found that by the time victims/survivors access DASA and DASA-based support their needs are acute. It would be beneficial to invest in preventative support and early intervention to reduce the severity of need in the DASA cohort.

Commissioning approach

- Yearly funding cycles should be extended for all providers to ensure staff do not leave their post because their futures feel uncertain or that delivery time is overly spent on bidding for funds
- Feedback from victims/survivors who have received support from specialist 'by and for' organisations, linked to their ethnicity, sexual orientation, and immigration status, has been very positive. Commissioning of these services should be maintained, and where possible grown, and funding cycles extended to ensure stability.

Balancing the London DASA Ecosystem

- MOPAC and GLA should explore alternative borough-based funding to incentivise all boroughs to invest more in local DASA provision even if their local victims/ survivors receive support elsewhere and if they accommodate demand from other boroughs
- Boroughs should be encouraged to commission specialist provisions on a joint basis, including dedicated acute mental health support or dedicated substance use support to address the geographical challenges of commissioning
- MOPAC and GLA should consider smaller-scale, localised alternatives to the pan-London Housing Reciprocal

Addressing housing provision

- Work should be done to align housing and DASA strategies by MOPAC and GLA
- A business case should be created to improve availability and quality of move-on accommodation and temporary accommodation which will require an up-front cost but improve flow through the system
- Sanctuary schemes and other kinds of safe accommodation should be piloted to reduce demand on refuge, second stage accommodation and semi-independent accommodation.
- MOPAC and GLA should continue to work together to best support rough sleepers as a result of domestic abuse
- MOPAC and GLA should continue to communicate with national government the need for more social housing and affordable housing

Updated guidance

- MOPAC/GLA should communicate with national government on the need for the DASA definition to be updated, in particular to enable support being given to victims/ survivors at every stage of their journey, including when not able to be in defined forms of safe accommodation
- MOPAC/GLA should communicate with national government for clearer guidance on how to better provide support for those with insecure immigration status
- 'Complex need' is a term used to describe many different circumstances and this can create confusion. 'Multiple disadvantage' should be better defined to support the commissioning and delivery of provision

Further research

- The evidence base for what safe accommodation provision and DASA-based support would meet the needs of the following groups should be improved accordingly; male victims/survivors; older victims/survivors; children as victims/survivors of domestic abuse in their own right

Data recording

- The data recording around domestic abuse and DASA provision should be improved by becoming more systematic. On Track Data is very rich and could be a model for other partners

- A system for recording multiple disadvantage experienced by people would ensure bespoke support can be commissioned and their needs better met

Partnership working

- To improve partnership working, all local authority housing teams, and housing associations in London, should be encouraged to undertake DAHA accreditation. DAHA results in improvements in organisational culture and partnership working between statutory and non-statutory partners.
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- Children's Services should be encouraged to improve their systems, processes and cultural practices when it comes to victims/ survivors of domestic abuse, and their children.
- MOPAC and the GLA should advocate that every London borough should have an adequately supported co-located IDVA

Whole Housing Approach

- Should there be a further focus on the Whole Housing Approach, a more thorough review is recommended
- The WHA should be more widely promoted within City Hall strategy and communications. This could involve webinars or sharing WHA resources, for example.
- To encourage implementation each local authority should identify which aspects of the WHA approach they want to focus on. MOPAC and the GLA could provide recommendations around this
- MOPAC and the GLA should identify how funding could be made available to support each local authority implementing the WHA

Next steps

The needs assessment has highlighted the scale of the challenges that victims/survivors in London are experiencing and the issues that VCS providers and boroughs experience in working to meet demand.

The findings and recommendations of the needs assessment have been used to inform the DASA Strategy and will play an integral role in shaping future DASA commissioning. Future DASA commissioning must prioritise an adaptable approach to meet a plurality of needs and meet current housing and support demands.

Other formats and languages

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