

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

The needs assessment for London 2024

Delivered by Crest Advisory



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Greater London Authority
March 2025

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Executive summary

Context

This report assesses 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.

Domestic abuse safe accommodation-based support means providing domestic abuse specific support services to people who are in domestic abuse safe accommodation.

In London, the Greater London Authority (GLA) and Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) are working in partnership to meet the requirements of the Duty. MOPAC and the GLA commissioned Crest Advisory to conduct an independent needs assessment to help them meet the Duty and provide recommendations to inform the refreshed London Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy.

Approach

A mixed method approach was adopted for this needs assessment which meant combining qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection and analysis.

We conducted quantitative analysis of published and local data including but not limited to: Crime Survey of England and Wales (CSEW), police recorded crime, homelessness case level collection (H-CLIC) and On Track which collects detailed case information on victims/survivors of domestic abuse. The qualitative analysis included a document review, interviews and focus groups with relevant stakeholders, and interviews and surveys with victims/survivors. Engagement totalled over 40 participants.

Partnership working and the Whole Housing Approach were both considered as deep dive areas to support wider analysis and inform the Mayor's future commissioning plans.

Findings

Rates of police recorded domestic abuse crime in London have increased over the last three years, though are still proportionately lower than its most comparable forces. In parallel, the number of households in London owed a prevention or relief from homelessness duty due to domestic abuse increased by 15% between 2020/21 and 22/23. This suggests that there has been an increase in DASA-based support demand over that time.

Victim/survivor experience

- 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 lack of long term provisioning of counselling/therapy.

Demand

- 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. This may be connected to long-term austerity which led to the withdrawal of early intervention services meaning there was a lack of early, preventative support as well as the impact of COVID-19 and cost of living
- The minimum identified demand for safe accommodation and safe accommodation-based support across London in 2022/23 was 11,472 referrals. However, this is likely to be an underestimate due to recording practices and missing data
- Of the unsuccessful referrals to Mayoral commissioned DASA-based services, almost a third were due to capacity and a fifth due to not being able to meet the needs of victims/survivors
- 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

Provision

- In 2022/23, 80% of referrals reported by Mayoral commissioned domestic abuse safe accommodation services 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
- The Mayoral services commissioned under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) offer a wide range of support to victims/survivors
- Victims/survivors are staying longer in safe accommodation due to the complexity of their needs and to the lack of move-on accommodation. This creates bottlenecks and decreases availability of support upstream
- Temporary accommodation is over-used to plug the gaps in availability of safe accommodation. It is often unsuitable and of poor quality. It is also a barrier to victims/survivors receiving DASA-based support

Challenges to commissioning

- Three key challenges to the Mayoral commissioning landscape emerged as most important: issues with the definition of safe accommodation, short funding cycles, and the geographical nature of provision

- Greenwich, Westminster and Havering saw the highest rates of households approaching their councils for homelessness support due to domestic abuse in 2022/23, with much higher rates than the national average
- Although there are geographical areas of high need in London, most victims/survivors are placed in safe accommodation in a different borough to the one they live in. This causes challenges for London boroughs in predicting demand for DASA-based support and commissioning local services to meet this demand. Practitioners shared that this could create tension between local authorities

Recommendations

Commissioning focus

- More refuge spaces 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 necessary
- There is not enough specialist provision for certain acute needs and victims/survivors with multiple disadvantages, especially for those with severe mental health needs. More appropriate support should be commissioned. This may include providing specialist provision or specialist staff in general provision
- MOPAC and local authorities 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 further 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. This will require an up-front cost but improve flow through the system to avoid the current bottlenecks in refuge spaces or overuse of unsuitable temporary accommodation which does not allow survivors to receive adequate support
- Sanctuary schemes and other kinds of safe accommodation should be piloted to reduce demand on refuge, second stage accommodation and semi-independent accommodation. This is especially important when considering refuge is not always suitable and/or the preferred option for some victims/survivors
- 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 lobby government for more social housing and affordable housing

Updated guidance

- MOPAC/GLA should lobby government 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 safe accommodation due to shortage of safe accommodation provision
- Lobby 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 groups below and commission provision should be improved accordingly:
 - male victims/survivors
 - older female victims/survivors
 - children as victims/survivors of domestic abuse in their own right

Data recording

- Data recording around DA 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 is vital to 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 Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation. DAHA results in improvements in organisational culture and partnership working between statutory and non-statutory partners
- 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. The Mayor should advocate that every London borough has an adequately supported co-located Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA)

Whole Housing Approach (WHA)

- The WHA presents a significant opportunity to refresh the approach to protecting and supporting victims/survivors of domestic abuse, including by allowing them to remain in their accommodation and for domestic abuse perpetrators to relocate instead. This can reduce the need for safe accommodation and may decrease the need for long-term support services
- Should the Mayor wish to focus strongly on the whole housing approach, a more thorough review is recommended
- The Mayor should promote the WHA more widely in their strategy and communications. This could involve webinars or sharing WHA resources, for example. The Mayor should aim to build momentum and awareness around the approach
- To encourage implementation each local authority should identify which aspects of the WHA approach they want to focus on. The Mayor could provide recommendations around this
- The Mayor should identify how funding could be made available to support each local authority implementing the WHA

Introduction and approach

Context

'The Crime Survey for England and Wales estimated that 2.3 million people aged 16 years and over experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2024.'¹

In 2021, the Domestic Abuse Act² (forthwith the Act) was established to tackle domestic abuse and hold statutory agencies accountable in protecting and supporting victims/survivors of domestic abuse. Part 4 of the Act places a duty on each local authority to provide safe accommodation-based support to victims/survivors of domestic abuse. This needs assessment is associated with Part 4 of the Act and therefore is the only Part discussed in this report.

Under Part 4, local authorities are expected to:

- assess the need for accommodation-based domestic abuse support in their area for all victims/survivors and their children, including those that require specialist support and those who come from outside the area;
- develop and publish a strategy for the provision of such support to cover their locality, having regard to the needs assessment;
- give effect to the strategy through commissioning/de-commissioning decisions;
- monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy;
- report back to central government;
- establish a Partnership Board.

The first DASA needs assessment in 2021

As the tier one authority in London, the Greater London Authority (GLA) works in partnership with the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) to deliver these duties. As part of this duty, they commissioned the needs assessment in 2021, which identified that although they were meeting the Council of Europe's recommendations on the number of safe accommodation places for its population, the needs of victims/survivors were not being met.

The 2021 needs assessment found:

¹ Office of National Statistics. (2024). Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview: November 2024

² Domestic Abuse Act 2021

- there needed to be a better understanding of demand and supply of safe accommodation, and safe accommodation-based support. There were key data gaps around specific cohorts of victims/survivors and the use of sanctuary schemes;
- that the current limitations of safe accommodation provision were leading to an increased risk of victims/survivors returning to the perpetrator or experiencing further mental health impacts;
- there were no common standards for the provision of safe accommodation across London, which had led to variable levels of support for victims/survivors;
- provision across London was currently commissioned and managed in silos, predominantly by each local authority, despite the majority of victims/survivors moving across London to flee domestic abuse;
- implementation of the new legislation needed to balance improving the quality of existing provision whilst pursuing opportunities to expand it.

This needs assessment is a refresh of the 2021 needs assessment, that was originally undertaken following the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

Aims of this refreshed needs assessment

In 2023, the GLA and MOPAC commissioned Crest Advisory to conduct an independent updated needs assessment which looked at how the demand and provision of safe accommodation-based support has changed since 2021, specifically regarding:

- domestic abuse victims/survivors' needs;
- provision and service gaps;
- the impact of newly commissioned services;
- the impact of COVID-19 and the cost-of-living crisis.³

This refreshed needs assessment is focused on Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation-based support (forthwith DASA-based support). However, in most cases, victims/survivors must be in safe accommodation to access DASA-based support. Therefore, this needs assessment has also looked at access to DASA-based support as a proxy for understanding DASA-based support demand.

The importance of this needs assessment is three-pronged:

1. Meets the duty requirement of completing a needs assessment
2. Meets the duty requirement of completing the reporting template
3. Informs the London Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy refresh

³ The evidence reviewed did not enable us to determine to what extent changes in need and provision were definitively caused by COVID-19 and the cost-of-living crisis. Where these issues are relevant, they are referenced in relevant sections of this report.

Approach

The needs assessment was carried out over five months from October 2023 to March 2024 and had five distinct phases. We undertook a mixed methods approach which meant combining qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection and analysis. Table 3 shows the activities and timelines for each research phase.

We conducted quantitative analysis of published and local data including but not limited to Crime Survey of England and Wales (CSEW), police recorded crime, homelessness case level collection (H-CLIC) and On Track which collects detailed case information on victims/survivors of domestic abuse. See annex 1 for details on all the data sources used for this report.

The qualitative analysis included a document review, interviews and focus groups with relevant stakeholders, and interviews and surveys with victims/survivors. See table 1 for further details.

Table 1 Research phases, activities, and timeline

Research phase	Activities	Timeline
Data collection and reporting template	Completed document review Circulated VAWG coordinators borough data return to understand each borough's DASA need and provision	October - December 2023
Support to engage	Requested collaboration from the VCS to organise interviews with practitioners and victims/survivors	November - December 23
Interviews and survey	Held interviews with 28 key practitioners (including those relevant to the deep dive areas) and 8 victims/survivors. Launched a victim/survivor survey (40 responses received).	November 2023 - January 2024
Analysis	Analysed the survey and interview findings, exploring how demand and provision has changed since 2021.	January 2024
Workshop	Held workshops with VAWG coordinators and the VCS to present preliminary findings and develop key recommendations.	January 2024
Final report	Incorporated all analysis and feedback into a final report.	January - March 2024

Participants

A diverse range of stakeholders relevant to the DASA landscape were engaged, with representatives of the statutory bodies as well as the voluntary and community sector and victims/survivors. The term practitioner(s) is used throughout the report which only refers to VAWG coordinators, VCS, and statutory bodies and commissioners. Overall, 40 stakeholders were engaged, which refers to both practitioners and victims/survivors.

VAWG coordinators

- London Borough of Hackney
- London Borough of Lambeth
- London Borough of Sutton
- London Borough of Waltham Forest
- London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham

Voluntary Community Sector (VCS)

- Refuge
- Solace Women's Aid
- St Mungo Community Housing Association
- Women's Aid Federation of England
- East European Resource Centre
- Asian Women's Resource Centre
- Latin American Women's Aid Refuge
- Young Ladies Club
- Respond
- L&Q Living Limited
- Stay Safe East
- The Nia Project
- Safer London
- Sister System
- Outside Project/Star Support
- Stonewall
- Women's Traveller Movement
- Victim Support
- The Drive Project
- Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse
- Advance Advocacy and Non-Violence Community Education
- Domestic Abuse Housing Association

Statutory bodies

- Metropolitan Police

- Sexual Health
- Integrated Care Board

Commissioners

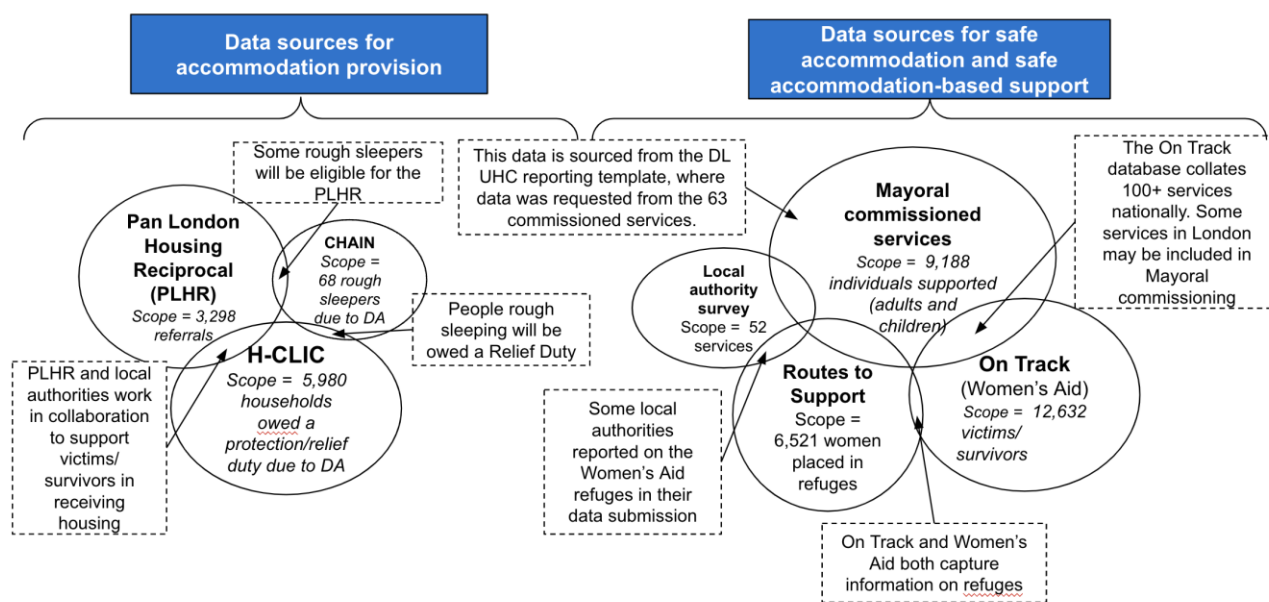
- MOPAC
- GLA
- Local Authority Housing Director

Victims/survivors

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.

Data sources

The diagram above shows the datasets analysed in this needs assessment. There is no single source of data that consistently captures demand and provision for safe accommodation-based support. This needs assessment analysed seven key datasets to create as complete a data picture as possible. Key sources included housing data and service provision data. There is likely overlap between cohorts as shown below, but the



scale of overlap is unknown.

Data caveats and barriers

The true demand for and provision of safe accommodation and safe accommodation-based support cannot be quantified with current recording processes.

There is no single source for unmet demand and provision of DASA or DASA-based support. This is due to the 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.

Data analysis is used to give the scale of demand, provision and unmet need. However, these limitations should be considered when examining the quantitative analysis in this report and taken together with the findings from the qualitative analysis.

Challenges to data recording contributing to data caveats

Data recording processes:

- some services **do not record the reason why a referral is unsuccessful**. This is important to be able to understand whether future commissioning needs to be tailored towards increased capacity, or a change in service delivery to better meet victim/survivor needs;
- some services cannot quantify unmet need because they advertise a bedspace when a space becomes available, meaning **the demand whilst there are no bed spaces available is not measured**;
- there is a **lack of standardised definition and data classifications**, for example types of services and characteristic breakdowns, which make comparisons across services challenging. Often data are attributed to an “other” category without clarification;
- many services **cannot capture detailed data on victims/survivors who are unsuccessful in their referrals**. Providers explained this is because it is not

appropriate to ask for a victims/survivor's details after they have just been turned away from support.

Data recording in practice:

- the safe accommodation and safe accommodation-based support ecosystem is fragmented and there is no ownership and limited understanding on how data through parts of the system connect. This causes barriers to following victim/survivor journeys or understanding overlap or gaps in demand or provision data;
- there can be a lack of buy-in to record data to a high quality. This research highlighted some key reasons for this:
 - A lack of capacity to deliver the service so efforts are focused on delivery, specifically impacting smaller providers
 - A lack of skills to record data to a high standard
 - Uncertainty on how the data will be used;
- The quality of data recording varies dramatically across services. Many datasets contain a significant number of empty data or not applicable which make conclusions and comparisons challenging. This is specifically the case for data recording of victims/survivors' demographics and needs, due to recording practices it is not possible to capture cross sections of multiple needs and characteristics across multiple datasets.

Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act (2021)

In 2021, the Domestic Abuse Act⁴ was established to tackle domestic abuse and hold statutory agencies accountable to protecting and supporting victims/survivors of domestic abuse. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 made tailored support possible by allocating responsibility to local authorities to provide support to victims and survivors of domestic abuse in safe accommodation for the first time.⁵

The Act includes but is not limited to:

- The legal definition of domestic abuse which determines children as victims of domestic abuse in their own right (Part 1);
- The appointment of a Domestic Abuse Commissioner (Part 2);
- New protection notices and orders (Part 3);
- Duty on local authorities to provide safe accommodation-based support to victims/survivors of domestic abuse (Part 4);
- Protection for victims and witnesses going through legal proceedings (Part 5);
- New criminal offences including controlling or coercive behaviour (Part 6).

This needs assessment is associated with Part 4 of the Act and therefore is the only Part discussed in this report. Part 4 places a Duty on each local authority to provide safe accommodation-based support to victims/survivors of domestic abuse.

Part 4(57)(1) of the Act states ‘each relevant local authority in England must —

- (a) Assess, or make arrangements for the assessment of, the need for accommodation-based support in its area,
- (b) Prepare and publish a strategy for the provision of such support in its area, and
- (c) Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy.

Part 4 (57(2) For the purposes of subsection (1)—

“accommodation-based support” means support, in relation to domestic abuse, provided to victims of domestic abuse, or their children, who reside in relevant accommodation;

⁴ Domestic Abuse Act 2021

⁵ Mayor of London press release (2022) ‘Mayor announces new £11.3m fund for domestic abuse services’

“relevant accommodation” means accommodation of a description specified by the Secretary of State in regulations.⁶

There are different types of safe accommodation that fall under the legal definition in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. These include, but are not limited to:	
Refuge accommodation	Single gender or single sex accommodation in shared or self-contained housing at a confidential address.
Specialist safe accommodation	Single gender or single sex accommodation to support those who share particular protected characteristics and/or vulnerabilities requiring additional support. This includes ‘by and for’ services.
Dispersed accommodation	Safe self-contained accommodation where a communal space or peer support may not be appropriate. This can also be ‘semi-independent’ support where victims/survivors need less intensive support than is offered by refuges.
Sanctuary schemes	Enhanced physical security measures provided to a home or the perimeter of the home.
Second stage accommodation	Accommodation for victims/survivors provided for a period before they move to fully independent and settled accommodation.
Single gender or single sex accommodation that is secure, dedicated to supporting victims/survivors, and has domestic abuse support tied to the accommodation, can also be defined as ‘safe accommodation’. This includes temporary accommodation that fits these requirements.	

Support services (forthwith DASA-based support) include, but are not limited to:

- bedspace in safe accommodation;
- housing access support;
- services specialised to victims/survivors with protected characteristics;
- services specialised to victims/survivors with protected complex needs;
- trauma-informed service support;
- therapeutic support;
- domestic abuse prevention and awareness;
- financial advice;
- child and family support;
- advocacy and outreach;
- specialist training;
- capacity building.

⁶ Domestic Abuse Act 2021

The London context

The Greater London Authority (GLA) and Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) work in partnership to meet the requirements of the Duty by commissioning safe accommodation support services.⁷

The GLA responsibility	MOPAC responsibility
<p>The GLA has a duty as a local authority to commission domestic abuse safe accommodation (forthwith DASA), and safe accommodation-based support in London.</p> <p>In 2023/24, the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) allocated £21,160,496.00 to support the GLA in the delivery of the Duty and committed to allocating £21,559,735.00 for 2024/25. The allocated funding is used to fund the continuation contracts and the call off contracts.</p> <p>The GLA provides grant funding to 21 London boroughs and 9 providers for them to continue to provide support services as they have done in 2021/22 prior to the introduction of the Duty. These are called continuation contracts, and last 12 months.</p>	<p>MOPAC conducts a procurement process on behalf of the GLA and London boroughs to onboard suitable providers onto the London Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Framework. These are called call off contracts and last 13-month contracts.</p> <p>The framework has 3 lots:</p> <p>Lot 1: Safe accommodation direct services (excluding 'by and for' providers, but including local authorities)</p> <p>Lot 2: Safe accommodation direct services – 'by and for' providers. All activities under lot 1 and lot 2 can include safe accommodation and safe accommodation-based support</p> <p>Lot 3: System and infrastructure-related services. Activities under this lot include establishing and maintaining better links between statutory and voluntary services; increasing awareness; policy development; and improvement including data collation, staff training and support.</p>

⁷ It is recognised that other workstreams exist to support victims/survivors experiencing domestic abuse including those who require accommodation, however, this SNA focuses on DASA support and its relevant funding sources.

London context of demand and provision

This chapter highlights there are two key trends that provide context to the DASA landscape:

1. An increase in police recorded domestic abuse crime in London
2. Decreasing availability of affordable housing London, which puts additional pressure on social housing

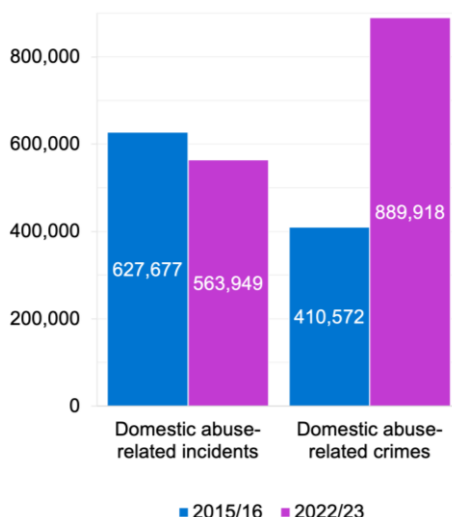
This would suggest that there may be additional demand on DASA provision compared to when the previous needs assessment was completed in 2021.

In 2022/23, there were 563,949 domestic abuse-related incidents recorded nationally, continuing the downward trend seen before COVID-19. Domestic abuse-related crimes remained similar to the previous year (889,918 compared with 889,311); however, they were 14.4% higher than the year ending March 2020, which was the point at which the previous needs assessment analysis was conducted (Go to annex 2 for a trend graph).

As seen in figure 1⁸ below there is a long-term increase in domestic abuse-related crimes with an 117% increase between 2015/16 and 2022/23. Increases seen in previous years may be, in part, driven by increased willingness and confidence of victims/survivors to report domestic abuse-related crimes.

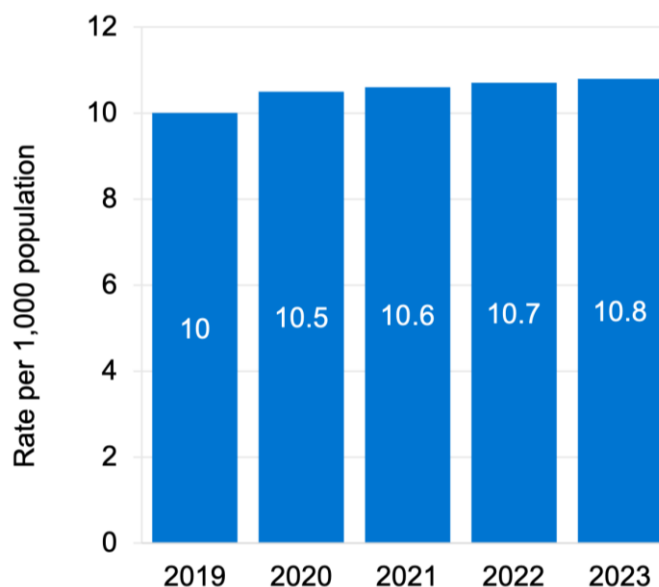
⁸ Source: Police recorded crime from the Home Office, ONS data release 2022/23. Please note that when a survivor of DA reports incidents to the Met Police, they are increasingly recording multiple crimes as one crime. Therefore, the number of people experiencing DA may be increasing more than the statistics here suggest.

Figure 1 Number of domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes recorded by the police, England and Wales (excluding Devon and Cornwall), year ending March 2016 to year ending March 2023



The rate per 1,000 population of domestic abuse crimes recorded by the Metropolitan Police from 2019 to 2023 has increased by 8.1% (see figure 2⁹). A quarter (25%) of domestic abuse offences in 2023 were related to violence with injury.

Figure 2 Rate per 1,000 population of domestic abuse crimes recorded by the Metropolitan Police, 2019 to 2023



⁹ Source: Metropolitan Police Crime Dashboard, Domestic Abuse - (public.tableau.com). Please note that when a survivor of DA reports incidents to the Met Police, they are increasingly recording multiple crimes as one crime. Therefore, the number of people experiencing DA may be increasing more than the statistics here suggest.

Police recorded data highlighted that in London there were 27.9 domestic abuse incidents and crimes per 1,000 population. This is lower than comparable forces¹⁰, with 37.2 per 1,000 in West Yorkshire, 32.3 in West Midlands and 30.4 in Greater Manchester. 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 DA is significantly higher than its most comparable forces but proportionate to population it is lower than other forces (See figure 3¹¹).

Figure 3 Rate per 1,000 population of domestic abuse crimes recorded by the Metropolitan Police, Greater Manchester Police, West Midlands Police and West Yorkshire Police, 2019 to 2023



London's housing market has faced significant challenges in recent years. Affordable housing has decreased which practitioners suggest has increased the demand on social housing (see annex 2 for data illustration).

"There's a lack of generally affordable housing" - VCS practitioner

"The massive housing crisis. That is that is happening everywhere. It's not just you know, [Borough] specific. It's national" - Statutory practitioner

¹⁰ HMICFRS: Most similar groups (MSGs) by force

¹¹ Source: Metropolitan Police Crime Dashboard, Domestic Abuse - (public.tableau.com).

Overall demand

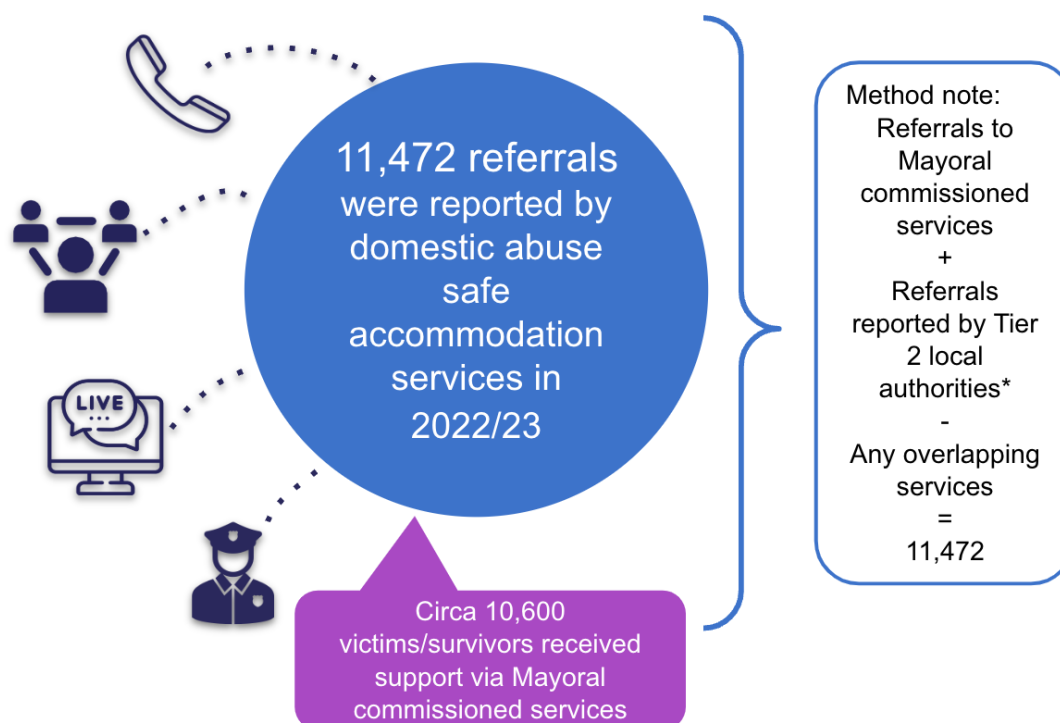
This chapter offers a reserved figure to illustrate the demand for DASA and DASA-based support in London by using 2022/23 referrals as a proxy. This is likely to be an underestimate due to organisations being unable to accept referrals where needs cannot be met by the service. Additional data suggests that needs are becoming more acute by the time victims/survivors are in contact with services, alongside the general increase in the volume of demand.

Mayoral commissioned domestic abuse services included in Crest's data collection **reported 11,472 referrals¹² in 2022/23**. This figure is to be taken as a **minimum** as it does not include all safe accommodation services in London, meaning the **demand is likely to be much higher**.¹³

Services' current monitoring methods and access to relevant data sources mean **it is difficult to clearly distinguish the change in demand** for these services over time and since the Act was introduced. One specific challenge in understanding true demand is that **for many refuges, referrals are only received when a vacancy is open**, rather than rolling referrals.

¹² Please note that 'referrals' here are used as a proxy for estimating demand. Practitioners made clear that where referrals are very likely to be unsuccessful, often they do not make them. This would suggest that demand is likely to be higher than these referral figures indicate.

¹³ Source: Mayoral commissioned services monitoring; Tier 2 local authorities' MHCLG data submission



*The MHCLG return did not receive responses from all local authorities. Of the local authorities who did submit a response, not all services were able to provide relevant data, meaning this is likely not a full reflection of the true demand.

Volume and need

DASA-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. This may be connected to long-term austerity, COVID-19 and cost of living.

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.

“We’re clogging up the hotels because it’s the only available space. But this is disruptive for families as our local authority will only allow hotels to be blocked out for a week.” - Statutory practitioner

“We have a bed blocking problem – with the lack of move-on, [this] means the refuge is constantly full. As soon as someone’s out, another one is in.” - VCS practitioner

Service providers reported increased demand for safe accommodation services, especially during the peak of COVID-19. A lack of commissioning to address this rise in demand is resulting in service providers not being able to deliver the quality of service they would like and feel they are capable of providing.

“Across the board there’s been increased demand that spiked in COVID-19 that hasn’t really let up since” - VCS practitioner

Some attribute this increase during COVID-19 to heightened awareness of domestic abuse, possibly linked to a Home Office campaign. 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.

“In the housing department, since we got DAHA accreditation and the Domestic Abuse Act [2021] came in, we’ve seen a huge increase in those impacted by domestic abuse approaching the local authority for safe accommodation.” - Statutory practitioner

“The demand continues to increase but the service provision and money doesn’t. So we’re never going to meet that demand.” - Statutory practitioner

Homelessness need as a result of domestic abuse

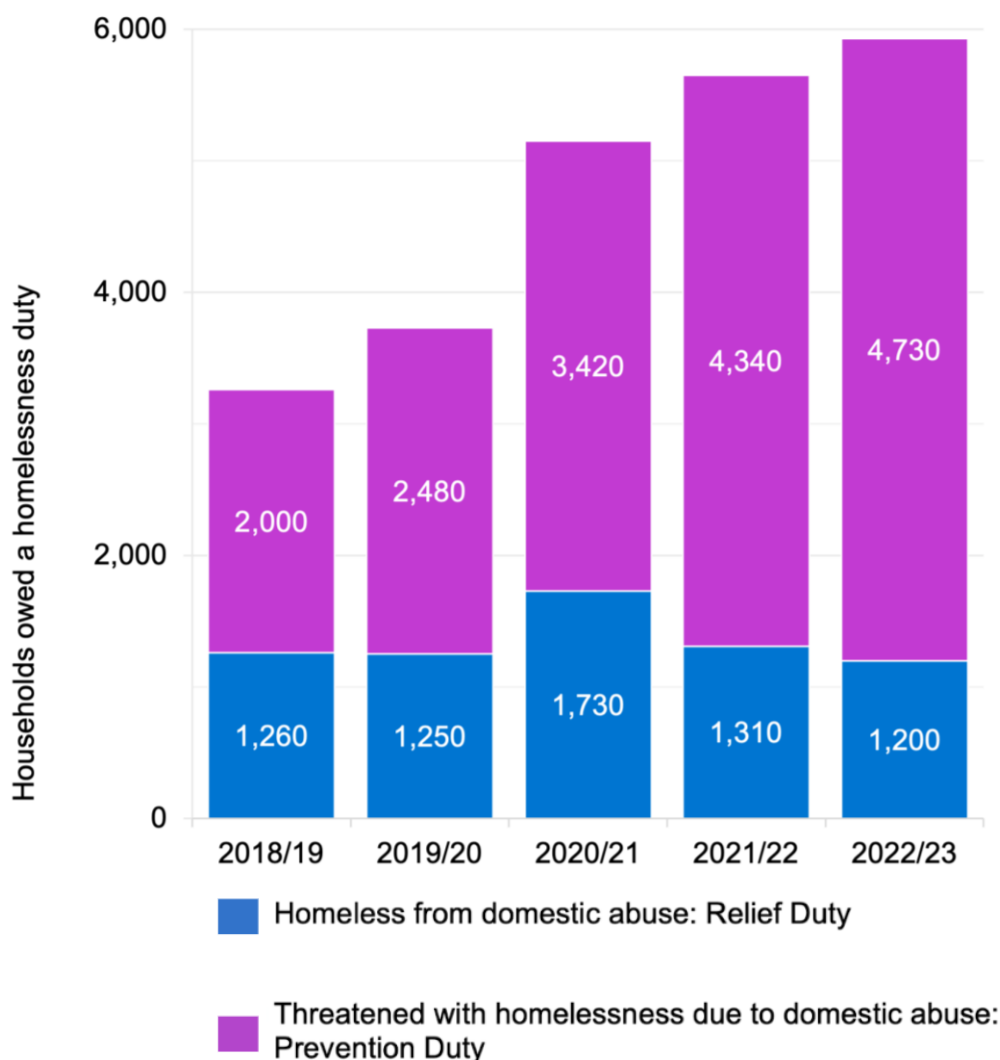
From 2020/21 to 2022/23, the number of households in London owed a prevention or relief duty from homelessness as a result of domestic abuse rather than other causes, increased by 15%. This illustrates the increased volume of demand for DASA provision.¹⁴

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 requires local authorities in the UK to take proactive measures in preventing and addressing homelessness. Over the last five years, there has been an increasing demand for this support across the homelessness sector as a whole, as well as for households impacted by domestic abuse.

In 2022/23, 57,140 households were owed a prevention or relief duty, 5,930 of these households (10.1%) were owed a duty as a result of domestic abuse.

¹⁴ Data note: H-CLIC holds information on victims/ survivors accessing housing support through their LA

Figure 4 Volume of households owed a homelessness duty (prevention or relief) due to domestic abuse 2018/19 to 2022/23



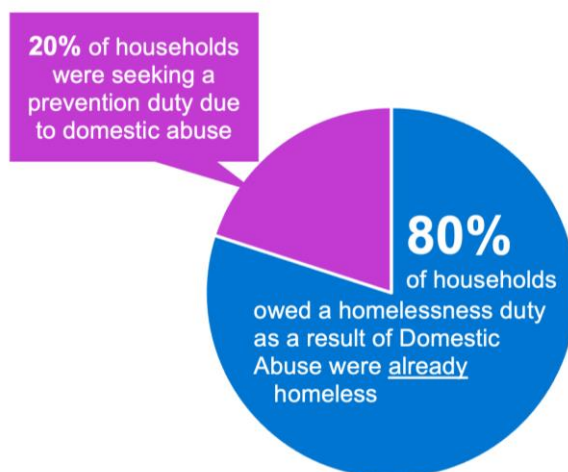
In London, there has been an increase in households seeking homelessness relief, outstripping the increase in those seeking homelessness prevention over the past three years. This suggests that the needs of those requesting housing support due to domestic abuse are increasingly acute by the time it comes to the attention of local authorities.

In 2022/23, 80% of households impacted by domestic abuse seeking homelessness support in London needed relief duties compared to 66% in 2019/20 (see figure 5).¹⁵ There has been an increase in households seeking support that are already homeless due to domestic abuse, compared to households at risk of homelessness. Under the Act, Tier 2 local

¹⁵ Source: H-CLIC. Data note: H-CLIC holds information on victims/ survivors accessing housing support through their Local Authority

authorities now have an automatic duty to prioritise those fleeing domestic abuse as well as lifetime security for tenancy to avoid homelessness.

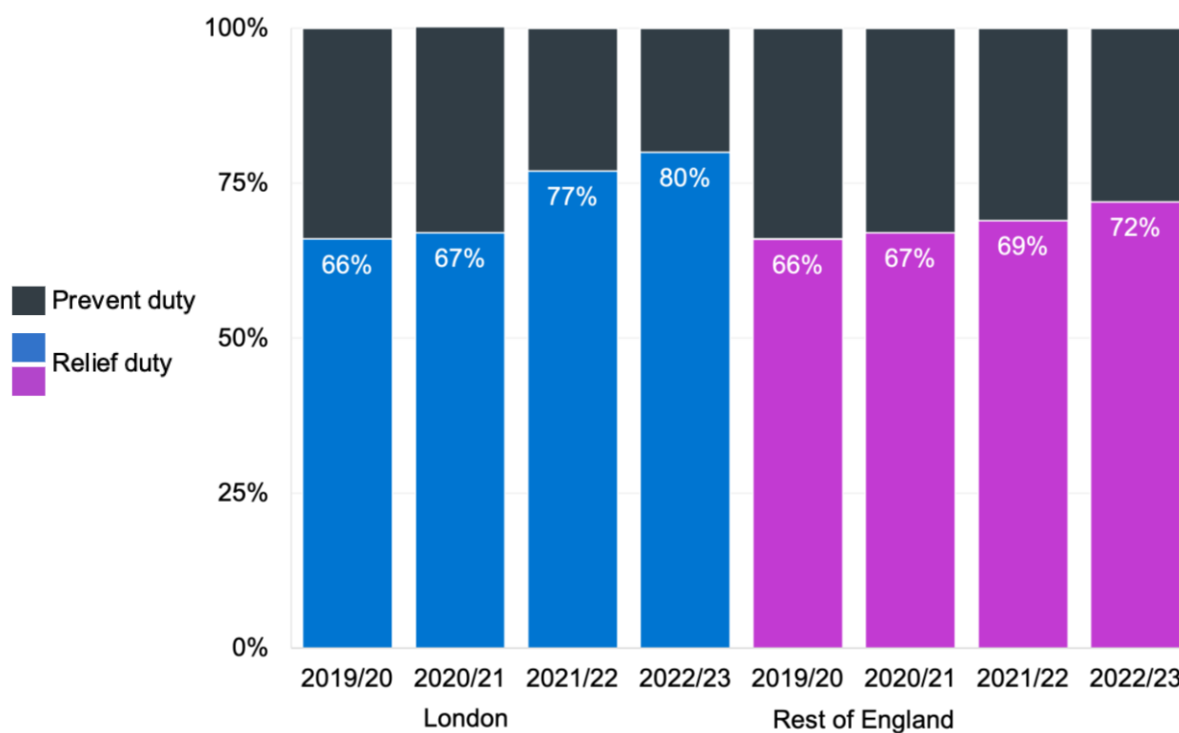
Figure 5 Percentage of domestic abuse victims/survivors receiving relief duties compared to prevention duties in London, 2022/23



The Homelessness Duty 2018 put emphasis on local authorities to intervene at earlier stages to prevent homelessness. However, the need for safe accommodation support by domestic abuse victims/survivors after they have been made homeless has been growing. The increase is greater in London compared to the rest of England (see table 6).¹⁶ In addition, the median price of a house in London is 13.3 times the average annual salary, compared to 8.3 for the rest of England.

¹⁶ Source: H-CLIC. Data note: H-CLIC holds information on victims/ survivors accessing housing support through their Local Authority

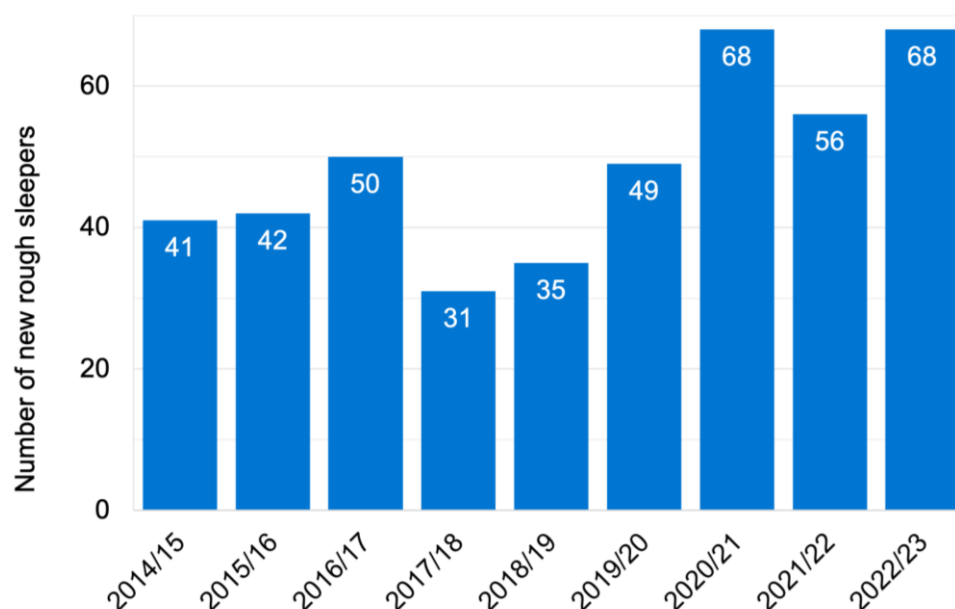
Figure 6 Proportion of prevention and relief duties given for domestic abuse as the reason for loss of last settled home, London compared with the rest of England, 2019/20-2022/23



Demand for housing support among victims/survivors that are rough sleeping has risen since the pandemic. As an extreme form of housing need, this demonstrates an increase in the acuteness of need. Figure 7 demonstrates the findings below.¹⁷

¹⁷ Source: CHAIN annual bulletin, Greater London 2022/23. Data note: CHAIN holds information on victims/ survivors seen rough sleeping across London, 68 domestic abuse victims/ survivors

Figure 7 Volume of domestic abuse victims/survivors rough sleeping in London, 2014/15 to 2022/23



68 domestic abuse victims/survivors were rough sleeping in London in 2022/23, from a total of 10,053 rough sleepers (0.7%). The volume of rough sleepers over the past 3 years has been consistently higher than the previous 6 years. The further rise in rough sleepers in 2020/21 coincides with the onset of the cost of living crisis.

CHAIN data shows that in 2022/23, 68 rough sleepers in London left their last settled base due to domestic abuse, consistent with the previous assessment. This accounts for 0.7% of all rough sleepers in London.

CHAIN attributes the 2021/22 reduction in rough sleepers to COVID-19 associated homelessness initiatives, such as the Everyone In initiative, and increased use of the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol. The higher 2022/23 total is likely due to increased living costs and the gradual winding down of emergency provisions.

The rough sleeping trends on CHAIN in London mirror the pattern of all rough sleepers in London, showing a consistent increase over the past decade, with two exceptions in 2017/18 and 2021/22. 10,053 people were rough sleeping in London in 2022/23, which is 54% higher than it was ten years ago.

Demand and provision of DASA-based support by characteristics and specific need

This chapter explores the characteristics of victims/survivors needing or accessing safe accommodation support, specifically:

- gender;
- age;
- ethnicity;
- sexual orientation and gender identity;
- disability;
- substance use;
- mental health needs;
- women with insecure immigration status;
- women with children.

The summary of demand provision by characteristic and need can be found in table 2. This analysis draws on data sources and engagement with support services. However, there are victims/survivors who are not included in the data because they are not approaching services, meaning these findings on barriers and needs may only form part of the picture.

Table 2 Summary of demand provision by characteristics and need

	Demand	Provision
Gender	Women are disproportionately victims/survivors of DA and need support. There is an unmet need for male housing services.	Safe accommodation provision is not sufficient in meeting demand from female victims/survivors. More research is required to understand how to meet male victims/survivors needs.
Age	The 20-30 age range has the highest demand for support. Practitioners believe the needs of older victims/survivors 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 DA.
Ethnicity and language	Those seeking DASA and DASA-based support are broadly proportionate to the London 2021 census. Some data is unknown.	Lack of overall provision affects all ethnicities. However, victims/survivors from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups are more likely to require support services tailored to their needs.

Sexual orientation	LGBTQ+ victims/survivors are more likely to experience homelessness and be male compared with other victims/survivors. While data indicates that need is largely met, practitioners reflected a high level of unmet demand.	LGBTQ+ victims/survivors are more likely to require specialised, tailored support services. Expert views indicate that more provision is required to fully meet need.
Disability	The needs of disabled victims/survivors are often not met. This can be for a number of reasons, including provision being 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.
Substance misuse	Victims/survivors with substance use needs can require a more intense level of support which can make meeting their needs difficult.	Practitioners indicate that many refuges don't have the specialist skills to support substance related needs and there is a lack of other appropriate provision.
Mental needs	Demand for mental health support is high. Demand is also more acute and complex.	Provision for mental health needs is high but not enough to fully meet demand. The most severe levels of need were often not met.
Immigration status and no recourse to public funds (NRPF)	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. This is partly due to the challenges in securing funding available to victims/survivors with NRPF
Women with children	There is substantial demand for DASA from women with children. 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. There is little provision for this group and women with older male children.

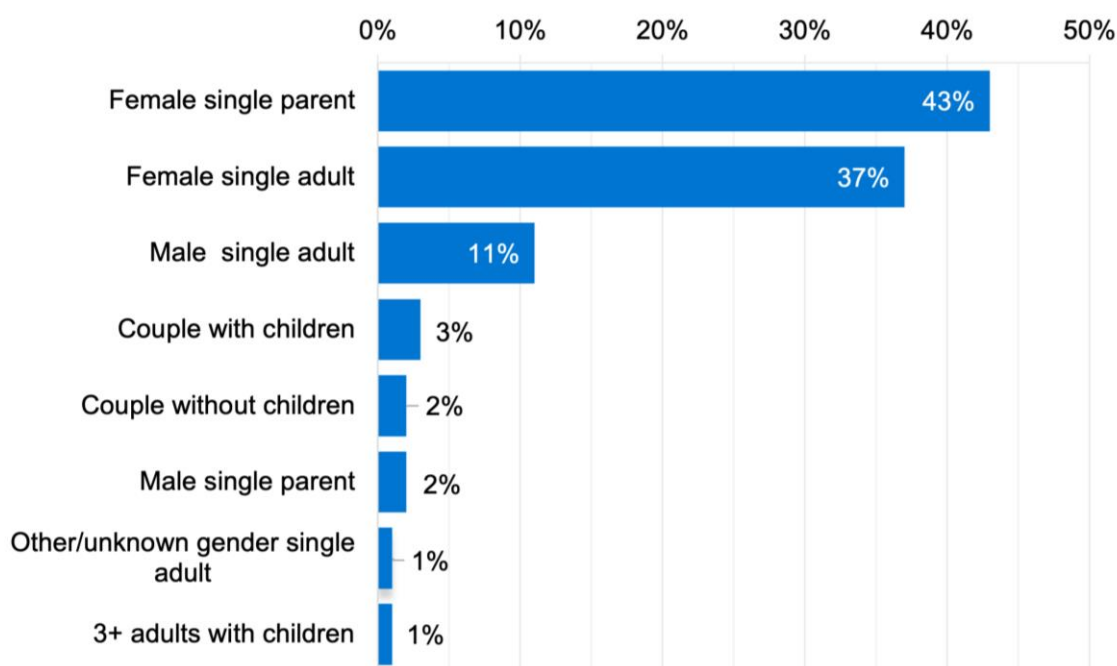
Protected characteristics

Gender

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. See figure 8 for further detail.¹⁸

Figure 8 Proportion of households owed a homelessness duty because of domestic abuse, by gender and family make up 2022/23

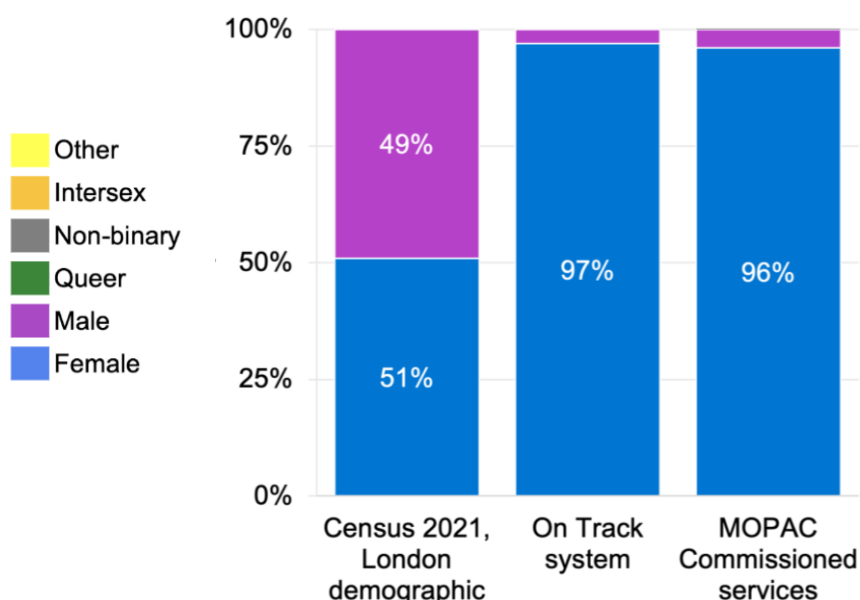


Comparing the gender of victims/survivors seeking and accessing support services on the On Track data system to the Census data on London's population highlights that women are overwhelmingly more likely to be requiring and receiving support from DASA and other domestic abuse services. See figure 9 for further detail.¹⁹

¹⁸ Source: Census 2021; CHAIN; On Track; H-CLIC. Data note: 5,930 households owed a homelessness duty

¹⁹ Source: Census 2021; CHAIN; On Track; H-CLIC. Data note: CENSUS shows London's demographics. Data note: 12,632 victims/ survivors accessing DA services. Data note: Mayoral commissioned services holds information on the 63 services in the Mayoral commissioning portfolio

Figure 9 Gender distribution across London's population (Census 2022), victims/survivors accessing services registered on On Track, and in Safe Supported Accommodation (2022/23)



There is a need for services for male victims/survivors, particularly those who are rough sleeping.

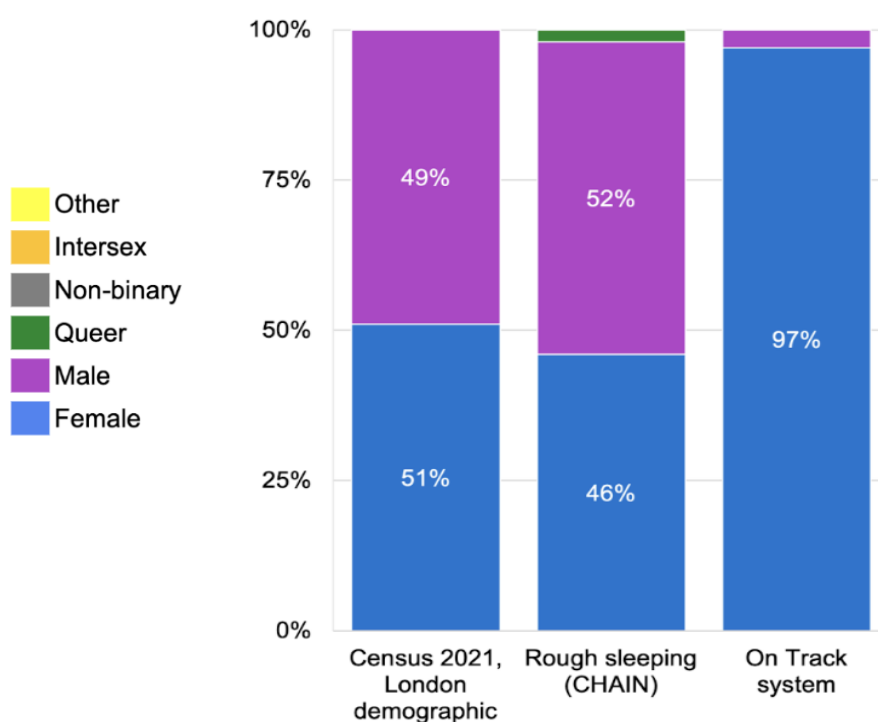
CHAIN data shows that the majority of domestic abuse victims/survivors rough sleeping in London are male, an increase in the proportion of men rough sleeping from 2020/21. Local authorities' efforts to prevent children from sleeping rough (who are most often with mothers), and a shortage of emergency support for men, may explain this increase in the proportion of men rough sleeping. See figure 10 for further detail.²⁰

However, women 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.

A service provided by Victim Support is one of few services 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.

²⁰ Source: Census 2021; CHAIN; On Track; H-CLIC. Data note: CSEW is a national survey. Data note: 68 DA victims/ survivors rough sleeping in London. Data note: 12,632 victims/ survivors accessing DA services

Figure 10 Gender distribution across London's population (Census 2022), DA victims/survivors sleeping rough and victims/survivors accessing services registered on On Track, 2022/23



Quantitative analysis suggests there is an unmet housing need for male domestic abuse victims/survivors in London – more research is required to understand how best to respond to the unmet need.

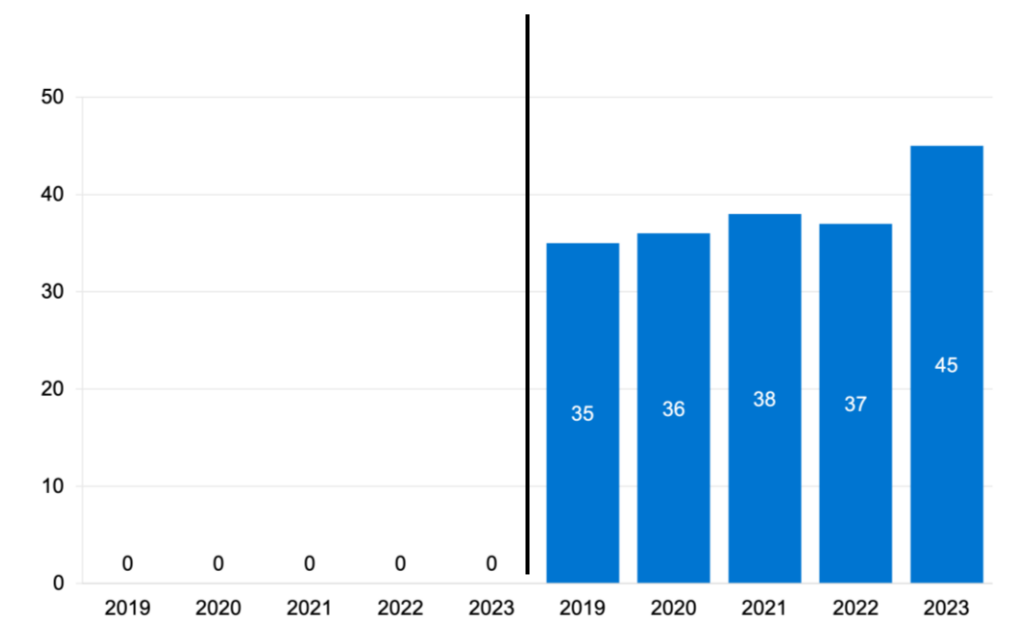
The provision of safe accommodation bed spaces in London for men impacted by domestic abuse is limited. See figure 11.²¹

ManKind is a specialist charity in the UK focusing on male victims/survivors of domestic abuse. The data they collected shows a national increase in refuge bed spaces that are accessible to men. Yet, there have been no recorded single sex dedicated refuge spaces available for male victims/survivors in London over the past five years.

Women's Aid present similar findings. Wider support services have increasingly offered support to men from 21% of services in 2016 to 28% in 2023. However, within this time there was no record of refuges or single sex dedicated bed spaces for male victims/survivors available for analysis.

²¹ Source: ONS Domestic Abuse 2022/23 release - ManKind data

Figure 11 Number of refuge bed spaces for male victims/survivors of domestic abuse, London compared to the rest of England (in blue), 2019 to 2023



Service providers echo this, explaining that finding a safe space for male victims/survivors is challenging, particularly for men with intersecting protected characteristics and support needs.

*“We have a real **difficulty** in **providing men** with a **safe space**. We have to use hotels and hostels. But these are such a mixed bag of people with various different complexities and needs. It’s a massive issue for us, just as it is for every local authority in the country.” - Statutory practitioner*

Age

Those aged mid 20s-mid 30s are the age group with highest demand (see figure 12)²². Practitioners were clear that a gap in knowledge and provision exists for older victims/survivors.

“We have people of all ages but are skewed towards young people...It’s also worth remembering that the benefit cap which affects people that are under 35, in terms of housing benefit, and youth services traditionally go to 25. So there is this 25 to 35 year age group of people.” - VCS practitioner

²² Source: Census 2021; CHAIN; On Track; H-CLIC. Data note: CENSUS shows London’s demographics. Data note: 68 DA victims/ survivors rough sleeping in London. Data note: 12,632 victims/ survivors accessing DA services. Data note: 5,930 households owed a homelessness duty. Method note: Direct comparisons across datasets are not able to be made, as different datasets measure different age categories.

Need	Domestic abuse victims/survivors 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 also 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.
Known provision	1,043 victims/survivors under the age of 25 were supported by Mayoral commissioned services. 72 victims/survivors over the age of 65 were supported by Mayoral commissioned services.
Known unmet need	188 (20%) women not placed in refuges through Women's Aid were under 18.

Figure 12 Age distribution across London's demographics (Census 2021), domestic abuse victims/survivors sleeping rough in London, households owed a duty due to domestic abuse and victims/survivors in the On Track system, 2022/23

demographic (CHAIN) System

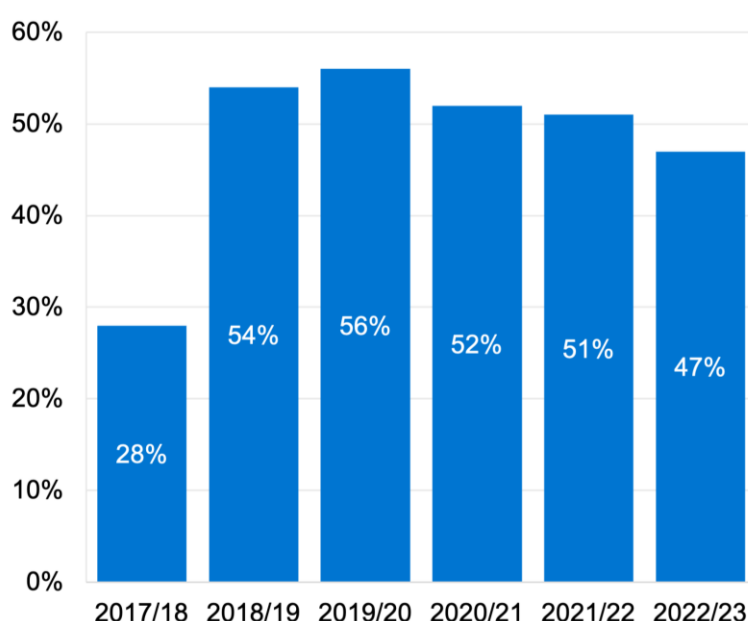
Children as victims/survivors of domestic abuse in their own right: Since the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, children exposed to domestic abuse in the family home are now considered victims/survivors in their own right. However, our findings suggest that the safe accommodation-based support for children is limited. Any support provided to children is usually an extension of meeting the needs of the female victim/survivor. Although there are some commissioned services for children in refuges, which include therapy and counselling, support still largely centres on the woman victim/survivor and their needs. One provider described support for children as an 'add on' rather than a core part of provision.

Practitioners suggested that the system might not be set up for prioritising children and their needs. Safe accommodation, such as refuges, are unlikely to have the skills and expertise to effectively support children. These needs may be better met outside of refuges, by other partners, such as children's services or voluntary sector organisations that work with children.

*"One of the gaps in terms of safe accommodation could be not having particular teams focused on children. It could be recruitment issues, but also, **it's quite new as well**. I think the other thing with children is it's such a **diverse group**, like from, you know, like a toddler is going to want something very different to a five year old to a teenager." - Statutory practitioner*

Since the Act was introduced, refuge data shows there has been a decrease in the proportion of women placed in refuge with children despite children being defined as victims/survivors in their own right in 2021. 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. See figure 13.²³

Figure 13 Volume of children placed in refuges in London 2017/18 to 2022/23



Child victims/survivors of intimate partner violence: The picture of children experiencing intimate partner violence is less clear; it is not known how many children are experiencing intimate partner violence, or if those that do have a housing need.

Ethnicity

Based on the known data, those seeking safe accommodation and safe accommodation-based support are broadly proportionate to the London 2021 census. However, lack of capacity affects all groups, including minority ethnic victims/survivors. See figure 14 for further details.²⁴

Need	All minority ethnic groups of victims/survivors make up just under half of the need for safe accommodation when looking
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²³ Source: Routes to Support. Data note: Routes to Support holds information on victims/survivors seeking refuge through Women's Aid.

²⁴ Source: Census 2021; CHAIN; On Track; H-CLIC. Data note: CENSUS shows London's demographics. Data note: 68 DA victims/ survivors rough sleeping in London. Data note: 5,930 households owed a homelessness duty. Data note: 12,632 victims/ survivors accessing DA services

	<p>at those rough sleeping, needing a homelessness duty and accessing support through On Track.</p> <p>This need is proportionate²⁵ to, and reflects, London's population as outlined in the Census. Whilst this does not indicate disproportionate level of need, our research highlights the different experiences of minority ethnic victims/survivors, and the need for services to be tailored.</p>
Known provision	<p>4,576 victims/survivors from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups were supported by Mayoral commissioned services.</p> <p>550 (53%) women placed in refuges through Women's Aid via On Track were from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds.</p>
Known unmet need	<p>466 (48%) women not placed in refuges through Women's Aid via On Track were from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds.</p>

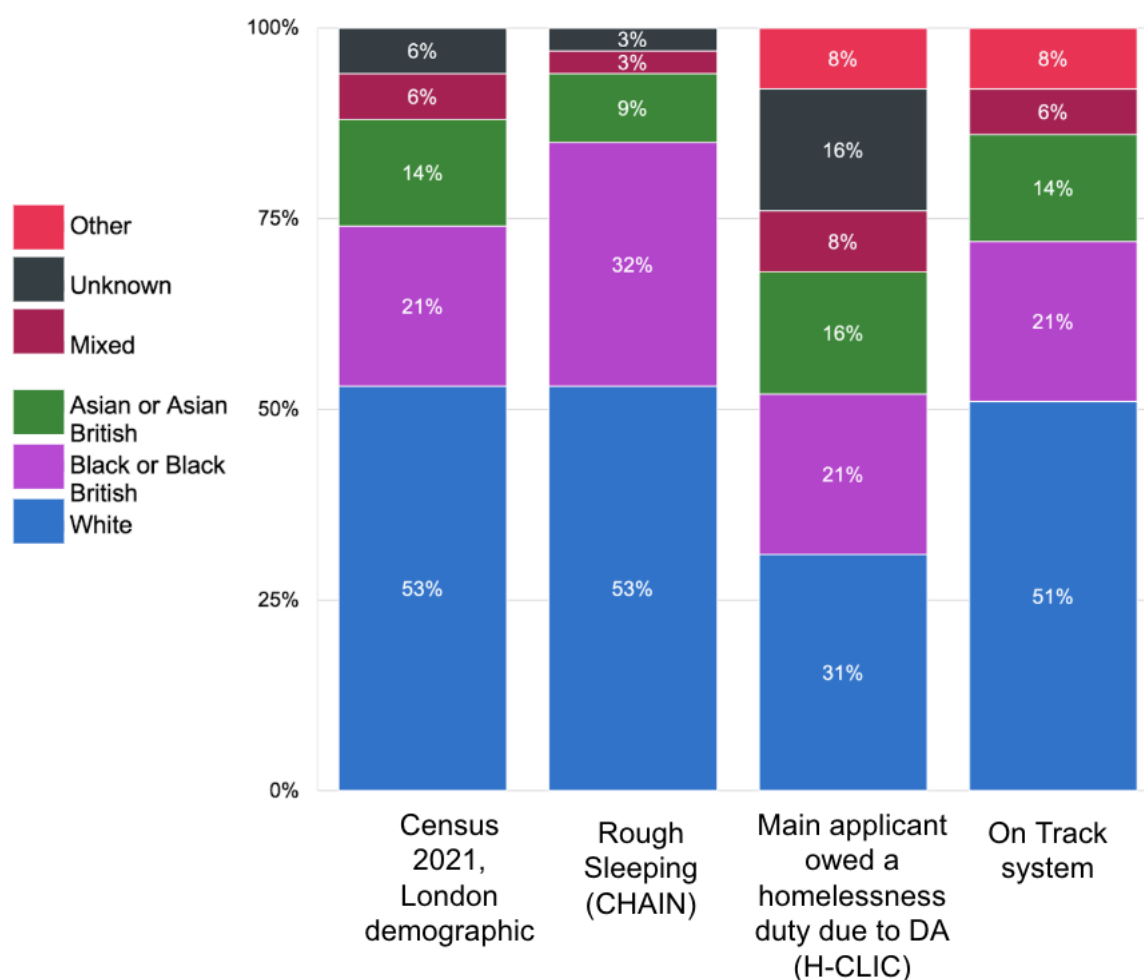
Minority ethnic groups

Victims/survivors from minority ethnic groups²⁶ may need specific support services that reflect the different ways and contexts in which they experience abuse. These needs are mainly catered for by 'by and for' services who have specialised knowledge and a better understanding of victim/survivor needs than mainstream services. Specialist provision is valued and should be maintained according to monitored need.

²⁵ The third column in figure 14 has a higher proportion of unknowns compared to other columns in this graph. Based on what data is known, there is no indication of significantly disproportionately affected ethnic group. However, better data recording may indicate disproportionality in the future.

²⁶ These grouped identities are not absolute and do not reflect all individual experiences

Figure 14 Ethnicity distribution across London's demographics (Census 2021), domestic abuse victims/survivors sleeping rough in London, households owed a duty due to domestic abuse and victims/survivors in the On Track system, 2022/23



Black, African, and Caribbean groups: Providers noted how different power and family dynamics, religious beliefs, or social stigma within Black, African and Caribbean communities can act as a barrier to accessing DASA-related services. Providers noted that this is compounded by the lack of trust in DASA-related services, which can be more pronounced in these communities due to the systematic inequalities they face.

“In the Black African communities, specifically, there's this whole shame around exposing your problems” - VCS practitioner

Traveller groups: Providers emphasised that Catholic beliefs can stigmatise divorce which can impact on reporting of domestic abuse among traveller groups. Large close-knit families also make resettlement more difficult and can make it harder to keep victims/survivors protected from their perpetrators. Providers also spoke about how Traveller women can get

turned away from refuges due to having many children or there being a one Traveller only policy in place.

“So we’ve heard of ... the one woman policy and then the strict refuge criteria in terms of just the number of children that you’re allowed to bring in, and like male children over a certain age, things like this.” - VCS practitioner

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

Sexual orientation and gender identity

LGBTQ+ victims/survivors 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.

“I can’t explain to you the level of need, like it’s way beyond any level of service that we can provide... I could literally double my staff team, and still not have enough resource” - VCS practitioner

“One of the things I found when we accept providers, referrals from organisations that are not LGBT, just LGBT specific, it misses a lot of the nuances around our community” - VCS practitioner

Need	<p>Providers suggest that mainstream organisations had limited awareness of people's varying needs within LGBTQ+ communities.</p> <p>LGBTQ+ people are at higher risk of experiencing homelessness, poor mental health, and substance use issues. The way these issues intersect and are experienced by LGBTQ+ victims/survivors will be unique to their community.</p> <p>‘By and for’ providers added that their service users tend to be younger and predominantly male. Whilst some providers reported that there could be a gap in provision for trans and non-binary people, MOPAC has commissioned the Outside Project to deliver the refuge accommodation to trans and non-binary victims/survivors. The project has supported 29 victims/survivors since its launch in July 2023.</p>
Known demand	<p>182 (4%) of victims/survivors referred for support through On Track services were LGBTQ+.</p> <p>28 (1%) of victims/survivors trying to access refuges through Women’s Aid were lesbian or bisexual.</p>

Known provision	1,040 (11%) of victims/survivors supported through Mayoral commissioned services were LGBTQ+. 14 (≈ 1%) of victims/survivors were placed in refuges through Women's Aid were lesbian or bisexual.
Known unmet need	14 (≈ 1%) women not placed in refuges through Women's Aid were lesbian or bisexual.

Disability

Disabled victims/survivors²⁷ have specific needs but according to practitioners, they are not fully met, and more specialist commissioning should be considered, taking into consideration physical and other needs.

"I had one client, he was in a wheelchair, they were putting him in a hotel where there was one lift and the lift stopped working. So how was he supposed to get up?"
- VCS practitioner

Need	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' inappropriate and mean support is better placed at their home. Additionally, staff sometimes misunderstand the needs and behaviours of disabled victims/survivors, especially those that are non-physical.
Known demand	604 (10%) of households owed a duty had a physical ill health or disability. 1,398 (8%) of victims/survivors referred through On Track services had a physical disability.
Known provision	1,456 (16%) of victims/survivors supported through Mayoral commissioned services had a disability. 22 (2%) of women placed in refuges through Women's Aid had a disability.
Known unmet need	11 households were unable to be supported by Mayoral commissioned services due to disability. 40 (4%) women not placed in refuges through Women's Aid had a disability.

²⁷ As described under the Equality Act 2010

Victim/survivor survey case study: disability as a barrier to accessing accommodation can cause victims/survivors to remain in unsafe conditions

Person A who has caring responsibilities and is unable to work due to disability, still lives with the perpetrator as support services cannot guarantee they will be housed near their key support family member. Due to A's disability, the idea of moving away and being isolated is a worse situation than their current one.

They have been waiting on the outcome of their housing appeal since submitting it at the beginning of 2023, despite being told they would hear back no later than September 2023. They have yet to receive any communication on this matter and have been re-experiencing suicidal thoughts as a result. A expressed a desire for tailored support specific to their disability as well as a case worker willing to chase applications on their behalf as they have great difficulty doing so.

Overall A has had a very negative experience of applying for housing, given that they still have no housing support over a year since submitting their application.

Needs**Language**

According to the On Track data, victims/survivors referred to support with English as a second language make up almost a fifth of all victims/survivors needing or accessing support. In 2022, 17% (1,026) of victims/survivors had English as a second language, showing a slight decrease from 19% in the previous two years (see figure 15)²⁸. 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. On Track data also highlighted that 9% of victims/survivors required an interpreter (see figure 16)²⁹.

²⁸ Source: On Track. Data note: On Track holds information on victims/ survivors accessing SA and SA-based support. Method note: On Track is the only dataset in this needs assessment that collects information on language.

²⁹ Ibid.

Figure 15 Victims/survivors first language, for services the On Track database 2020 to 2022

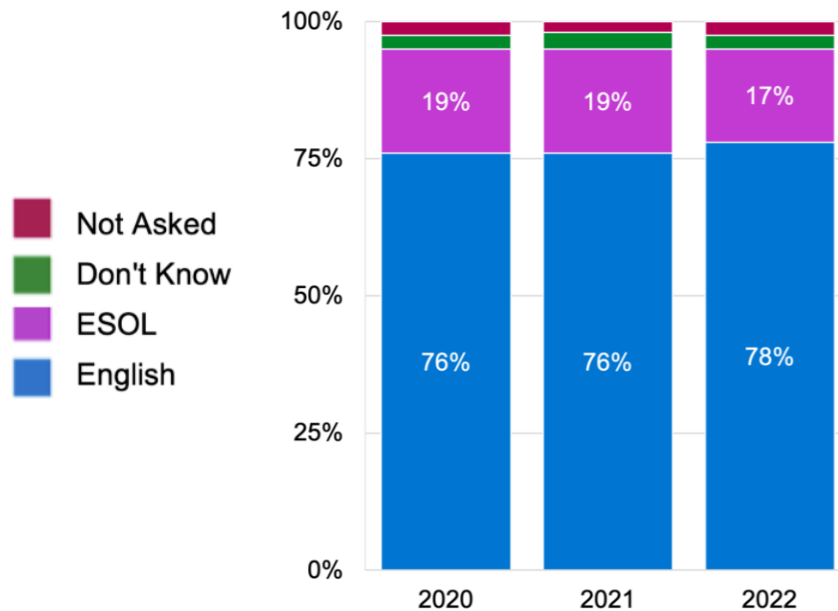
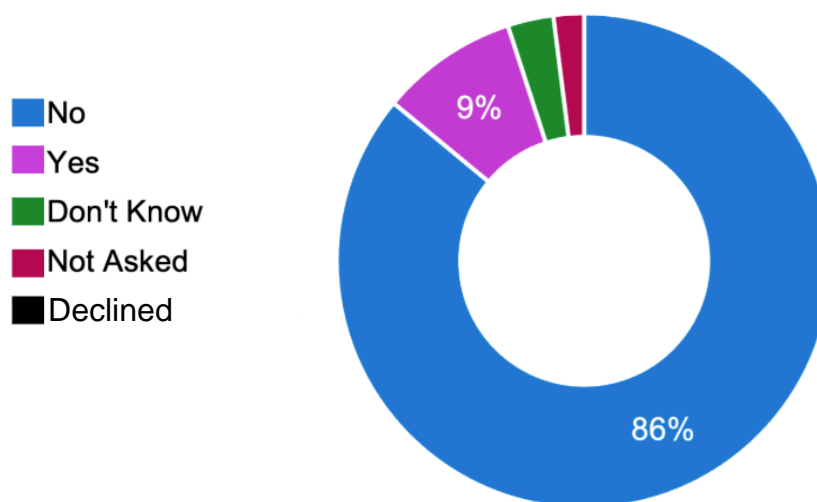


Figure 16 Victims/survivors needing an interpreter, for services the On Track database 2020 to 2023



Substance use

Victims/survivors with substance use needs 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. Practitioners suggest there is not enough support available to meet demand.

“Mainstream refuges might risk assess that the substance use is just too high for them to manage with their levels of staffing” - VCS practitioner

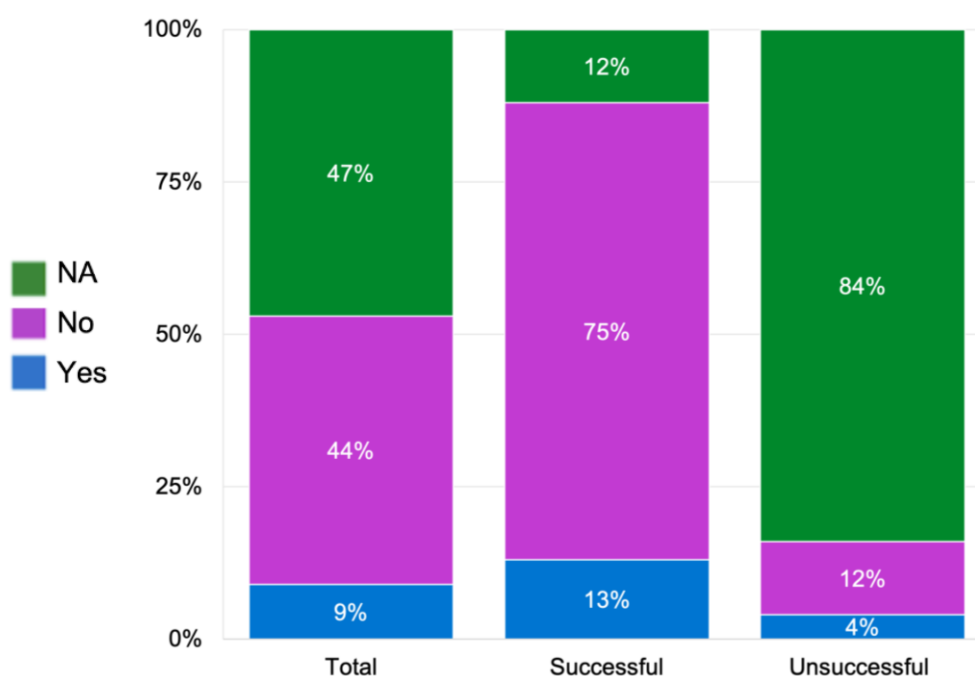
Need	<p>Some voluntary sector and statutory partners spoke about increases in demand from victims/survivors with substance use needs. However, the lack of data means it is unclear to what extent there has been an increase across London.</p> <p>It remains difficult to accommodate victims/survivors with substance use needs in a mainstream refuge. The refuge may not have the resources or the skills to support this cohort, for instance due to lacking addiction specialists or 24-hour staff.</p> <p>Equally, it might not be appropriate for the other victims/survivors in the refuge, particularly those with children, to be in close vicinity with someone with high needs around substance use.</p>
Known demand	<p>113 (2%) of households owed a duty had a drug use need.</p> <p>15 (22%) victims/survivors rough sleeping in London had a drug use need.</p> <p>231 (5%) of victims/survivors referred for support through On Track services had a substance use need.</p>
Known provision	<p>36 (3%) of women placed in refuges through Women's Aid had a substance use need.</p> <p>365 (4%) of victims/survivors supported through Mayoral commissioned services had a drug support need.</p>
Known unmet need	<p>53 (6%) of women not placed in refuges through Women's Aid had substance use need.</p> <p>4 households were unable to be supported by Mayoral commissioned services due to drug needs.</p>

Mental health

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. The proportion of successful referrals with these needs is higher than those who were unsuccessful. This shows that provision is being delivered.

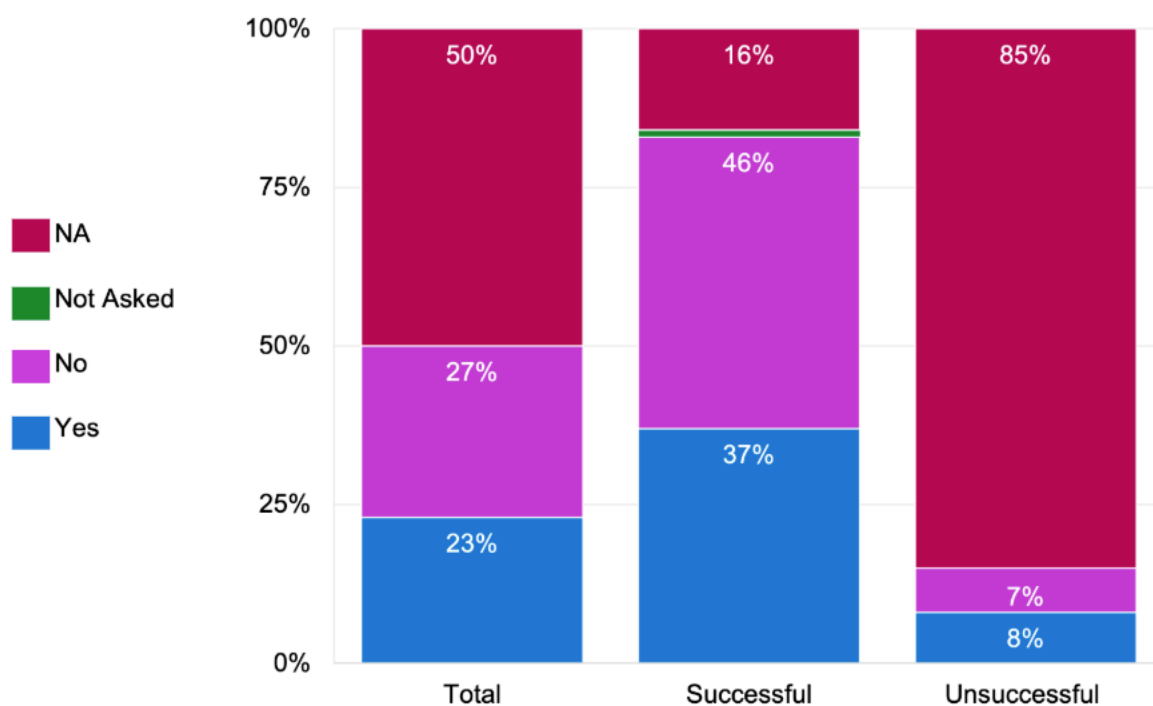
36% of victims/survivors supported through Mayoral commissioned services in 2022/23 had mental health needs. On Track data suggests victims/survivors with more severe mental health needs face barriers to accessing support. Whilst other characteristics in this analysis cannot be directly linked to unsuccessful referrals, 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. See figures 17 and 18 for further detail.³⁰

Figure 17 Proportion of total, successful and unsuccessful referrals to accommodation services in On Track for victims/survivors with mental health support needs, 2022/23



³⁰ Source: On Track. Method note: Many service providers have reported the challenges in monitoring characteristics of victims/ survivors who successfully receive support. To capture a true understanding, monitoring and data recording practices must be improved. The data in figure 17 looks at the characteristics of victims/ survivors who are successful or unsuccessful and does not show any direct influence of characteristics on chances of success. Figure 17 data looks at the characteristics of victims/ survivors who are successful or unsuccessful and does not show any direct influence of characteristics on chances of success.

Figure 18 Proportion of total, successful and unsuccessful referrals to accommodation services in On Track for victims/survivors with a mental health disability, 2022/23



However, although there is some mental health provision to meet this need in safe accommodation services there is not enough overall. Moreover, victims/survivors with more acute mental health needs require specialist support that is not routinely provided within mainstream safe accommodation.

“A lot of our clients aren’t eligible for traditional refuges, because of substance use or mental health or other things.” - VCS practitioner

Need	<p>Some practitioners spoke about the increase in demand from victims/survivors with mental health needs. It is unclear whether this reflects the frequency or severity of cases with mental health needs, which should be explored in future research.</p> <p>'Mental health needs' is quite nuanced as it 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.</p>
Known demand	<p>943 (16%) of households owed a duty had a history of mental health problems.</p> <p>46 (67%) victims/survivors rough sleeping in London had a mental health need.</p> <p>1,933 (40%) of victims/survivors requesting support through On Track services had mental health support needs.</p>
Known provision	<p>2,189 (24%) of victims/survivors supported through Mayoral commissioned services had a mental health need.</p> <p>160 (16%) of women placed in refuges through Women's Aid had a mental health need. This has gone up by 48% from 108 in 2019.</p>
Known unmet need	<p>68 households were unable to be supported by Mayoral commissioned services due to mental health needs.</p> <p>150 (16%) of women not placed in refuges through Women's Aid had mental health need.</p>

Insecure immigration status

Victims/survivors with insecure immigration status face systemic barriers accessing support services. Provision has been improving but practitioners reflect that meeting this need is very complex and is not fully sufficient.

"NRPF is a very difficult area for service provision. For one of our NRPF ladies, we've spent [2 months] trying to find her somewhere but we've still got nowhere for her to go and she's now returned to live with the perpetrator. We did everything we could but these are the patterns we're seeing." - VCS practitioner

"Support and options available for people have no recourse public funds, it's just terrible." - VCS practitioner

Need	<p>A large number of service providers discussed the challenges in providing safe accommodation and support to victims/survivors with an insecure immigration status. Many of these victims/survivors have no recourse to public funds and are unable to access state welfare, including income support, housing benefit, universal credit, and local authority housing. The current commissioning system provides little support for this cohort 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.</p> <p>Moreover, a victim/survivor's insecure immigration status is often used by perpetrators as a means of coercion and control. This can mean 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.</p>
Known demand	2,072 (4%) of victims/survivors referred through On Track had no recourse to public funds.
Known provision	<p>87 (8%) women placed in refuges through Women's Aid had no recourse to public funds.</p> <p>1,497 (3%) referrals through On Track by victims/survivors with no recourse to public funds to were successful.</p>
Known unmet need	<p>107 households were unable to be supported by Mayoral commissioned services due to no recourse to public funds.</p> <p>81 (8%) women not placed in refuges through Women's Aid had no recourse to public funds.</p> <p>575 (1%) referrals through On Track by victims/survivors with no recourse to public funds to were unsuccessful.</p>

Bedspace capacity in refuges for women with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) is low but has been increasing. However there remain significant barriers to access funding even when spaces are available.

The percentage of refuge vacancies available to women with no 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. See figure 19.³¹

While available bed spaces have been increasing for women with NRPF, these vacancies only note that a woman with NRPF will be considered. It does not assure acceptance, as

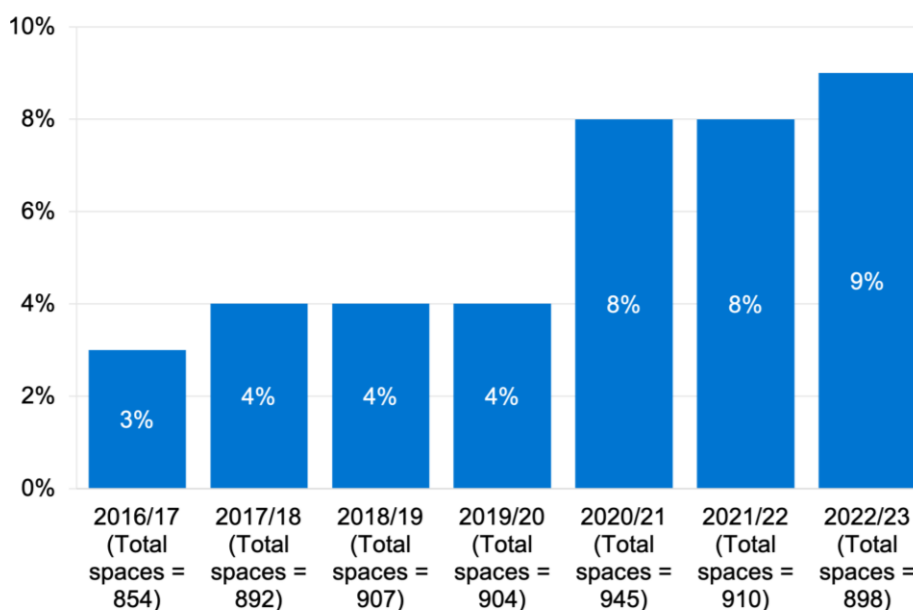
³¹ Source: Routes to Support. Data note: Routes to Support holds information on victims/ survivors seeking refuge through Women's Aid.

many vacancies require funding to be secured before considering women with NRPF. Service providers emphasised this remains a barrier for these women accessing refuges.

“Obviously the women with no recourse to public funds, we can only support them if they have funding secured through another stream” - VCS practitioner

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.

Figure 19 Refuge vacancies for women with no recourse to public funds in Greater London 2016/17 to 2022/23



Women with children

There is substantial demand for DASA for women with children. However, practitioners shared that finding provision for women with more than two children and women with older male children was particularly difficult.

“The idea of leaving your 14 year old son behind and taking the rest of your kids just doesn't seem like an option at all because the perpetrator could come home and then take their anger out at the 14 year old boy. So yeah, if there are like larger families of having four or five, six kids plus, refuge can't always accommodate” - VCS practitioner

Provision for families with more than two children or older male children should be expanded. Refuges are not always suitable and other forms of safe accommodation should be considered.

Need	<p>There were two main identified challenges around supporting women with children. Firstly, many refuges do not accept women with older male children. Secondly, safe accommodation often does not have the space to accommodate women with multiple children.</p> <p>These issues mean that when a woman with children is trying to flee domestic abuse, she has to make a decision on whether she accepts safe accommodation and is separated from her children.</p> <p>Children can also add a layer of complexity to the support required. For example, women may need help with navigating family court cases.</p>
Known provision	<p>481 (47%) of women successfully placed in refuges through Women's Aid had children.</p> <p>719 children were placed in refuges through Women's Aid.</p> <p>4,020 children were supported by Mayoral commissioned services.</p>
Known unmet need	<p>15 households were unable to be supported by Mayoral commissioned services due to family size or children's ages.</p>

Bedspace capacity in refuges for women with two or more children has been decreasing over the last 6 years, whilst bedspaces for women with three or more children remains limited.

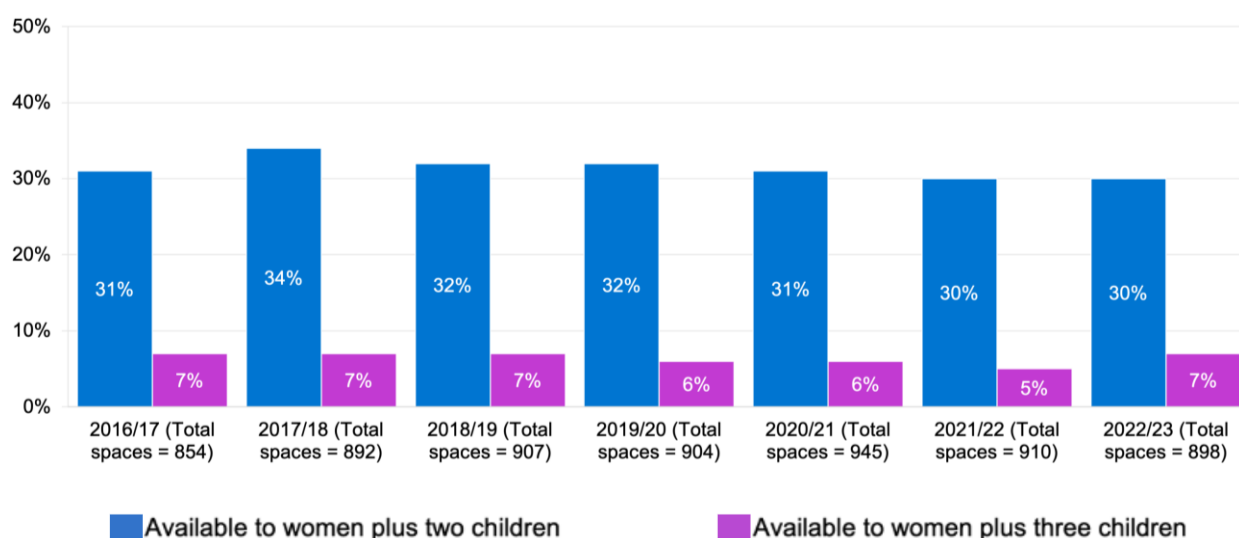
Data from Women's Aid shows that in 2022/23, the percentage of refuge vacancies available to women with two children was 29%. This is lower than previous years, following a steady decline from 34% in 2017/18. See figure 20.³²

For women with three children, the challenge in finding suitable bed space is greater. The capacity for bed spaces for women with three or more children has remained consistently low. In 2022/23, the percentage of refuge vacancies available to women with three children was 7%.

³² Source: Routes to Support. Data note: Routes to Support holds information on victims/ survivors seeking refuge through Women's Aid

Service providers explained that these barriers for women with two or more children increase when also intersecting with other needs (such as mental health or insecure immigration status).

Figure 20 Refuge vacancies for women with children in Greater London 2016/17 to 2022/23



Complex needs

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.

Although a large number of practitioners discussed the **increase in victims/survivors presenting with 'complex needs'**, the way complex needs was defined varied. The three most common definitions of complex needs were:

1. Victims/survivors with high support needs that cannot be accommodated in a mainstream refuge (usually victims/survivors with high mental health needs or substance use issues)
2. Victims/survivors experiencing multiple disadvantage. These are victims/survivors that suffer 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
3. Victims/survivors with overlapping and intersecting characteristics or needs. For example, male victims/survivors of domestic abuse that have no recourse to public funds. These victims/survivors require specialist support across a number of different areas

Despite the variation in definition, it has been widely acknowledged 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. However, resourcing or funding is not always sufficient to effectively provide this.

“I think complexities have definitely gone up... we’ve seen a distinctive increase of mental health and substance use” - VCS practitioner

*“The complexity of cases has changed towards being more complex, and **taking more time**” - VCS practitioner*

*“All women we support have **some level of alcohol or substance use support needs and we are a 24 hour service**. [These women will have been excluded from mainstream] because of their substance use so mainstream refuges might risk assess that the substance use is just too high for their levels of staffing ... or they’ve been previously evicted from other accommodation maybe due to arrears or anti-social behaviour. That **excludes them from quite a lot of services**.” - VCS practitioner*

Overall findings

Mayoral commissioned safe accommodation and DASA-based support services are not entirely meeting demand. Service capacity is a barrier, as is services’ ability to meet the needs of victims/survivors.

In 2022/23, 2,115 people were unsuccessful in receiving support from safe accommodation services. 29% of these referrals were unsuccessful due to capacity constraints. However, 19% were unsuccessful because the services were not able to meet the needs of the victims/survivors. See figure 21.³³ (See annex 2 for further details)

³³ Source: Mayoral monitoring of Mayoral commissioned services 2022/23. Data note: Mayoral commissioned services holds information on the 63 services in the Mayoral commissioning portfolio

Figure 21 Unsuccessful referrals to safe accommodation services, by reason 2022/23 (n = 2,115)

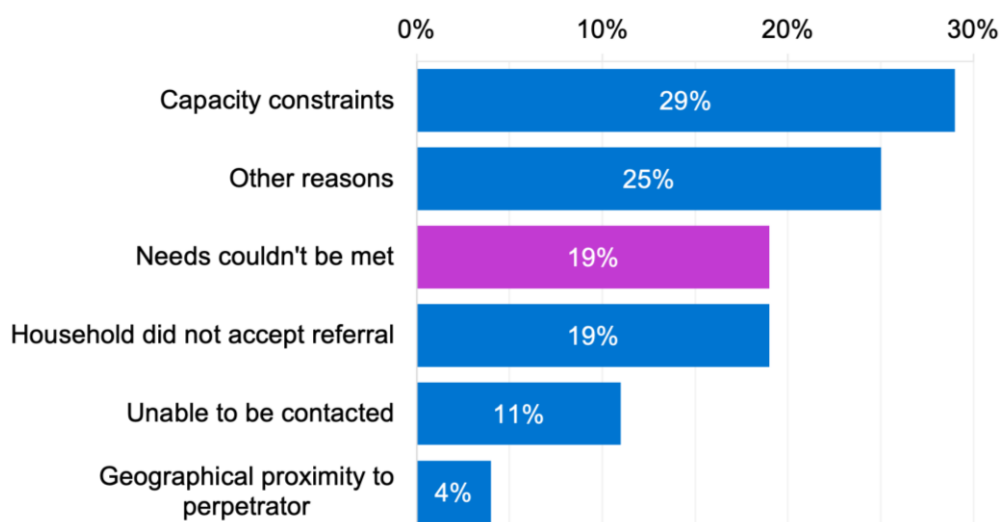
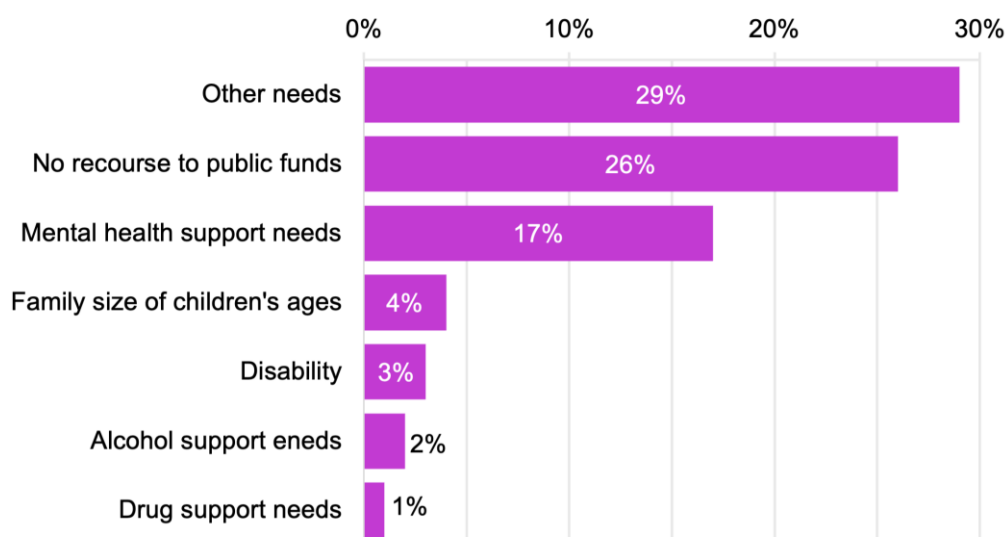


Figure 22 The specific need that could not be met, of all referrals that were unsuccessful because their needs were not met 2022/23 (n = 409)



Where safe accommodation 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. See figure 22.³⁴ Other reasons included:

³⁴ Source: Mayoral monitoring of Mayoral commissioned services 2022/23. Data note: Mayoral commissioned services holds information on the 63 services in the Mayoral commissioning portfolio

- assessment showed referred person was the aggressor as opposed to victim/survivors;
- no current domestic abuse;
- current address too close to available refuge spaces;
- unable to complete risk assessment;
- incomplete information given to victims/survivors;
- culturally sensitive issues.

Provision: flow through the system

The following chapter explores the flow of DASA-based support demand through the system to better understand the nature and challenges of provision in the London ecosystem.

This section examines provision through the lens of the journeys that victims/survivors take to access, receive and move on from safe accommodation and accommodation-based support			
Stages of the victim/survivor's journey	Accessing safe accommodation	Receiving safe accommodation and safe accommodation-based support	Move on
Research questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do victims/survivors access support? • What do referral pathways look like? • What are victims/survivors' experiences of accessing support? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are victims/survivors' experiences of receiving support? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does move-on accommodation look like for victims/survivors?

Accessing support: understanding referrals

There are a number of access routes into safe accommodation. Our research shows that referrals come from a wide range of sources including statutory agencies, personal support systems, and from victims/survivors themselves.

"Professionals... they give a number to the service user, and then the woman call us" - VCS practitioner

"First of all, I searched Google for Women's Aid numbers. There's a lot of numbers like some numbers in East London, West London" - Victim/Survivor

"I searched through them online" - Victim/Survivor

The referral pathways outlined below have been identified through our interviews with practitioners (local authorities, Mayoral commissioned services, and other VCS providers), interviews with victims/survivors, data submissions from tier 2 local authorities, and On Track.



Variation in the success rate of different referral pathways

There is substantial variation in the success rate of different referral pathways. As we can see in table 3 and the **highlighted rows**, between 2020 and 2023 there were only 541 self referrals into domestic abuse services, accounting for 3% of all referrals. However, 83% of self referrals were successful. In contrast, over the same period of time, there were 2,765 referrals from MARAC to domestic abuse services, accounting for 16% of all referrals. Only 28% of these referrals were successful – the lowest success rate of all referral pathways.

Our analysis of On Track data and our engagement with practitioners indicate that there can be several reasons why a referral may be successful/unsuccessful. This includes capacity and an ability to meet victim/survivor needs.

However, the reason why the success rate varies between different referral sources, or if and why the quality of referrals vary between different referral sources, is not known. This should be an area of further research.

Table 3 Success rate into services on the On Track database,³⁵ by referral source 2020 to 2023

Organisation	Number of referrals made in 2020 to 2023	Percentage of all referrals made that year	Referral success rate
Other	3,066	18%	46%
MARAC	2,765	16%	28%
Children's services	1,769	10%	45%
Friends/Family	1,522	9%	55%
Police	1,380	8%	40%
Another VAWG Service	1,062	6%	65%
IDVA	826	5%	59%
GP	617	4%	56%
Self referral	541	3%	83%
Mental health	533	3%	39%

Variation in how needs are assessed at the point of referral

A number of practitioners that were engaged discussed how victim/survivor **needs were not always fully identified** at the point of referral. This was partially due to victims/survivors **not always knowing what their needs were** when they approached a service. A number of victims/survivors that were engaged said that when they initially sought support, they **just wanted to feel safe** – they were not necessarily looking for anything else (e.g. mental health support).

“To be honest, I really do not know what I was looking for... I just picked up the phone just to ask for help” - Victim/Survivor

Some practitioners reported that victims/survivors did not always feel comfortable discussing all of their needs at the point of referral, especially if they had not built up a **trusting relationship** with the referring provider/practitioner.

“That's the sort of immediate thing that's been referred for, but then actually, you do a little bit of digging, and there's a huge housing need. There's mental

³⁵ Source: Women's Aid, On Track database. Data note: On Track holds information on victims/survivors accessing SA and SA-based support.

health...substance use...all the kind of rest. So it's like, the domestic abuse support can often be the entry point” - VCS practitioner

Practitioners also discussed how assessments can misidentify needs. This could be because referrals were made on the basis of a person’s protected characteristic, rather than their circumstances. For example, a person may be referred to an LGBTQ+ support service because of their sexual orientation, but their most pressing need, which needs to be met, is housing.

“Very often referrals from mainstream organisations focus a lot on the fact that someone is LGBTQ+ like that seems to be the biggest issue that they see” - VCS practitioner

Additionally, practitioners reported that in some cases, people could be referred to a specialist ‘by and for’ service on the basis of their protected characteristic, but they hadn’t experienced domestic abuse.

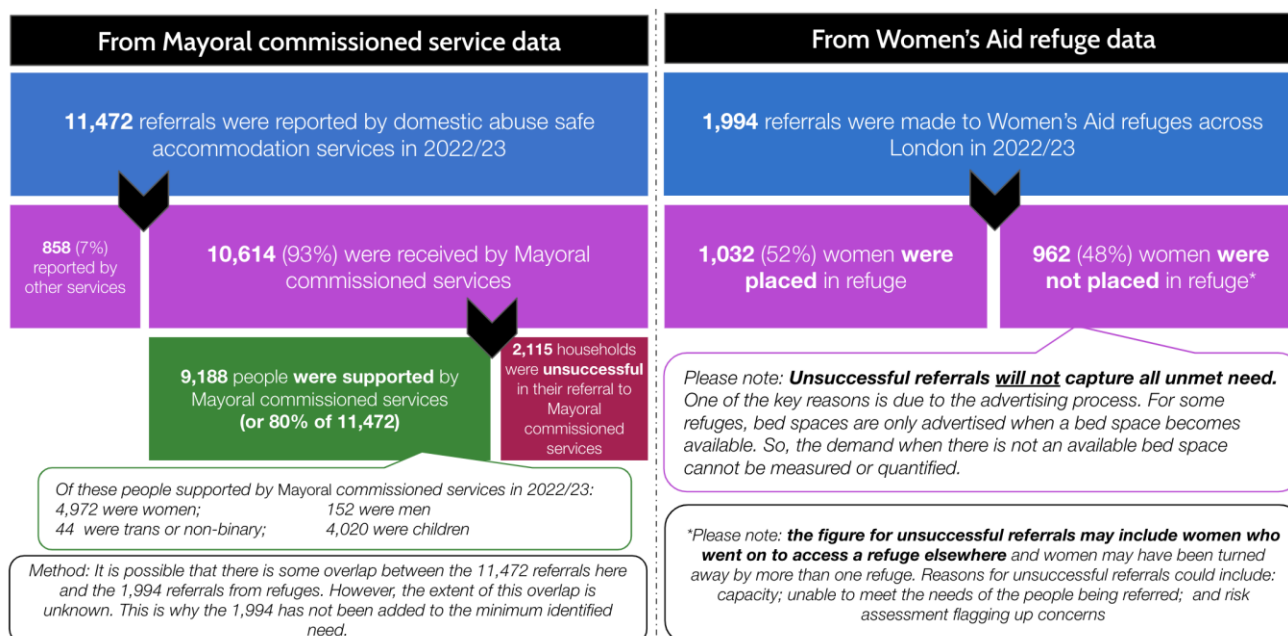
Safe accommodation and support types available

In 2022/23, 80% of referrals reported by domestic abuse safe accommodation services commissioned by the Mayor 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. See table 4 for a breakdown of successful/unsuccessful referrals from Mayoral commissioned service data and Women’s Aid refuge data.³⁶

³⁶ Method: It is possible that there is some overlap between the 11,472 referrals here and the 1,994 referrals from refuges. However, we do not know the extent of this overlap. This is why the 1,994 has not been added to the minimum identified need.

*Please note: the figure for unsuccessful referrals may include women who went on to access a refuge elsewhere and women may have been turned away by more than one refuge. Reasons for unsuccessful referrals could include: capacity; unable to meet the needs of the person being referred; and risk assessment flagging up concerns

Table 4 Breakdown of successful/unsuccessful referrals from Mayoral commissioned service data and Women's Aid refuge data



The Mayoral services commissioned under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) offer a wide range of support to victims/survivors. See table 5 for further details on how many of the supported victims/survivors received which type of support.

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.

Table 5 Further details on how many of the supported victims/survivors received which type of support (including percentage)

Of the 9,188 supported victims/survivors recorded by the Mayoral commissioned services ³⁷ and placed in safe supported accommodation:	
6,686 (73%) received general support	4,074 (44%) received domestic abuse prevention support
5,801 (63%) received advocacy support	3,158 (34%) received advice services such as financial and legal
4,870 (53%) received specialist support (according to the MHCLG definition) ³⁸	2,803 (31%) received children's support
4,522 (49%) received housing-related 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

Prior to accessing safe accommodation in 2022/23, most women stayed in unsafe circumstances, which could add further strain on their wellbeing. Table 6 indicates the breakdown in percentage of the different types of accommodation being accessed by women before accessing safe accommodation.³⁹ It shows 51% of women accessing safe accommodation in 2022/23 were staying in unsuitable accommodation before they received a bed space.

³⁷ Mayoral monitoring of Mayoral commissioned services 2022/23. Data note: Mayoral commissioned services holds information on the 63 services in the Mayoral commissioning portfolio.

³⁸ Source: Delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse in domestic abuse safe accommodation services

³⁹ Source: Routes to Support. Data note: Routes to Support holds information on victims/survivors seeking refuge through Women's Aid. Other (23% - each <1%).

Table 6 Suitable and unsuitable accommodation women are accessing before accessing safe accommodation (in percentage)

Suitable accommodation before accessing safe accommodation	Unsuitable accommodation before accessing safe accommodation ⁴⁰
16% House owned/rented in own name	25% Living with family/friends
4% Moved on from another refuge	15% House owned/rented in perpetrators name
1% Hospital/Rehabilitation	9% Emergency temporary accommodation
1% Supported accommodation	2% Rough sleeping

Most women (25%) relied on the support of friends and family before accessing a refuge space. Women's Aid research found that sofa-surfing with relatives or friends is often problematic for women fleeing domestic abuse, citing issues of overcrowding, broken friendships and, in some instances, further abuse.⁴¹

Table 6 indicates 9% of women needed emergency temporary accommodation. This research has found that often temporary accommodation is used as a fall back to meet overflow of demand. However, Women's Aid research emphasises that hotels and emergency facilities often lack the essential support and safety needed for vulnerable women in such situations.

Refuge accommodation

Most safe accommodation in London is provided by refuges. Practitioners suggested that refuges were often a higher commissioning priority and expressed a need for investment in a wider range of accommodation.

As of March 2023 there were 1,745 bed spaces for adults and children across London for domestic abuse victims/survivors in Mayoral commissioned safe accommodation services. The majority (56%) of these were provided through refuges (see figure 23).⁴²

⁴⁰ Unsuitable accommodation in this analysis has been calculated to include rough sleeping, living in a house in the perpetrators name, emergency temporary accommodation, and living with family/friends.

⁴¹ Source: Women's Aid, The Hidden Housing Crisis (2020)

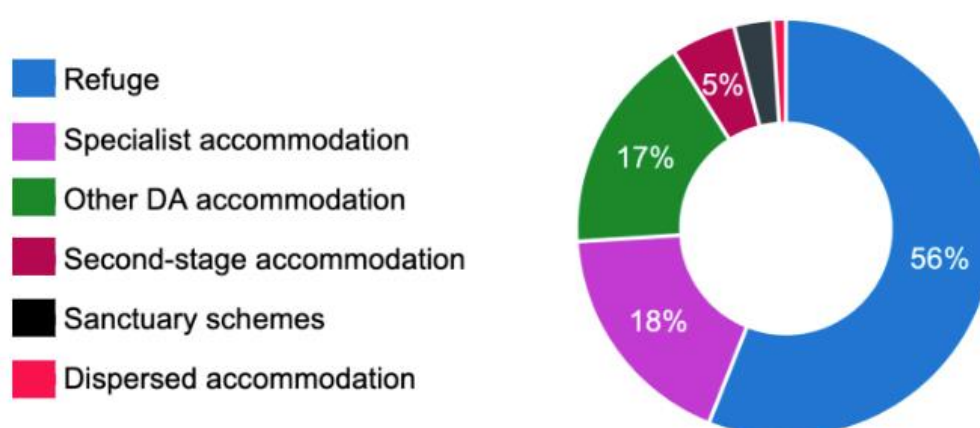
⁴² Source: Mayoral monitoring of Mayoral commissioned services 2022/23. Data note: Mayoral commissioned services holds information on the 63 services in the Mayoral commissioning portfolio. *Other DA accommodation includes safe accommodation through safe houses, temporary accommodation, and provision of outreach support to survivors who were in existing safe accommodation that were provided through other means.

Specialist accommodation also 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.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 acknowledges that victims/survivors may require a diverse range of safe accommodation. However, service providers have highlighted that commissioning priorities mean there are barriers to services providing other forms of accommodation, such as support in the community.

Practitioners told us that refuge capacity often does not meet demand and that in many cases, even where a refuge space may have been available, it could not sufficiently meet victim/survivor needs.

Figure 23 Proportion of domestic abuse safe accommodation bed spaces in Mayoral commissioned services, by type of accommodation, 2022/23



Refuges are providing the most capacity for safe accommodation in London. However, Routes to Support data shows that in 2023/24 so far, 50% of referrals to refuge placements have been unsuccessful (see figure 24)⁴³.

⁴³ Source: Routes to Support. Data note: Routes to Support holds information on victims/ survivors seeking refuge through Women's Aid. Method note: The number of referrals is not equal to the number of individual women accessing support as they may include a person making repeated attempts for support. Furthermore, these figures only show demand where this is a vacancy available on Routes to Support and do not include women who call the NDVHL for a vacancy and find nothing suitable listed.

Figure 25 Proportion of successful and unsuccessful placements in refuge recorded by Routes to Support, 2023/24 (Q1-Q3) [n: 508]

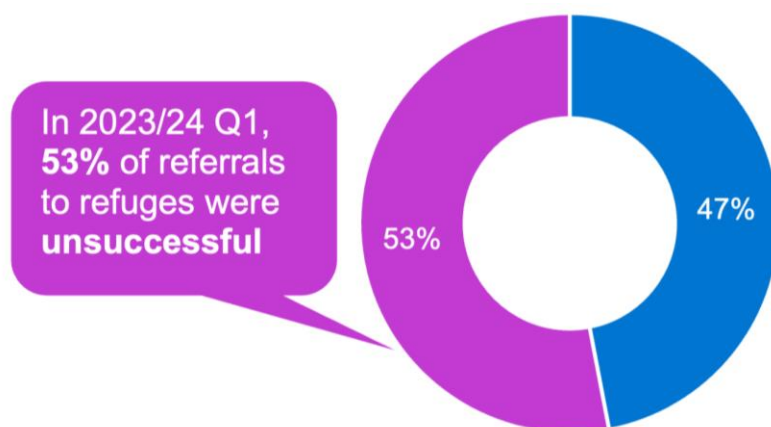
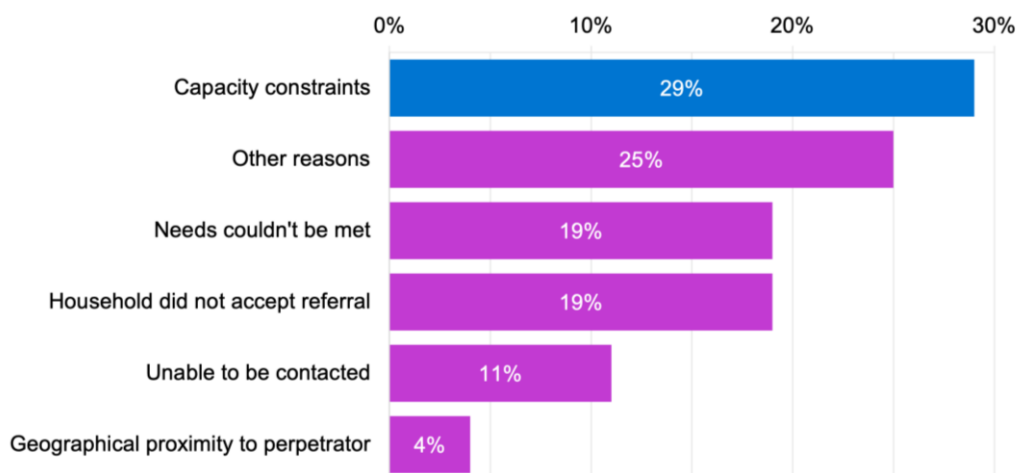


Figure 24 Unsuccessful referrals to safe accommodation services, by reason 2022/23 (n = 2,115)



In 2022/23, 2,115 people were unsuccessful in receiving support from safe accommodation services. **29% of these referrals were unsuccessful due to capacity constraints.** However, 19% were unsuccessful because the services were not able to meet the needs of the victims/survivors. See figure 25 for further details.⁴⁴

“If there aren't enough [safe accommodation spaces] in the first place, you can't even get to those conversations around additional support needs, because you can't meet the primary need of a safe roof above their head” - VCS practitioner

London's provision in relation to England

⁴⁴ Source: Routes to Support. Data note: Mayoral commissioned services holds information on the 63 services in the Mayoral commissioning portfolio

While it is clear that there is not enough refuge provision to meet demand, it is worth noting that London has proportionately higher refuge availability than elsewhere in England and has a volume of bed spaces 2% higher than Council of Europe recommendation.

In 2022/23 London’s volume of refuge bedspaces was 2% higher than the recommended volume by the Council of Europe. 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 adjusted for actual need.

There was a spike in refuge capacity in 2021 when refuge capacity was above the Council of Europe minimum recommendation by 5%. However, this has dropped again in the following years in 2022 and 2023.

The percentage shortfall is calculated using the Council of Europe minimum recommendation of one space per 10,000 population.⁴⁵ This shows the difference between the number of refuge spaces in an area and the recommended number of refuge spaces for that area, as a proportion of the recommendation. In instances where the percentage shortfall is a negative value, the number of refuge spaces exceeded the minimum recommendation (see annex 2 for more details).

Sanctuary schemes

Sanctuary schemes were discussed as one alternative to refuges. They fulfil the legal definition of safe accommodation and allow victim/survivors to stay in their own home.

What are sanctuary schemes?	Benefits of sanctuary schemes
<p>Sanctuary schemes are defined as ‘a multi-agency victim/survivor centred initiative which aims to enable households at risk of domestic abuse to remain in their own homes and reduce repeat victimisation through the provision of enhanced security measures (sanctuary) and support’.</p> <p>Operationally speaking, it refers to a range of security measures which provide enhanced security measures to one's own home or the perimeter of the home, such as the installation of additional locks or a sanctuary safe room.</p>	<p>Interviewees have confirmed that sanctuary schemes are effective at providing support to victims/survivors who do not want to leave their home.</p> <p>It also mitigates the disruption associated with moving between a home to a refuge, then temporary accommodation, then permanent accommodation.</p> <p>For one victim/survivor, using a sanctuary scheme meant that they could continue pursuing their education whilst living at home, which was previously a barrier to seeking a refuge place.</p>

⁴⁵ Source: Women's Aid Federation of England - data from Routes to Support, the UK violence against women and girls service directory. Method note: Council of Europe's measure of minimum shortfall, sees negative percentages indicating a higher volume of available refuge bedspaces.

<p>Sanctuary schemes are mostly delivered by local authorities in London of which the housing department is usually the main funding source. Other agencies, such as the Police, VCS, or housing associations can also be involved.</p> <p>As of March 2023, sanctuary schemes amounted to 3% of Mayoral commissioned domestic abuse safe accommodation spaces. The type of sanctuary scheme installation varies according to a victim/survivor's needs. In Hammersmith & Fulham, the £16,000 provided for sanctuary installation costs was spent on securing a total of 36 homes in 2022/23, for which one a Safe Room was built at a cost of £2,789.40.</p>	<p>Practitioners have also suggested sanctuary schemes are most effective when implemented alongside perpetrator management programmes as it encourages the perpetrator to leave the home and gives the victim/survivor the choice to stay safe within their own home.</p>
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“We did a report on how long people are staying in the accommodation once the sanctuaries [have] been installed and they're there for a long time. They're not there like it hasn't worked for moving after six months, 12 months, 18 months there, a long time” - Statutory practitioner

“We have a budget for Sanctuary schemes, which is quite large to say the least, and it's working well” - Statutory Practitioner

Despite the existence of sanctuary schemes, it is unclear what the demand for, and provision of, sanctuary schemes looks like in London due to the limited availability of data.⁴⁶

- According to the London Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation strategy (2021), sanctuary schemes need to be made available in all boroughs. However, it is unclear how many boroughs are implementing sanctuary schemes and in what way. Our engagement has showed that there is significant variation in how sanctuary schemes are delivered locally. For example:
 - for some local authorities, the schemes that exist are old, not advertised, or do not adequately address the needs of victims/survivors. However, there is high awareness in some areas, resulting in high demand, and long wait lists;
 - some local authorities have quite restrictive criteria and only offer it to women deemed high risk. Other local authorities are less restrictive and will install if it's safe for the victim/survivor and aligns with their wants and needs.

⁴⁶ For more details on provision go to annex 2

- Anecdotally, we have heard that sanctuary schemes have been effective. However, there has not been a recent evaluation of sanctuary schemes, and there is not a lot of data on their long term impact. According to the Whole Housing Project evaluation (2021) there is currently limited consensus on what makes a Sanctuary Scheme effective

“So we got a dedicated provider and actually did that work ourselves and paid for it ourselves, because the local scheme didn't have that sort of offering that would meet the needs of what we wanted” - VCS practitioner

“For example, I think one of the things we were looking at is ring doorbells, for example, if that could be a part of sanctuary scheme provision as well and some don't have that.” – Statutory practitioner

Victim/survivor experience of DASA-based support

Positive experiences

Survivors shared that safe accommodation and DASA-based support, in many cases, met their needs. In some cases, victims/survivors felt the support they received had a highly positive impact on their journeys.

Safe accommodation-based support can have a profound impact on victims/survivors of domestic abuse. As a form of ‘crisis’ intervention, safe accommodation-based support 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) also has an important and positive impact on victims/survivors. Several victims/survivors who were engaged described how this support went above and beyond what they were expecting to receive.

*“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**”*
- Victim/Survivor (MOPAC Monitoring form)

Victim/survivor case study

Person B is currently in a refuge with dependent children. They have been in the refuge for 4-6 months since starting support within DASA services. They have stated that it meets all their needs. B's feedback of their experience with the system has been highly positive. They reported improvements in mental health and a feeling of safety and security as a

result of their time in a refuge, and they sought additional support for 8 distinct needs including domestic abuse prevention advice, legal advice, financial advice, and counselling for children. They had no suggestions of improvements that could be made to any part of the existing system and are incredibly grateful for all of the support they have received thus far; stating that the refuge has been like a rehabilitation centre for them and their children.

Benefits of practical and emotional support

Practical and emotional support provided to victims/survivors empowered them to become independent and rebuild their lives in the longer term.

Alongside a bed space, victims/survivors also highly valued the practical and emotional support provided by services. Practical and emotional support provided to victims/survivors empowered them to become independent and rebuild their lives in the longer term

*“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 of the support I have received” - Victim/Survivor (MOPAC Monitoring form)*

*“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**.” - Victim/Survivor (MOPAC Monitoring form)*

*“I received an email showing I was awarded housing benefits for the hotels where I had rent arrears. Thank you for all your support and help. It feels like **a huge weight has been lifted off my shoulders and life is changing for the better post-abuse**. I appreciate your assistance in helping me keep my kids safe” - Victim/Survivor (MOPAC Monitoring form)*

Support with securing housing, domestic abuse awareness, prevention work, and wider financial and day-to-day support, were all reported by victims/survivors as essential in allowing them to move away from abuse and become more independent. Victims/survivors also reported that the emotional support they received helped them build their confidence and empowered them to rebuild their lives.

Negative experiences

Not all experiences were positive.⁴⁷ A number of victims/survivors responding to our survey, discussed unmet needs stemming from the quality of the accommodation, shared living conditions and a lack of amenities. Others highlighted that the duration of counselling and therapy was not long enough meet their needs.

In terms of housing needs, 6/13 responses to our survey question regarding their experience of the DASA-based support focused on the facilities themselves, noting inadequate amenities and discomfort with shared living arrangements.

In terms of accommodation-based support, counselling and therapy were the most common support types in our survey, that did not meet victims/survivors' needs. The majority of comments focused on the short duration of support, lack of meaningful outcomes, and inadequate quality of counsellors/therapists. Interviews with victims/survivors added that there could be long wait times to receive counselling and therapy.

“We offer counselling in house, and we offer 16 sessions... unfortunately, this is not enough. I mean, 16 sessions is very, very little... you can barely touch the surface, when you do two months of therapy” - VCS practitioner

Victim/survivor case study

Person C with two dependent children, sought a temporary safe space in a refuge which they were granted after a 2-4 week wait. They occupied the safe space for 7-12 months. They had a negative experience with seeking housing as they did not feel they were given much information or alternative options for housing. Their refuge met some of their needs, however they did not like having to share facilities with other families and would have far preferred separate units for each family. They have since moved on from the refuge to a new home provided by a housing association, however the home is too small for their needs and C is currently sleeping in the hallway so their children can have a room each. C fundamentally disagrees with the idea of refuges with multiple occupancy and shared utilities as the experience of such housing situations can be as damaging as the abuse.

Temporary accommodation to address shortfalls in availability of safe accommodation

Temporary accommodation is a form of temporary housing which is used while a local authority finds more permanent accommodation. It is designed for households experiencing homelessness. Types of temporary housing include a room in shared housing; a flat or

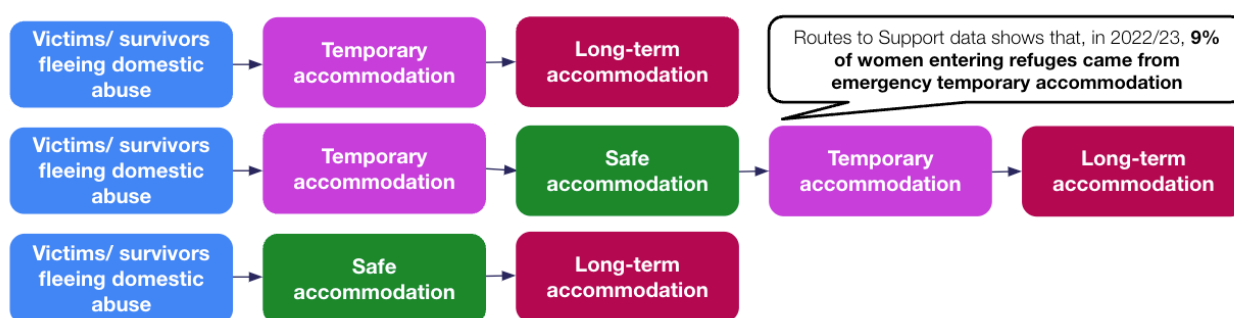
⁴⁷ Method note: As part of this needs assessment, a survey of victims/survivors was conducted to capture their experiences within DASA, map their pathways through services, and hear their thoughts on improvements that could be made. 40 people responded to the survey, and while this is a small sample, their experiences provide valuable context and are worth drawing out for this report. For more details on the experiences of victims/survivors go to annex 2

house from a private landlord; short-term council or housing association tenancy; and hostels, bed and breakfasts (B&B) or hotels. Research by Shelter in 2023 found that 16% of households in temporary accommodation, nationally, are in a hostel, B&B or budget hotel.⁴⁸

Victims/survivors' journeys can vary significantly, and temporary accommodation can be used to plug the gap at any point.

“Those that are supported by others in the community, a lot of those are going to temporary accommodation, but some will go into temporary accommodation whilst they wait for refuge.” - VCS practitioner

This needs assessment found that temporary accommodation can be used at several different points of victims/survivors' journeys. Below are some example illustrative journeys.



As highlighted earlier, Routes to Support data shows that, in 2022/23, 9% of women entering refuges came from emergency temporary accommodation.

It is recognised that not all victims/survivors' journeys look like this – journeys can vary significantly, with victims/survivors entering different forms of accommodation at different periods of time (including friends/family and returning to live with the perpetrator). The diagram above is meant to illustrate that temporary accommodation is used when there is no safe accommodation or long-term accommodation (e.g. privately rented accommodation or social housing).

The use of temporary accommodation in London

Practitioners highlighted that temporary accommodation is being used to support victims/survivors where safe accommodation services cannot meet the demand.

⁴⁸ Shelter, Still Living in Limbo: Why the use of temporary accommodation must end (2023).

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 LA/HA stock accommodation.

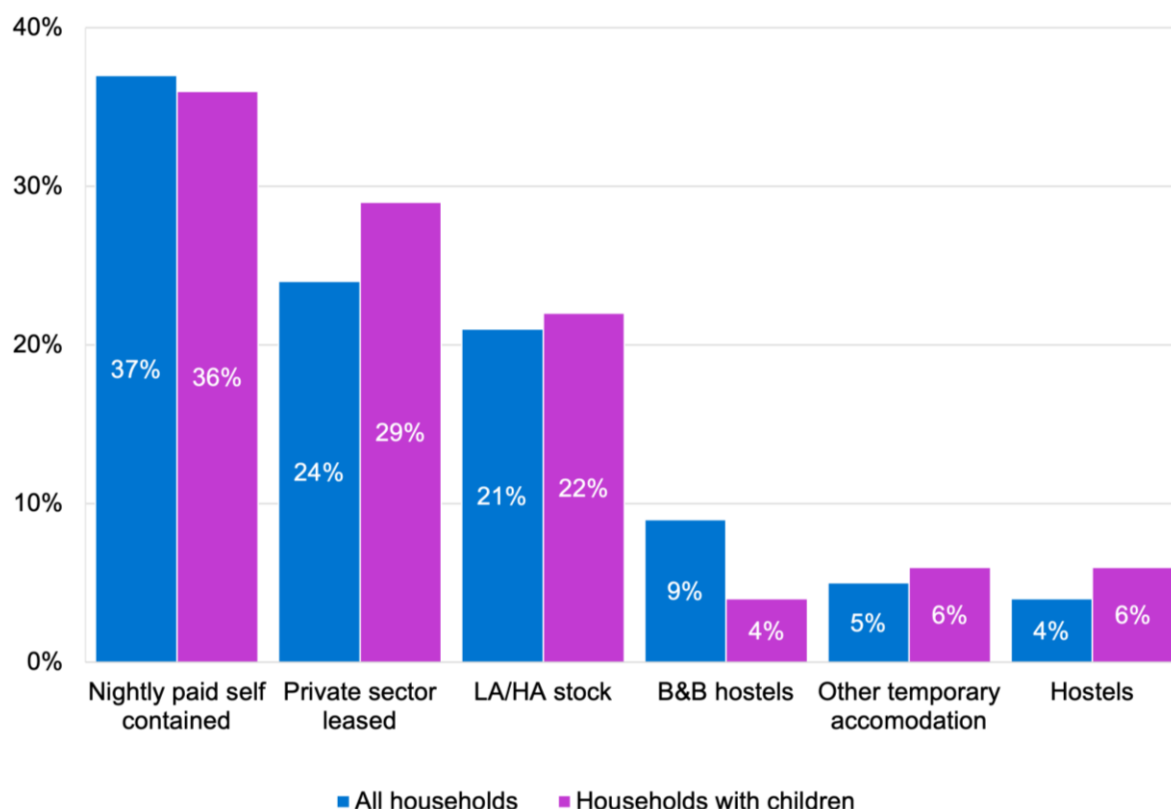
In London, households impacted by domestic abuse with children placed in temporary accommodation were most likely to be in nightly-paid self-contained accommodation (37%), or private sector leased (29%). By contrast, in the rest of England, households with children in temporary accommodation are most likely to be in local authority or housing association provided accommodation (35% or 1,380 households).

In 2022/23, London single households impacted by domestic abuse were most likely to be placed in nightly-paid self-contained accommodation (37%), or private sector accommodation (24%). In contrast, in the rest of England, single households in temporary accommodation are most likely to be in local authority or housing association provided accommodation (30% or 1,980 households), or bed and breakfast (21% or 1,340 households). See figure 26 for further details.⁴⁹

Stakeholders shared significant concern over the quality and suitability of temporary accommodation for victims/survivors.

⁴⁹ Source: H-CLIC. Data note: H-CLIC holds information on victims/ survivors accessing housing support through their Local Authority

Figure 26 Proportion of households placed in temporary accommodation, by type of accommodation, 2022/23



Quality: Both victims/survivors and service providers told us about the poor quality of temporary accommodation, which often lacked the most basic necessities. Although this is not unique to victims/survivors of domestic abuse, the impact, particularly on well-being and the recovery process, can be particularly acute on victims/survivors due to their vulnerability.

“I have my kitchen, but no fridge ..., no microwave, no oven, no ventilation” - Victim/Survivor

“I don't have mattresses to sleep... the room is very dirty” - Victim/Survivor reflecting on their first night in temporary accommodation

*“Conditions in, in temporary housing, temporary accommodations are **pretty awful**, and **women are stuck in there for some time, sometimes take months** more, because there is no move-on accommodation” - VCS practitioner*

Suitability: Because temporary accommodation can be offered to anyone approaching the local authority for housing, with priority need, it can be **mixed gender**. This could make it **unsuitable for vulnerable female victims/survivors**.

“We've had a woman who left our refuge and was placed in TA [temporary accommodation] and one of the other two people in that TA, he has convictions for

stabbing previous partners and an incident has occurred with this person” - VCS practitioner

Practitioners reflected that there are very few temporary accommodation sites that were physically accessible to disabled victims/survivors.

Victim/survivor case study

Person D has a history of experiencing domestic abuse with a previous partner and their most recent partner. D identifies as disabled and has school-age dependents. After leaving a refuge, D was given temporary accommodation which was located on the other side of London. D states **‘on top of the trauma that has happened, we are now in a peculiar place, an area we don’t know anyone’**.

D’s dependents were too old to share a room however the council wouldn’t move the family from temporary accommodation to a more suitable residence. The temporary accommodation became **infested with maggots and was very damp. D complained multiple times to the council, but these complaints went unanswered.** As the council would not move D and their family into another property they moved to a private rented property, where they have to top up the local housing allowance by quite a substantial amount to meet the rent.

Victims/survivors often do not receive safe accommodation-based support in temporary accommodation. This impacts wellbeing and recovery.

Instability and short term placements: Stakeholders told us that victims/survivors can be constantly moved around different temporary accommodations, or they stay in one temporary accommodation for months or years. This lack of stability and certainty can have an extremely negative impact on victims/survivors and undo some of the benefits gained from staying in safe accommodation and receiving support. Ultimately, this can increase the likelihood that a victim/survivor returns to live with their perpetrator.

*“I had one lady that had moved **eight times in a 16-month period**” - VCS practitioner*

Support: Victims/survivors can still receive support when they move on from a refuge, including support moving in, financial support to help them get settled, and advocacy support. Because they are moving on from a refuge they should, in theory, receive less intense support than in the refuge. However, they end up needing the same amount of support - or more - because of the poor conditions of temporary accommodation and the impact that has them. Victims/survivors reported that the transition from comprehensive

support within a refuge to minimal support within temporary accommodation was very difficult to handle.

*“So when I’m leaving that place [refuge]...still I want some support from my caseworker...When I’m moving temporary accommodation...I don’t have mattress to sleep ... the room is very dirty ... I have very bad condition washroom...how to bathe, how to cooking...I don’t have heater. My room window is broken at temporary accommodation. [It] is bad in all this experience and that time I need [support]...I’m very comfortable living refuge...but **after leaving refuge they [caseworker] just drop [you]**. ‘Now you are leaving so now I can’t do [anything] so now your calls, your responsibility...you send messages to council you send mails to council’” - Victim/Survivor*

Move-on accommodation

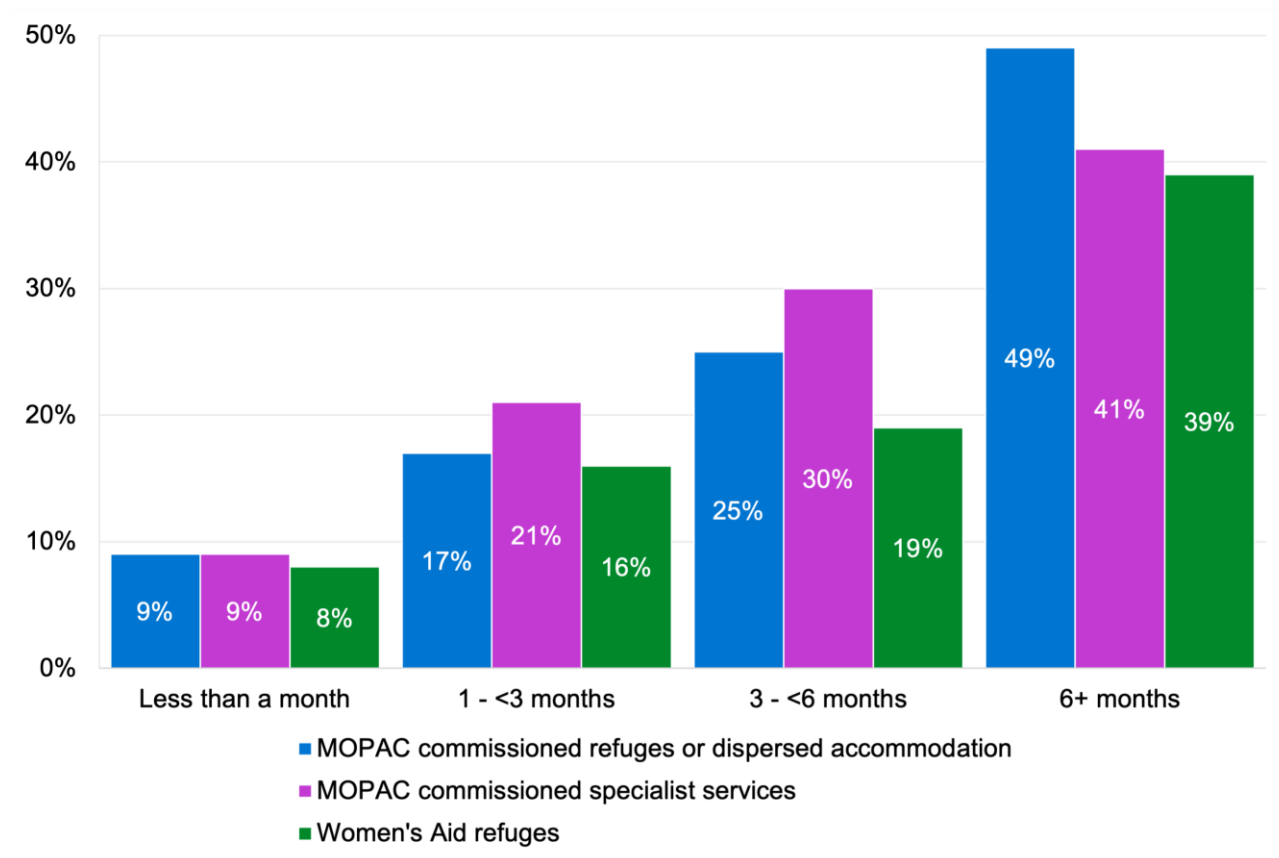
Victims/survivors are staying longer in safe accommodation, potentially due to cases being more complex and challenges in securing move-on accommodation. This creates barriers for other victims/survivors in gaining access to safe accommodation.

In 2022/23, most victims/survivors needed to stay in their safe accommodation for over 6 months. Longer periods of stay are reducing services’ capacity (see figure 27)⁵⁰.

⁵⁰ Source: Mayoral monitoring of Mayoral commissioned services 2022/23; Routes to Support. Data note: Mayoral commissioned services holds information on the 63 services in the Mayoral commissioning portfolio. Data note: Routes to Support holds information on victims/ survivors seeking refuge through Women’s Aid.

Across the refuges and specialist services operating in London, as well as the Routes to Support database, the majority of domestic abuse victims/survivors stayed in their safe accommodation for more than 6 months in 2022/23.

Figure 27 Average length of stay by victims/survivors in domestic abuse safe accommodation in 2022/23, by type of accommodation



London refuges have slightly higher average lengths of stay compared to the national average. This reflects challenges in move-on accommodation. A lack of efficient move-on accommodation limits DASA service providers' ability to allow victims/survivors to rebuild their independence when they no longer need support.

One voluntary practitioner explained that in their specialist refuge service, some victims/survivors have stayed for six years because of struggles to move on to appropriate housing.

Impacts on housing provision

Housing services are not consistently providing longer-term accommodation across London to households impacted by domestic abuse once their homelessness duty has expired.

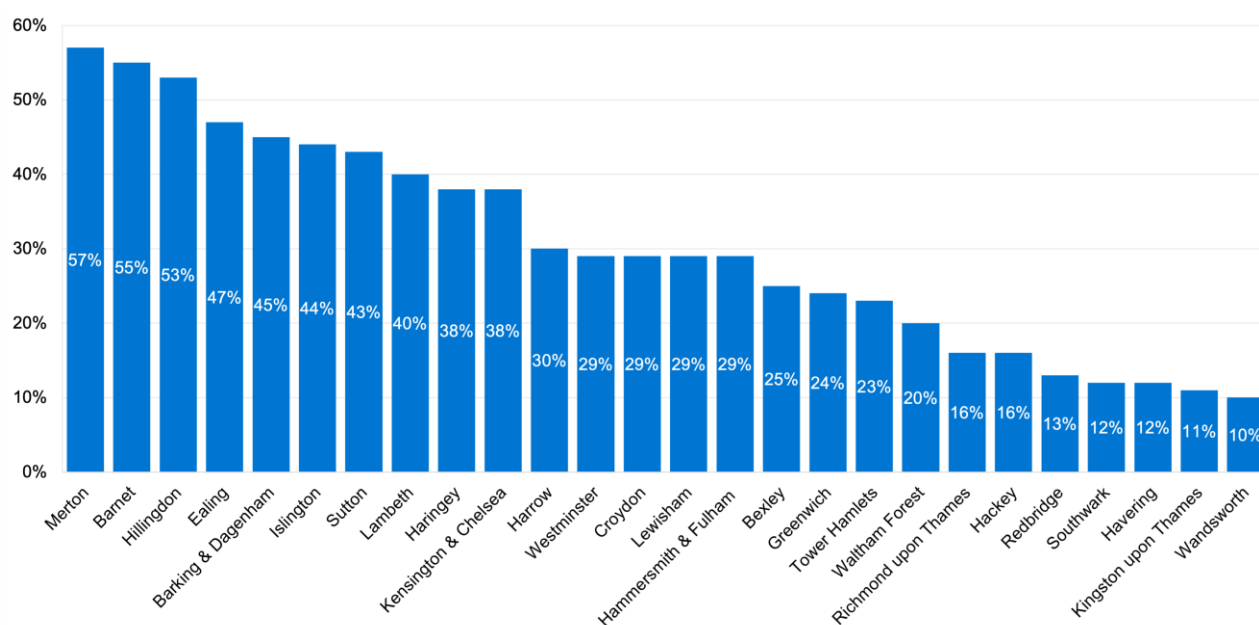
Similarly to safe accommodation services, the **housing sector is also limited in its ability to support domestic abuse victims/survivors** consistently across London's local

authorities. Service providers highlighted that **commissioning systems limit their ability to prioritise domestic abuse victims/survivors** for housing provision.

H-CLIC data highlights **Merton, Barnet and Hillingdon** as local authorities with the **highest rates** in London of **securing households with accommodation** once their relief and prevention duties have ended in 2022/23 (see figure 28)⁵¹.

In comparison, this data highlights Southwark, Havering, Kingston upon Thames and Wandsworth as local authorities facing the most challenges to securing accommodation once a duty ends.

Figure 28 Proportion of households who secured accommodation after their homelessness duty ended, due to domestic abuse, 2022/23



Social housing is one type of move-on accommodation for survivors who have accessed DASA-based support. There is high demand for social housing in London, with limited supply and long waiting lists

As privately renting in London becomes increasingly unaffordable, there is greater pressure on social housing to provide permanent long-term accommodation to the general population as well as to victims/survivors of domestic abuse. However, this increased demand for social housing has led to a crisis, characterised by increasingly limited supply, and long waiting lists. Despite priority need thresholds, victims/survivors are struggling to access social housing.

⁵¹ Source: H-CLIC, 2022/23. Data note: H-CLIC holds information on victims/ survivors accessing housing support through their Local Authority

*“There's not enough accommodation. Because when you look at the stock that you have versus the demand it's ridiculous... **you've got two bedroom waits of 15 years**” - Statutory practitioner*

*“Historically you know someone might be on the social Housing Register and expect to get a council flat within, I don't know, five years?... **That waiting list is now 15 years**” - VCS practitioner*

“It's definitely a housing stock issue. Number one, there's not enough houses in London” - VCS practitioner

*“There is **no move-on accommodation**. So that, that is a huge challenge... Before, they would access social housing. **There are very few boroughs that offer social housing anymore**. So the main option that women are given is from private owners” - VCS practitioner*

*“We have housing managers there and they just say, **we haven't got the housing, we haven't got the space**” - VCS practitioner*

*“It doesn't matter that the law has been changed, that we've now got a tier one Duty...if **the housing isn't there**” - VCS practitioner*

Impacts on service delivery

Local authority housing teams are under intense pressure. They face high demand for their services but are operating with limited resources, capacity, and finances. As a result of these pressures, practitioners reported that some local authorities are engaging in practices which do not provide adequate housing support for victims/survivors. This is creating barriers for victims/survivors in accessing move on accommodation.

Practices reported by practitioners in our engagement included:

- delayed decision making;
- high evidence thresholds, with victims/survivors having to provide proof that they are victims/survivors of domestic abuse;
- use of 'local connection' rules;
- inconsistent housing band allocations.

*“And then like I said, because the **housing crisis** that we have some gatekeeping, which I guess is not necessarily always intentional, but **if you've got limited resource, it then becomes who gets what**” - VCS practitioner*

“Gatekeeping, I suppose is the basic reason... there's a lot of people in the waiting list, and they're trying to reduce the numbers in those higher bands” - VCS practitioner

*“There's **a lot of gatekeeping**, even to this day, there's still a lot of gatekeeping” - Statutory Practitioner*

*“Gatekeeping from local authorities.... when we tried to get someone out of an abusive relationship and apply for homelessness, there's **lots of back and forth** which shouldn't happen, including **asking for lots of the proof that these women are indeed victims of domestic abuse**” - VCS practitioner*

These findings align with recent research from Women's Aid, Solace Women's Aid, and the Public Interest Law Centre on gatekeeping practices by local authorities in London and the impact on victims and survivors.⁵²

Some victims/survivors who were unable to access permanent housing went into temporary accommodation after their placement in safe accommodation. It was suggested that this was due to local authorities having low housing stock and the general lack of affordable housing. Due to the shortage of temporary accommodation within boroughs, local authorities are increasingly placing households out of borough.

Routes to Support data⁵³ shows that in 2022/23, most victims/survivors leaving refuges did not end up in long-term, secure, accommodation (see table 7)⁵⁴. A quarter (25%) of victims/survivors leaving refuges ended up in temporary accommodation, compared to 19% in 2020/21. Many practitioners highlighted the increasing use of temporary accommodation in the 'move-on' space was due to the lack of affordable housing and the local authorities having low social housing stock.

⁵² Source: Women's Aid; The Domestic Abuse Report 2020 The Hidden Housing Crisis. Solace Women's Aid, Priority Need For Housing For Survivors Of Domestic Abuse: One Year On. Public Interest Law Centre, 'Abused twice': the 'gatekeeping' of support for domestic abuse survivors in every London borough.

⁵³ Source: Routes to Support; Shelter, Still Living in Limbo: Why the use of temporary accommodation must end (2023).

⁵⁴ Source: Routes to Support; Shelter, Still Living in Limbo: Why the use of temporary accommodation must end (2023). Data note: Routes to Support holds information on victims/survivors seeking refuge through Women's Aid.

Table 7 Refuge: victims/survivors successful move-on location

Refuge Victims/survivors successful move-on location (n = 1,329) ⁵⁵	26%: New home
	25%: Temporary accommodation
	7%: Living with family/friends
	5%: Another refuge
	4%: Returned to live with perpetrator
	4%: Returned to old home
	3%: Supported accommodation

Impact on victims/survivors of domestic abuse

The experience of moving into temporary accommodation was found to be distressing for some victims/survivors. Victims/survivor are often told in advance what day they need to leave a refuge. However, some were not told until the day they were leaving safe accommodation where they were being placed. Very few had been able to view the accommodation in advance. This was reported to sometimes be an incredibly distressing experience for several reasons:

- victims/survivors can **wait hours on the day** they are meant to be leaving before the local authority tells them where they are going;
- victims/survivors are **not given any options** of temporary accommodation to choose from, and they are unable to view the accommodation in advance;
- the temporary accommodation is **not always in the borough within which the homeless application was submitted** — victims/survivors can end up moving to a borough that they do not know very well.

Practitioners said that this happens because once entering safe accommodation, you are no longer considered by housing teams to have an immediate housing need. When leaving safe accommodation, they consider a case on that day.

*“We basically just **react on the day** when someone's leaving refuge. That's the day that they need temporary accommodation. That's the day that we're able to source it because **we can't hold vacant accommodation - there's so much demand**” - Statutory practitioner*

Victim/survivor case study

⁵⁵ Data note: Routes to Support holds information on victims/survivors seeking refuge through Women's Aid.

Person E was only told their specific move out date 3-4 weeks prior to this date. E was not told where they would be moving to, what type of accommodation it would be (temporary, permanent or hostel) nor were they able to visit it before moving in.

The day E was scheduled to move out, they were told to pack their bags and wait for the council to text them their new address and information on where to find the key to access the property. E found this part and the lack of prior information very hard. E had felt safe for the last 6 months whilst in the refuge but now had no idea where they were moving to or what it would be like. The council did not text E until 7pm on their move-out day. E was ordered an uber by the council and had to go to an unknown property with their belongings at night. E didn't know what they would find which made them very anxious. E states this 'hits you hard'.

Impacts on securing longer term accommodation

These issues in securing permanent accommodation after safe accommodation was also found to create bottlenecks in the system.⁵⁶

A number of practitioners told us that the 'gold standard' for the length of time in a refuge was 6 months. This reduces the chances that victims/survivors become institutionalised and enables them to transition into independence. However, due to the lack of move-on accommodation after refuges, some victims/survivors are having to stay in refuges longer. This has a knock-on impact on the availability of refuge spaces for incoming victim/survivors.

The lack of move-on accommodation also means that victims/survivors are unable to leave temporary accommodation. A number of practitioners reported that some victims/survivors are staying in temporary accommodation for months due to the lack of appropriate move-on accommodation (affordable housing or social housing).

***"Women are staying a bit longer, mainly due to the difficulty in finding suitable accommodation for them to move on into... the average length of stay is roughly around 9 months, but we've had women stay as long as 18 months"** - Statutory practitioner*

***"Since the housing crisis we have seen the average length of stay growing... This then impacts the number of DA survivors we are able to support."** - VCS practitioner*

***"Clients who are moving through those accommodation routes, there isn't something at the end of that stay"** - VCS practitioner*

⁵⁶ Go to annex 2 for further details

“No ones being rehoused at the other end, you've just got a constant backlog of people that are waiting to be rehoused” - Statutory practitioner

“Where they go next is a big gaping hole across the board” - VCS practitioner

Challenges to DASA commissioning and provision

This chapter explores key challenges to DASA-based support and commissioning. These include:

- The definition of 'safe accommodation' is restrictive and not always well understood
- The MHCLG funded Mayoral commissioning cycle funds DASA service providers for either 12 or 13 months (dependent on the procurement contract type). This short-term funding cycles disrupt services' ability to provide support
- Although there are geographical patterns to need, victims/survivors are often not placed in refuges in their own borough for their safety. This creates challenges for local authorities commissioning based on need and causes tension in local delivery. Insights on the Pan London Housing Reciprocal are summarised in this section.

The definition of 'safe accommodation' is restrictive and not always well understood

The government's national definition of 'safe accommodation' can be restrictive. Due to this restriction not all victims/survivors are placed in what is legally defined as 'safe accommodation'. This means they do not qualify for safe accommodation-based support, such as counselling, financial aid or advocacy assistance.

The definition of safe accommodation **excludes mixed-gender accommodation**. However, some victims/survivors are placed here because there are no available spaces in single sex accommodation or because they accessed support through a different pathway.

For example, in one borough, victims/survivors of domestic abuse can be supported through the Vulnerable Adults Pathway, which provides specialist supported accommodation for people experiencing multiple disadvantages (e.g. complex mental health needs, addiction, criminal justice support needs). This accommodation is not single-sex, so it does not count as 'safe accommodation' and means **victim/survivors can't access safe accommodation-based support provided under the Part 4 Duty**.

Safe accommodation requires victims/survivors to leave their home or stay at home with a sanctuary scheme. This may not be feasible for victims/survivors who cannot leave their home, such as those with disabilities and mobility issues, and where the perpetrator continues to live. **Although they still require support, they are not classified as living in 'safe accommodation' and thus are denied access to these support services.**

*“One of the things that is also **really complicated** about **looking at** our **demand** is that because of the **definition of safe accommodation**, it means that we can **only really count our refuges** because it's all it has to be single sex provision” - Statutory practitioner*

“There is no feasible way for them to leave that property, even though they're experiencing abuse from the perpetrator at home. So that doesn't meet the definition of the Act at all” - VCS practitioner

Practitioners suggested that some local authorities lack a strong understanding of what the Duty entails and that some changes were not broadcast as much as they should have been. For example, the VCS, VAWG coordinators and homelessness teams all reported examples of local authorities lacking awareness of changes made within the Duty that meant those experiencing and fleeing domestic abuse have a priority housing need. This meant some practitioners enforced more stringent eligibility criteria on victims/survivors when accessing support. Additionally, many organisations assumed that the Mayoral funding had to be spent within the year despite this not being the case nor it being stated in the Duty guidance. This imposed unnecessary constraints on local authorities.

Practitioners also reported that there was a lack of clear definitions of the key terms in the Duty guidance and relevant documents. This resulted in practitioners interpreting terms differently and thus not adhering to the Duty in a consistent manner. 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’.

*“I think the **lack of clarity** over **key definitions in the guidance** in the commissioning framework had a massive impact on applicants understanding of what they were applying for and meant that there were delays.” - Statutory partner*

“Local authorities in a lot of cases don't necessarily fully understand the duties set out and the statutory guidance is often not adhered to, or interpreted, inaccurately” - Statutory partner

*“We've seen money that **councils** have been **allocated specifically** for the **duty** kind of **spent** on things that **aren't eligible under the guidance**.” - Statutory partner*

The MHCLG funded Mayoral commissioning cycle

The MHCLG funded Mayoral commissioning cycle funds DASA service providers for either 12 or 13 months (dependent on the procurement contract type). 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.

“We don't have long term funding...we've had to extend our funding every year...As I say, contract extensions are not best practice...So our providers have applied in the framework for additional funding ... to create capacity...But if at any point they go, we don't want to re-commission...What happens to that post? It's very short sighted. Because if at any point, the borough says...’We can't commit to that next year. We can only commit to [half]’...[We've] got these extra posts now and nowhere for them to deliver services. And the lack of sustainable funding is of complete is really, really, really complicated.” - VCS practitioner

Service delivery: 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 had not been accepted prevents long term planning and risks letting victim/survivors down if support becomes unavailable at short notice. Participants mentioned that some victims/survivors are not used to being supported, meaning it can take time to gain their trust and start making an impact in their journey. Therefore, short commissioning cycles can have a detrimental impact on the long-term recovery process of a victim/survivor.

Demonstrating impact of service delivery: Practitioners reflected that demonstrating impact within a 12 or 13 month period is very difficult. This was in particular reference to the time it took to set up the commissioned service which requires recruiting the right people and training to a specialist level. It could take up to 6 months before a service had even started to support victim/survivors. This poses a challenge for the services to demonstrate impact of the service delivery when only being able to rely on 6 months of evidence. Additionally, participants 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.

“[You] work really hard to find something [safe accommodation] that you think might be suitable, and then in reality, because of [lack of] staff capacity, [lack of] staff training, [lack of] understanding of what's needed and the type of need that people present with ... that can't be well accommodated” - VCS practitioner

“Having people with the right skill set.... It's such a specialist skill, and that it's very hard to find people that could really fit all of that in” - Statutory partner

Providers told us that the current funding model also impacts recruitment and retention of staff. They were clear that, in turn, these issues impacted the support victims/survivors received. This limited the beneficial impact they were able to have.

Recruitment and retention: Twelve- or thirteen-month commissioning cycles are conducive to short-term or zero-hour employment contracts due to the unknowns of whether the commissioning will be renewed the following year. Such employment contracts do not

offer job security which makes it challenging to recruit people as these are not desirable or often sought-after types of employment.⁵⁷

Likewise, this **lack of employment security means retention of staff is low** as employees search for more secure opportunities.

Such recruitment and retention challenges can mean **staff are leaving for local authority jobs** which **offer more sustainable employment** and are **often better paid**. This can offer an opportunity for sustainable provision of services from within local authorities. Participants also highlighted risks to the voluntary and community sector: it can also mean VCS staff are having to take on **more caseloads** which can lead to **burnout** and a **reduced capacity** to accept victims/survivors into their services.

“More and more people from the VAWG sector are moving to local authorities, which is dangerous...they’ve got people with specialist knowledge and expertise moving to local authorities, whether or not they’re really harnessed, we don’t know...Women’s Aid did a survey of their members and found that over half of the staff left to move to local authorities, which kind of shows how massive this is [recruitment and retention crisis in the VAWG sector]. And so for local authorities, they might say, ‘we’ve commissioned this service, they’re not able to recruit, we’ve been waiting for months, we’ve not got someone in post, we’re just going to keep it in house. Because actually, when it comes to VAWG recruitment, we’re [local authority] are doing quite well, because everyone’s coming over to us, and we’re able to pay them and give them benefits, etc’.” - Statutory practitioner

“You have really short term contracts, you have people that are completely burnt out and just like overworked, underpaid” - VCS practitioner

‘By and for’ services most acutely impacted

‘By and for’ services were felt to be most acutely impacted by this funding model. Often these services were smaller in size, therefore resourcing bid writing was difficult. Despite the value of ‘by and for’ services, they struggle to adhere to commissioning requirements such as writing impact reports and responding to all questions in the invitation to tender (ITT), in particular the ‘social value’ questions. The ‘social value’ section in an ITT often was felt to ask for subsidised work from the bidding organisation. ‘By and for’ services find it difficult to respond to the ‘social value’ as they do not have capacity/resources to provide subsidised work. Practitioners also shared their challenges in finding staff capacity to write bids and reports.

“I know there were massive efforts to make it [commissioning framework] more equitable. And you know, sort of ring-fenced funding or preserved for specialist

⁵⁷ Booth, A.L., Francesconi, M. and Frank, J. (2002). Temporary Jobs: Stepping Stones or Dead Ends? The Economic Journal, 112(480), pp.F189–F213. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0297.00043>.

*'by and for' services, but the essence of competitive bidding is still there ...you have **organisations bidding against each other** and **councils** are more likely to **go for** the one that is the **cheapest or best value for money**. So that's where the **larger generic**, and often the rogue exempt accommodation providers come in, because they're able to **offer more for less**, but actually, what they're doing is just massively undercutting the service. And also these **procurement processes** are **extremely lengthy** as like London councils report, I think it was a couple of years ago, now that gives the figure that **London statutory agencies spends 30% of their budget** on just the **procurement process**...because they're such **lengthy processes**, and **extremely expensive**. The **smaller services** are just **automatically excluded or disregarded**. So we had a lot of 'by and for' members of women's aid, but also members of Imkaan, that just **didn't have the time to even engage**." - Statutory partner*

"I would say that 95% of opportunities that come through the system, we don't go for them, because they're not possible to deliver with any level of positive service. So there's a big responsibility here for commissioners, and policymakers to revisit what they're expecting both social care, but the third sector to deliver" - VCS practitioner

*'if you are a **very small team** of perhaps five people delivering services...they're so small, and they **don't have a whole department** that's down to data analysts and performance and the big services like refuge for example, we have a whole team, the whole department of performance, **smaller 'by and for' services don't have that capacity**... [it is] **difficult to try and fulfil that request [on proving impact] when you're a very small team of five people**, and also delivering services and don't want to let the women down that you're supporting. And VCS partners always do say that sort of timelines, but ... **our priority is to deliver services**. Collecting data, whilst is most it is important. There's like a cost to it' - Statutory practitioner*

Victims/survivors placed outside their own borough

Although there are geographical patterns to need, victims/survivors are often not placed in refuges in their own borough for their safety. This creates challenges for local authorities commissioning based on need and causes tension in local delivery.

Rates of domestic abuse crimes recorded by the Metropolitan Police vary across London. In 2022/23, Barking and Dagenham continued to have the highest rate per 1,000 population of recorded domestic abuse offences (see annex 2 for further details). They are joined with Tower Hamlets, Greenwich and Croydon as the four London boroughs with the highest rates of domestic abuse offences recorded by the police - 13.0, 11.2, 11.1 and 10.4 offences per

1,000 population respectively (see table 8).⁵⁸ These four areas have remained the highest rates of crimes since 2020/21. However, they have all seen a slight decrease since 2020/21.

Table 8 Top 4 boroughs in London for the highest volumes of domestic abuse crimes recorded by the Metropolitan Police 2022/23

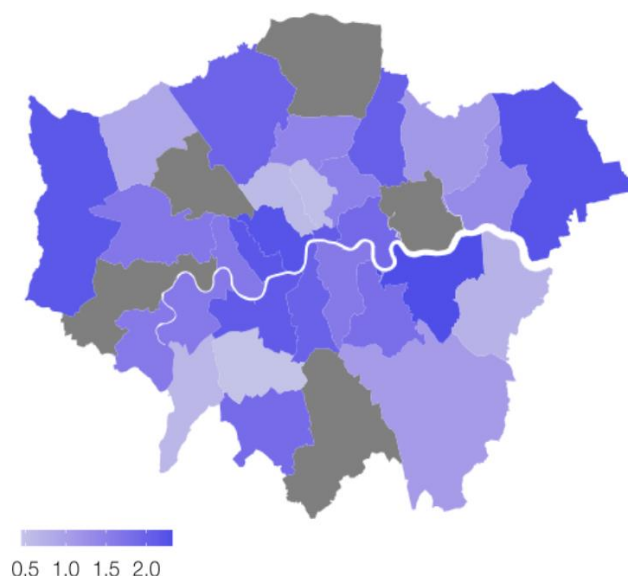
Borough	Rate of recorded domestic abuse crimes 2022/23 per 1,000 population	Change in rate of crimes from 2020/21
Barking & Dagenham	13.0	↓
Tower Hamlets	11.2	↓
Greenwich	11.1	↓
Croydon	10.4	↓

Rates of households requiring homelessness support from local authorities, having lost their last settled base due to domestic abuse, also differ across London. Greenwich, Westminster and Havering had the highest demand in 2022/23 for households approaching their own local authority for homelessness support due to domestic abuse. See figure 29. (See further details in annex 2)⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Source: MPS Crime Dashboard

⁵⁹ Source: MPS Crime Dashboard. Data note: H-CLIC holds information on victims/survivors accessing housing support through their Local Authority

Figure 29 Rate per 1,000 households of prevention and relief duties owed due to domestic abuse, London 2022/23



Westminster continues to be a hotspot in London for rough sleeping. This is seen for all rough sleepers and domestic abuse victims/survivors rough sleeping. As in previous years, the borough in which the greatest number of domestic abuse victims/survivors were seen rough sleeping in 2022/23 was Westminster, with 12 domestic abuse victims/survivors (18% of the overall London total) (see annex 2 for a visual representation). Camden and Ealing saw the second highest number of domestic abuse victims/survivors. However, this is still only half of the need in Westminster. (See table 9 for further details)⁶⁰.

Table 9 Ten London boroughs with the highest number of domestic abuse victims/survivors rough sleeping in London 2022/23

Borough	Number of domestic abuse victims/survivors rough sleeping	Percentage of domestic abuse victims/survivors rough sleeping	Change from 2020/21
Westminster	12	18%	+↑
Camden	6	9%	+↑
Ealing	6	9%	+↑

⁶⁰ Source: CHAIN, 2022/23. Data note: CHAIN holds information on victims/survivors seen rough sleeping across London, 68 domestic abuse victims/survivors

Borough	Number of domestic abuse victims/survivors rough sleeping	Percentage of domestic abuse victims/survivors rough sleeping	Change from 2020/21
Heathrow	5	7%	+↑
Lambeth	5	7%	+↑
Hackney	4	6%	+↑
Kensington and Chelsea	4	6%	+↑
Brent	3	4%	+↑
Bromley	3	4%	+↑
Hammersmith and Fulham	3	4%	+↑

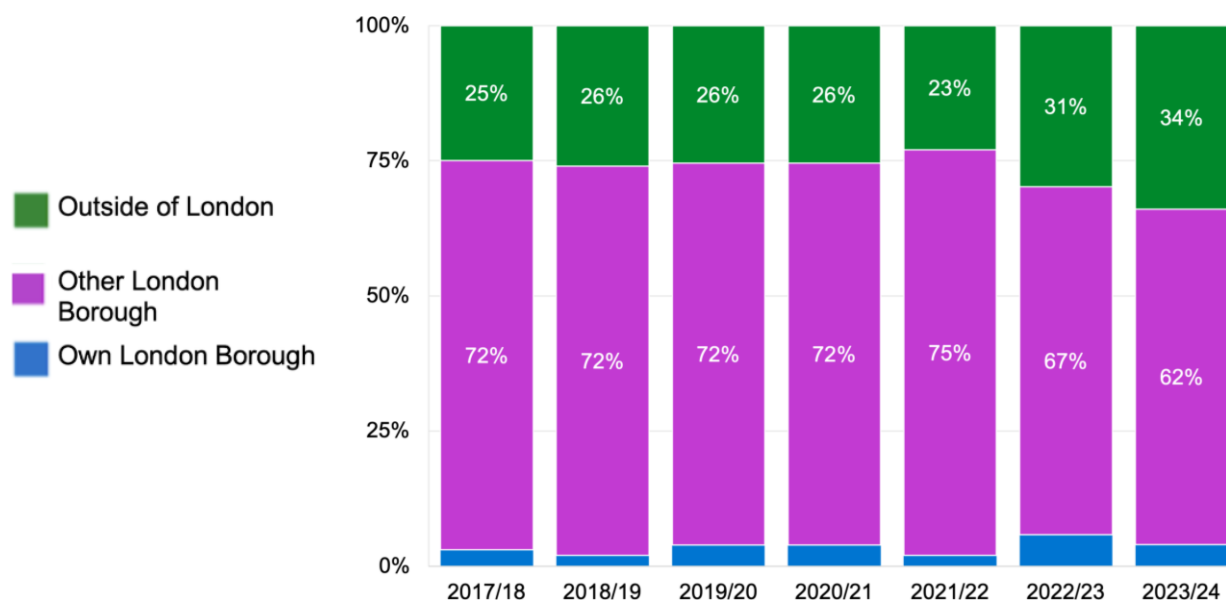
The majority of local authorities' refuge demand comes from other London boroughs, as well as outside of London; 98% of demand in 2022/23. Placing victims/survivors in a different borough to where they lived at the time of experiencing domestic abuse and/or accessing support is often for their safety.

Levels of need for safe accommodation support in a borough and demand on local authority services often do not align. Any measure of demand across London services must also consider that the majority of their demand comes from other London boroughs, as well as outside of London.

In 2022/23, 31% of women placed in London refuges had moved from outside of London. Another 67% had moved from other London boroughs (see figure 30)⁶¹.

⁶¹ Source: Routes to Support. Data note: Routes to Support holds information on victims/survivors seeking refuge through Women's Aid.

Figure 30 Proportion of known previous locations of women when placed in London refuges, 2017/18 to 2023/24



Moving victims/survivors is intended to provide safety from the perpetrator. However, many service providers have highlighted the challenges that this disruption to support networks and routines poses.

*“It’s very, very, very **unusual** that **somebody** from one borough **will remain in that borough**” - Statutory practitioner*

*“If you had a **refuge in borough with families** from **within the borough**, the **risk** of potentially the **address getting leaked** might be as **higher**” - Statutory practitioner*

However, this causes challenges for London boroughs in predicting demand for DASA-based support and commissioning local services to meet this demand. Practitioners shared that this can create tension on partnerships between local authorities.

It is unclear how to prioritise commissioning across local authorities due to the transient nature of refuge provision: commissioning of refuge spaces in London is not consistent by geography. This makes it challenging to plan and provide consistent provision and support and means local authorities have varying capacity to support victims/survivors.

Unequal commissioning means demand risks being directed towards boroughs with strong provision, meaning referrals may then become oversubscribed. **Unsuccessful referrals therefore do not necessarily equate to lower levels of DASA capacity and investment.**

This creates unequal provision across London: According to some VAWG coordinators this has fuelled a cycle of unequal service provision in which **boroughs with lower capacity levels are not incentivised to invest in DASA services** as they can pass on the demand to other boroughs.

Practitioners highlighted the risk of this ‘**postcode lottery**’ where victims/survivors can be denied support based on their eligibility to move to different boroughs. This is especially the case for specific cohorts of victims/survivors who require support from ‘by and for’ services that operate in certain areas.

It also creates tension across local authorities and puts pressure on partnerships: According to practitioners, this resulted in feelings of resentment or inequity because local authorities with good provision could accept referrals from other boroughs but they couldn’t always refer out to other boroughs who didn’t have sufficient provision.

“Where we’ve got more bed spaces, we have higher demand for them. So you get a lot of demand from other boroughs just because you’ve got the space” - Statutory practitioner

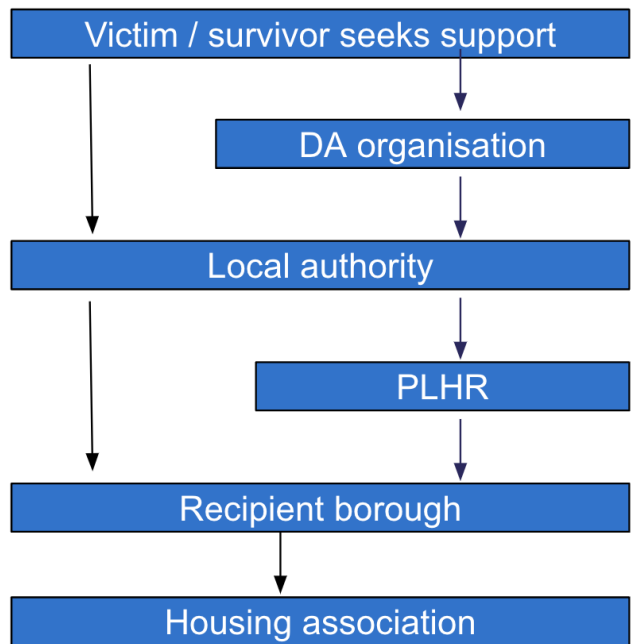
The Pan London Housing reciprocal (PLHR)

The Pan-London housing reciprocal (PLHR) was set up in 2017 and aimed to offer long-term and affordable housing for social tenants fleeing domestic abuse.

“So often those who are at risk of violence who have a social tenancy are forced to make a difficult choice – they can either stay at risk or become homeless. The Reciprocal offers a third choice, one that helps them find a safe and secure home which they can afford.” - Safer London

The Pan-London Housing Reciprocal (PLHR) is a housing scheme that allows people with social tenancies facing serious harm to secure an alternative social tenancy in a different London borough. The scheme is staffed by Safer London and is a voluntary collaboration between all London boroughs and housing associations (see table 10 shows the victim/survivor flow through the scheme). The scheme supports person(s) and households affected by DA, sexual abuse/violence, honour-based violence, hate crime, and serious youth violence.

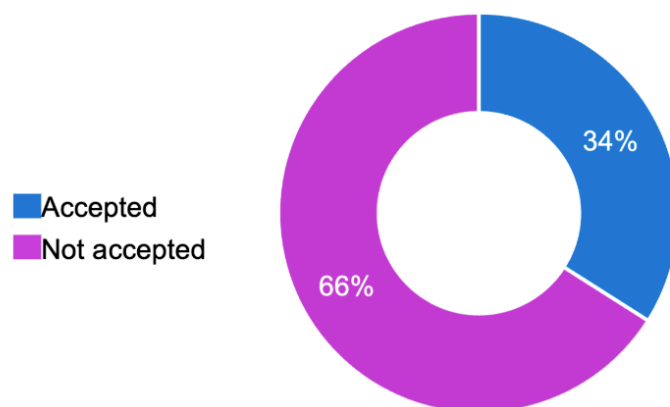
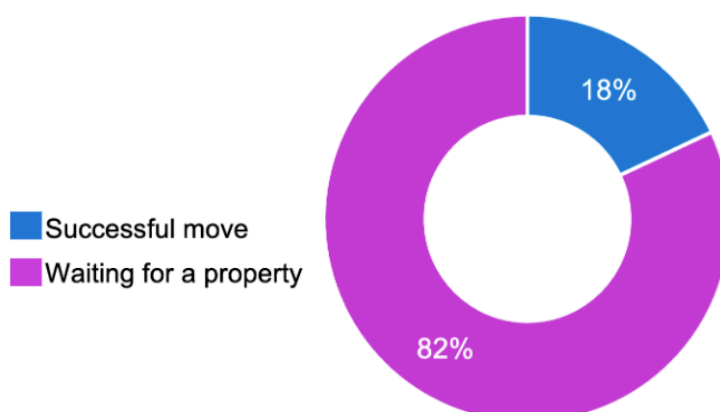
Table 10 Victim/survivor flow through the scheme



However, the scheme is limited in its ability to support domestic abuse victims/survivors fleeing abuse. Over six years of PLHR scheme lifetime, only 34% (1,128/3,298) of all referrals have been accepted (see figure 31)⁶². Of accepted referrals only 18% (248) cases have been moved successfully into housing, an average of 40 successful moves each year. 2018 saw the most successful year for the scheme, however still only 51 successful moves were made (see figure 32)⁶³. To compare to the demand for social housing, in 2021/22 alone, 24,000 social lettings were made. Despite its purpose, the PLHR scheme has had little impact on meeting demand.

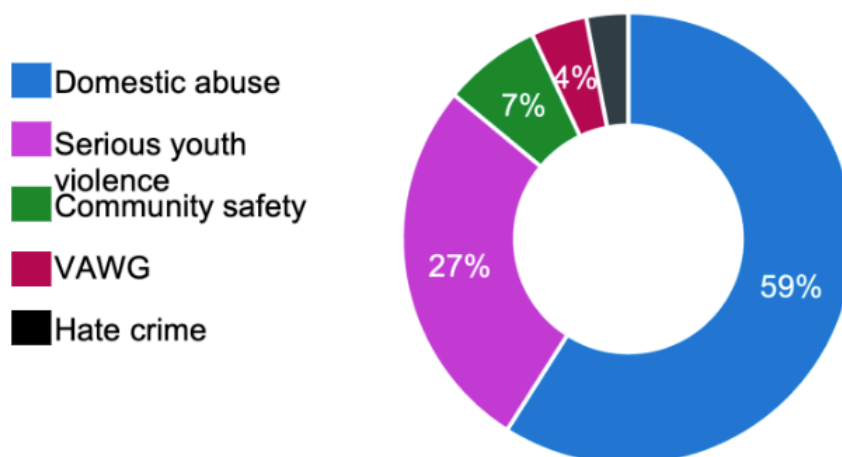
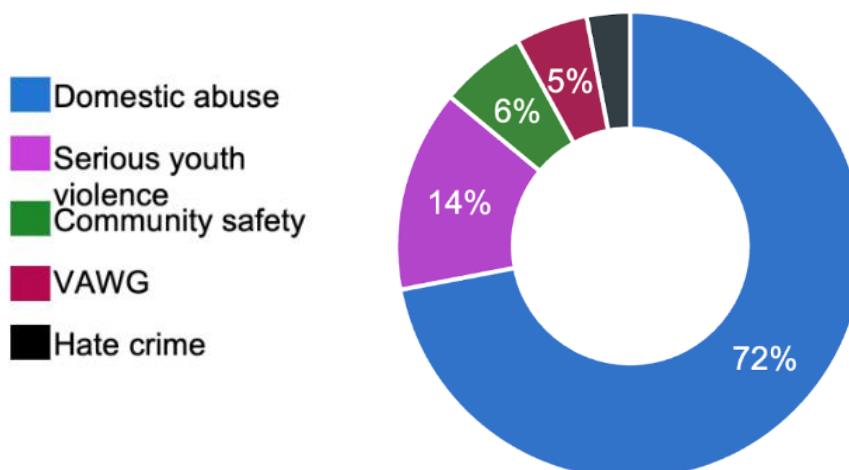
⁶² Source: PLHR Review 2023. Data note: PLHR is a scheme in London, providing affordable housing to victims/survivors. Data is held on 3,298 referrals.

⁶³ Ibid.

Figure 32 PLHR referral acceptance rate, 2017 to 2023**Figure 31 PLHR referral successful move rate, 2017 to 2023**

Initially, PLHR was created to support people affected by domestic abuse alone. However, as priorities changed, the program expanded its scope to provide housing assistance for a more diverse group of victims/survivors. This broader focus now includes those impacted by serious youth violence, community safety concerns, violence against women and girls (VAWG), and hate crimes. The updated priorities acknowledge the positive outcomes of relocating people affected by these various types of crimes. See figures 33 and 34.⁶⁴

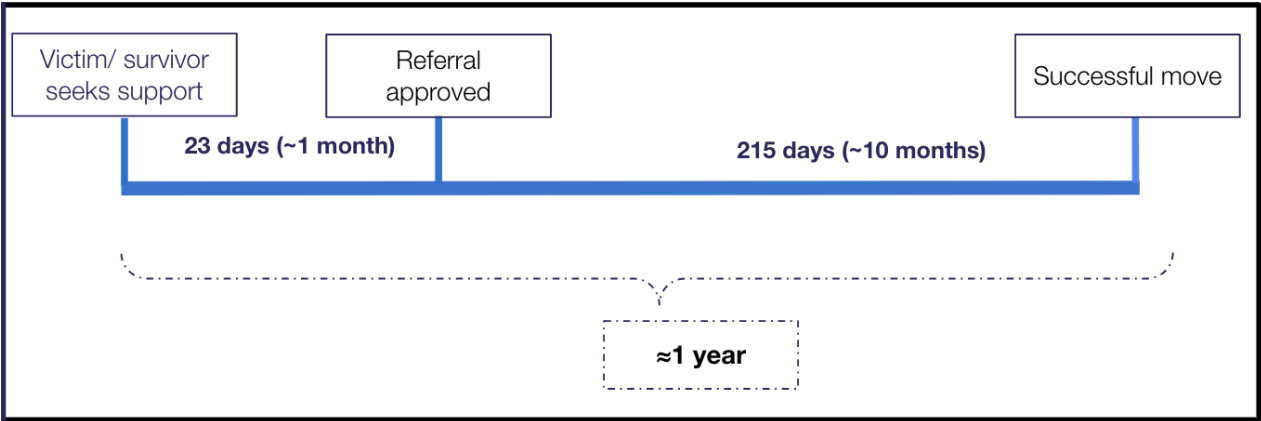
⁶⁴ Source: PLHR Review 2023. Data note: PLHR is a scheme in London, providing affordable housing to victims/survivors. Data is held on 3,298 referrals.

Figure 33 PLHR successful moves, by victims/survivors type (2017 to 2023) [n: 248]**Figure 34 PLHR accepted referrals, by victims/survivors type (2017 to 2023) [n: 1,128]**

The lack of available housing and inefficient partnerships means that even victims/survivors who successfully moved through the scheme waited for almost a year, on average, before moving. Victims/survivors are spending increasingly long waiting for the PLHR scheme to support them in securing social housing. From a victim/survivor seeking housing support from local authorities, they are then waiting almost a month (23 days on average) to hear if the referral is approved. If the referral is approved, the victim/survivor is then waiting over 10 months before they are able to successfully move into the accommodation (see table 11

for an illustration).⁶⁵ Service providers explained these long waiting times mean it is becoming increasingly difficult to support victims/survivors in safe accommodation, with limited chance of a successful move on.

Table 11 Timeline of a victim/survivor receiving social housing through PLHR (average)



The pandemic severely impacted staff awareness of the PLHR schemes’ function and duties: When the PLHR was launched, training was provided to regional staff. The pandemic caused high turnover in frontline council staff meaning expertise was lost, resulting in a large proportion of those who had been trained leaving their organisations. While these roles have since been filled, there are large gaps in understanding between newer and older staff. Understanding of the scheme and its internal processes are limited as new staff require training.

The cost-of-living crisis has driven up the price of housing and drastically reduced available stock: The housing market crisis in London has dramatically increased private rent costs and decreased stock of available letting properties. This has meant that there is a significant shortfall of property available for housing organisations which places major barriers on the ability of local authorities to provide housing support. Within the context of an increased need for housing support in London, available provision continues to decline across many local authorities.

Current partnership working across agencies is causing inefficiencies to the scheme: Practitioners in the PLHR report explained that there are gaps in effective partnership working. For example, before a victim/survivor is moved, senior leadership at the partner organisation – where the client currently holds a tenancy – must provide approval. Practitioners explained this creates bottlenecks when relationships are not effective.

⁶⁵ Source: PLHR Review 2023. Data note: PLHR is a scheme in London, providing affordable housing to victims/survivors. Data is held on 3,298 referrals

However, many practitioners were still keen to set up a managed reciprocal – just on a smaller, more localised level, with boroughs that they have a good relationship with.

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. The benefits of this approach are:

- it's easier to facilitate in terms of administration and logistics;
- it's easier to get buy-in and commitment from housing directors;
- a local authority is able to support a victim/survivor to move on, without it affecting it's housing stock.

“The reason it would benefit local authorities would [be] because there's a lack of housing stock as it is, so they're getting the like for like property back” - Statutory practitioner

Deep dives: partnership working and Whole Housing Approach

This chapter explores the findings from the two deep dives into partnership working.

1. Partnership working in the London ecosystem was found to be good overall, with some working relationships requiring improvement
2. The Whole Housing Approach was found to be beneficial overall, especially as it can be incrementally implemented

Partnership working

Voluntary partners discussed strong partnership working within the sector - with providers taking a coordinated approach to supporting victims/survivors of domestic abuse. While 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 the bigger barriers.

In terms of improving partnership working, there are known examples of best practice which can improve the way local authority housing teams and housing associations work with the voluntary sector. Namely, Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation and co-locating IDVAs (both components of the WHA).

Voluntary sector practitioners generally described good partnership working within the sector, with partners taking coordinated approaches to supporting victims/survivors. This manifested in

- well-functioning referral pathways between different voluntary sector providers;
- coordinated approaches to supporting victims/survivors. Victims/survivors can be referred to multiple different providers to support their varying needs.

"I think generally speaking, teams across different organisations work quite closely together. And, 'if you've got that specialist, then I'll refer to you' that kind of thing" - VCS practitioner

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.

*"And, the [by and for] sector is kind of small. And so **we've got these really nice partnerships across the sector**. And then these ... other partnerships that we've had for a long time with certain organisations in the mainstream sector, who have some **nice referral pathways** into us as well" - VCS practitioner*

However, partnership working is not perfect. 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.

Challenges in partnership working

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.

Communication: Some partners discussed communication challenges with local authority housing teams, although this did not apply to every local authority housing team. These challenges could affect their ability to support a victim/survivor 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.

"Communication is very, very hard with some local authorities" - VCS practitioner

Culture: 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 IDVA** 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.

"I was based in a local authority and I would see the conversations 'oh I think she just wants housing, she is lying about the situation'" - VCS practitioner

"If they don't have ... good practices or training within their organisation... it is not easy to work with them" - VCS practitioner

Challenges for VCS partners in navigating housing systems and processes

A number of 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.

*"We're not working with the same local authority, different ones. So you get **different responses**" - VCS practitioner*

"It's quite difficult to get an understanding of what their processes are and how they make their decisions in terms of priority need, interim duties, all these kinds of things" - VCS practitioner

*"I've met with providers in [London borough] to try and understand their process. And at the end of the meeting, **I haven't understood their process**. And I've met with five people, each from different parts of housing... **I haven't understood how to how to refer someone emergency on that day**. And they haven't been able to tell me at the end of the conversation, or just well, ring this woman." - VCS practitioner*

Challenges for VCS and children's services

The most challenging area of partnership working identified was between voluntary sector organisations and local authority children's services.

Section 17(1)(a) of the Children Act places a duty on local authorities to 'safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need'.⁶⁶ 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.

"They push back or they don't want to recognise that domestic abuse affects children too" - VCS practitioner in reference to children's services

⁶⁶ Children Act 1989

“The amount of time it takes to communicate, one of my biggest issues is trying to get social workers to answer phones” - VCS practitioner

A number of practitioners said that it could be quite 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.

In the context of disabled victims/survivors, it can be particularly challenging to work with children's social care. Practitioners reported that social care can often stigmatise disabled women, making them seem unfit to look after their children, rather than working with them to see if they need any extra support to do so.

“There's always a communication difference between us and Children's Services, in understanding the adult that we're supporting, and what their needs are. So then we clash a lot. And I think that's the struggle we have when it comes to people with a learning difficulty to be understood by the children social services to say, okay, they can still be a parent, they just might need that extra support” - VCS practitioner

Beneficial approaches to partnership working

Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation and co-location were cited as examples of best practice in relation to partnership working. Both can improve communication and cultural practices within local authority housing teams.

DAHA Accreditation: DAHA accreditation is a benchmark for how housing providers should respond to domestic abuse. The accreditation framework consists of 8 priority areas that cover an organisation's operations and service delivery.

Our practitioner engagement showed DAHA accreditation can have a **positive impact on partnership working between housing teams and voluntary sector providers**. Partnership working and collaboration is one of the priority areas under DAHA accreditation. Housing teams are **encouraged to strengthen partnerships with local domestic abuse services** - utilising their specialisms and expertise to meet the needs of victims/survivors of domestic abuse. One participant described having positive working relationships is a set standard under DAHA accreditation.

“There are also certain standards [as part of the DAHA accreditation] around information sharing and attending strategic boards, and having good referral pathways and positive working relationships” - VCS practitioner

Co-location: A number of practitioners discussed the benefits of having an Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA) co-located within a local authority housing team or housing association. For housing officers, IDVAs provide case management support, using

their expertise in domestic abuse to provide advice and guidance on how to approach specific cases. IDVAs can also access refuge directories (such as Routes to Support) so are able to help housing officers find refuge places for victims/survivors of domestic abuse. Importantly, IDVAs also help upskill housing officers - informally sharing knowledge, expertise, and providing training.

*“I can see the housing team has a **good understanding** because of the work that's been done there around domestic abuse... the housing options manager is really, **really on board** and really able to now **take those decisions on her own**, because she's got that **level of knowledge**” - VCS practitioner discussing the benefits of co-location*

The Whole Housing Approach

The deep dive into the Whole Housing Approach (WHA) made it 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.

Methodology:⁶⁷

- **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, why it is needed, and its different components
- **4 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 as well as its **potential for a wider roll out**. Questions on the WHA were also incorporated in our interviews with **housing directors and commissioners**

What is the Whole Housing approach, and why is it needed?

The Whole Housing Approach (WHA) is a **framework** for addressing the **housing and safety needs** of victims/survivors of domestic abuse. Research by Women's Aid shows that victims/survivors of domestic abuse often have to **leave their homes in order to feel safe**.⁶⁸ However, due to a lack of safe and affordable housing, **many victims/survivors end up homeless or rough sleeping**. In the *Hidden Housing Crisis*, Women's Aid found that **concerns around housing and homelessness** was a '**significant barrier**' for women leaving abusive partners.

⁶⁷ Method note: The intention here 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.

⁶⁸ Source: Women's Aid, *The Hidden Housing Crisis* (2020)

Aims of the WHA:

- **Earlier identification and intervention** for domestic abuse through mobilising social and private landlords and key institutions involved in private ownership
- **Improve access to safe and stable housing** across all housing tenure types (social, private rented and private ownership)
- **Ensure victims/survivors have access to a range of housing options and initiatives**, so they can choose to either relocate or remain in their existing accommodation
- **Increase tenancy sustainment options**
- **Reduce the number of people who are made homeless as a result of domestic abuse**

What are the components of the Whole Housing Approach?

Not all the components of the WHA fall under the legal definition of ‘safe accommodation’ or ‘safe accommodation-based support’. Table 12 illustrates the different components of the WHA.

Table 12 Different components of the Whole Housing Approach

Accommodation types	Housing options and initiatives
1. Supported/sheltered housing	6. Housing First
2. Refuge	7. Managed Reciprocal
3. Social housing	8. Sanctuary schemes
4. Privately Rented Sector	9. Domestic abuse services (including co-located IDVAs)
5. Privately Owned	10. Flexible Funding
	11. DAHA
	12. Perpetrator management

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

*“We’ve seen really **big improvements in the support that survivors received from local authorities that have had DAHA accreditation**” - Statutory practitioner*

“I think the main changes that you see are ... how quickly [victims/survivors] are responded to and how urgently domestic abuse is treated as an issue” - Statutory practitioner

“You really got the sense that [housing] officers actually cared about the people that they were working with. And it wasn’t just like ‘I need to progress this case for X, Y Z reasons’” - Statutory practitioner

The positive impact of DAHA accreditation was also noted in the DAHA Accreditation Evaluation, by the University of York, which stated that the accreditation process had resulted in ‘changes in organisational culture’ with ‘shifts in how individual staff members and the organisation thought and behaved’.⁶⁹ The evaluation also found wider benefits of accreditation with victims/survivors feeling listened to and respected, and frontline workers improving the speed and quality of their responses. The University of York’s report and the practitioners in this 2022/23 Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation needs assessment, suggested that shifts in culture could lead to long-term and sustainable impact changes to how an organisation responds to victims/survivors.

The WHA approach allows victims/survivors to **explore all the housing options available** to them and **empowers them to make decisions** that are best for them - whether that’s entering a refuge and leaving their borough or remaining at home with a sanctuary scheme in place.⁷⁰ This is a good approach where refuge is not suitable.

“So what we notice is that often for those fleeing domestic abuse, refuge was often presented as the only housing solution. And we know that refuge is not viable for all women experiencing domestic abuse. For example, it’s not ideal for women that have larger families - VCS practitioner

The WHA provides a flexible approach, which considers the different needs that victims/survivors have at different stages of their journeys. As well as short term support at crisis stage, there is a particular emphasis within the WHA on the long-term safety and security of the victim/survivor.

The WHA can be implemented flexibly, with local authorities adapting the model to suit their needs. This means that, instead of implementing all 12 components at once, they select 1-

⁶⁹ Source: University of York, An evaluation of DAHA accreditation, Final Report (2021)

⁷⁰ Source: DAHA, Whole Housing approach Evaluation, Year 1 Report (2020)

2 components that they think they can easily implement, meets the needs of their communities, and works alongside what they're already doing/their priorities. By implementing a couple of components at a time, delivery is also more feasible in terms of resourcing and funding.

"I think sanctuary [schemes] and flexible funding are two quick wins, that probably can be done with the safe accommodation funding that's around" - VCS practitioner

'Each component of the WHA can be implemented as a standalone initiative that creates impactful results for survivors' - Whole Housing Approach, Year 1 Pilot Evaluation⁷¹

"We don't have to look at all of them in one go, we can focus on two of those components and start there, and then slowly build to focus on the other components as well" - VCS practitioner

Potential barriers to WHA implementation

Every component of the WHA has costs associated with it and will require resources and funding to implement. This can be a barrier for implementation. The resources and funding required will vary depending on the component and a number of other factors, including how a local authority would like to implement the component. For instance, some practitioners shared that some local authorities can spend £1,000 - £1,500 per sanctuary scheme, whilst others spend closer to £150 - £300. Components such as DAHA accreditation, which require recruiting for new roles, creating new structures, and implementing system level change are likely to have larger immediate financial implications.

*"You have to pay your **accreditation fees** and your **assessment fees**... you also have to invest a bit, not loads, a bit in **training, comms and infrastructure**. So like case management system changes and stuff like that" - Statutory practitioner, speaking about DAHA.*

*"At a time where most local authorities, particularly housing departments are in massive amounts of **debt and overspend**" - Statutory practitioner*

It is also worth considering the **broader context** that local authority housing teams are operating in. Housing teams have **high demand for their services, with housing officers under a lot of pressure**. The cost-of-living crisis has also affected the **volume and nature of demand** for services, as well as the **costs of providing those services**.

*"There's always something else going on, **there's always something more urgent**" - Statutory practitioner*

⁷¹ Ibid.

“Could you imagine trying to support 70 people, 60 people, 50 people, with housing and bearing in mind they don't only just support women that are fleeing domestic abuse, it could be anyone that has a housing need” - VCS practitioner

Buy-in from senior stakeholders, and frontline staff, as well as issues around recruitment and retention are also barriers in implementing the WHA.

The resources and costs associated with implementing the WHA can affect buy-in for both senior stakeholders and frontline staff. Senior stakeholders and staff are already facing high demand, so may not be willing to take on something that they see as additional work. The thought of implementing the WHA can also be daunting, given that it has 12 components - some of which can take a lot of time and resources (e.g. DAHA).

“And I think they see it [WHA] as probably more work rather than actually going to be working with them. I think it's like another addition that they need to do” - VCS practitioner

To mitigate against this, practitioners suggested emphasising the long-term benefits of the WHA, including the potential cost savings that can be achieved further down the line.

There are a number of challenges with staff recruitment and retention in the VAWG sector. Issues such as comparatively low salaries, high caseloads, and stressful working conditions, has made it difficult to recruit specialist staff. In particular, IDVAs that might co-locate in a local authority housing team.

“We've had nobody in post over the course of two years, we've had one person in place for six months. And that's it” - Statutory practitioner, in reference to an IDVA

One practitioner told us that, since the pandemic, it has become harder to recruit for co-locating IDVAs. One reason given for this, was that fewer people are now willing to be in the office 3-4 times a week (something that was described as crucial for an IDVA to share learning and expertise).

Recommendations

This chapter provides recommendations based on the quantitative and qualitative analysis carried out for this needs assessment. The recommendations are to inform the London Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy refresh.

Commissioning focus

- More refuge spaces 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 necessary
- There is not enough specialist provision for certain acute needs and victims/survivors with multiple disadvantages, especially for those with severe mental health needs. More appropriate support should be commissioned. This may include providing specialist provision or specialist staff in general provision
- MOPAC and local authorities 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. This will require an up-front cost but improve flow through the system to avoid the current bottlenecks in refuge spaces or overuse of unsuitable temporary accommodation which does not allow survivors to receive adequate support
- Sanctuary schemes and other kinds of safe accommodation should be piloted to reduce demand on refuge, second stage accommodation and semi-independent accommodation. This is especially important when considering refuge is not always suitable and/or the preferred option for some victims/survivors
- 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 lobby government for more social housing and affordable housing

Updated guidance

- MOPAC/GLA should lobby government 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 safe accommodation due to shortage of safe accommodation provision
- Lobby 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 groups below and commission provision should be improved accordingly:
 - male victims/survivors
 - older female victims/survivors
 - children as victims/survivors of domestic abuse in their own right

Data recording

- Data recording around DA 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 is vital to 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
- 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. The Mayor should advocate that every London borough has an adequately supported co-located IDVA

Whole Housing Approach (WHA)

- The WHA presents a significant opportunity to refresh the approach to protecting and supporting victims/survivors of domestic abuse, including by allowing them to remain in their accommodation and for domestic abuse perpetrators to relocate instead. This can reduce the need for safe accommodation and may decrease the need for long-term support services
- Should the Mayor wish to focus strongly on the whole housing approach, a more thorough review is recommended
- The Mayor should promote the WHA more widely in strategy and communications. This could involve webinars or sharing WHA resources, for example. The Mayor should aim to build momentum and awareness around the approach
- To encourage implementation each local authority should identify which aspects of the WHA approach they want to focus on. The Mayor could provide recommendations around this
- The Mayor should identify how funding could be made available to support each local authority implementing the WHA

Annex 1: Glossary of terms and detailed methods

Glossary of Terms

DAHA	Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance
DASA	Domestic abuse safe accommodation
DASA-based support	Domestic abuse safe accommodation-based support
GLA	Greater London Authority
Insecure Immigration	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’ ⁷² .
MARAC	Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference. This is a regular meeting where information is shared on the highest risk of domestic abuse cases with representatives from a number of statutory agencies who develop a safety plan
Mayoral commissioned services	Mayoral commissioned services under the Part 4 Duty
MHCLG	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
MOPAC	The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime. MOPAC oversees the work of the Met police service, sets priorities for policing and community safety in London, agrees policing budget and holds the Met Commissioner to account
No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)	This refers to a specific group of people with insecure immigration status. 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 DA) there are a few schemes which mean the person might be eligible for temporary resource support including benefit and housing support
Practitioners	Refers to VAWG coordinators, VCS, and statutory bodies and commissioners
Stakeholders	Refers to practitioners and victims/survivors

⁷² Queen Mary, University of London (2020). The impact of increasing domestic violence as a result of COVID-19 on those with insecure immigration status

VAWG	Violence Against Women & Girls
VAWG Coordinator	A 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
VCS	Voluntary Community Sector

Methods

The methods used to conduct the 2022/23 Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation needs assessment included quantitative analysis and qualitative research

Document review	A review of published and internal policy documentation, evaluations, and reports relating to domestic abuse safe accommodation and accommodation-based support. This set out the local strategic context around service provision and victim/survivor needs.
Quantitative data analysis	Quantitative data analysis on published and local data sets to understand the volume and nature of demand for safe accommodation, and accommodation-based support. For the full list of datasets included in this report see table 10 and 11
Practitioner interviews	Interviews with 23 practitioners and focus groups. This included interviews with MOPAC commissioners, VAWG coordinators, statutory partners, and voluntary sector service providers. For the full list of participating practitioners see page 10.
Practitioner Workshops	Two workshops were conducted one with VAWG coordinators and with MOPAC's Expert Reference Group. This provided the opportunity for relevant practitioners to review our preliminary findings and to support the development of recommendations.
Victim/survivor interviews	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.
Victim/survivor survey	Disseminated a survey of victims/survivors to capture their experiences within DASA, map their pathways through services, and hear their thoughts on improvements that could be made. In total, 40 victims/survivors responded to the survey.

Table 13 Data sources used in the 2022/23 Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation needs assessment

Mayoral commissioned services monitoring	Homelessness Case Level Collection (H-CLIC)	MHCLG data collection from tier 2 local authorities	The Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN)
Owned by: MOPAC Time span: 2022/23 Data size: 41 services Focus: DASA service provision	Owned by: MHCLG Time span: 2021/22-2022/23 Data size: 5,980 households Focus: Homelessness Duties	Owned by: Crest Advisory Time span: 2020 to 2023 Data size: 52 services Focus: DASA service provision	Owned by: GLA & Homeless Link Time span: 2022/23 Data size: 68 rough sleepers Focus: Rough sleeping
Summary: Mayoral commissioned 63 services listed in their programme portfolio. Each one is monitored according to the continuation grants and call off contract given to each one. This forms the overarching picture of services involved in DASA provision under Mayoral commissioning.	Summary: 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.	Summary: Under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, Tier one authorities must conduct a local needs assessment. MHCLG have developed a standardised form to support authorities in undertaking a local needs assessment, to be filled out with the support of Tier 2 local authorities. Crest Advisory sent a data collection form to all London tier 2 local authorities, aligned to the MHCLG standardised form. 21 local authorities contributed.	Summary: CHAIN is a multi-agency database that records information about rough sleeping in London. Rough sleeping is defined as people sleeping in the open air or in other spaces not designed for habitation, such as doorways, stairwells, parks or derelict buildings. The data provided to this needs assessment includes information on 68 rough sleeping domestic abuse victims/survivors.

Table 14 Data sources used in the 2022/23 Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation needs assessment continued

On Track	Routes to Support	Pan London Housing Reciprocal (PLHR)	Published datasets
<p>Owned by: Women's Aid</p> <p>Time span: 2020 to 2023</p> <p>Data size: 12,632 victims/survivors</p> <p>Focus: DA service provision</p>	<p>Owned by: Women's Aid</p> <p>Time span: 2017 to Q3 2023</p> <p>Data size: 6,521 women placed</p> <p>Focus: Refuge provision</p>	<p>Owned by: Safer London</p> <p>Time span: 2017 to 2023</p> <p>Data size: 3,298 referrals</p> <p>Focus: Social housing scheme</p>	<p>CSEW</p> <p>The Crime Survey of England and Wales is an annual survey sent to randomly selected participants to record their experiences of crime and capture any trends.</p> <p>Police recorded crime</p> <p>Police recorded crime collects information on where crimes have been reported to and recorded by law enforcement agencies from all police forces nationally.</p> <p>Metropolitan police dashboard</p> <p>The Met police dashboard is an online data tool using data from the last four years. It covers multiple crime types including domestic abuse.</p>
<p>Summary:</p> <p>On Track is Women's Aid's case management and outcomes measurement system which is used by 100+ domestic abuse organisations and providers.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>Summary:</p> <p>Routes to Support is the UK-wide online database for domestic abuse and other VAWG services. It provides details of available refuge provision for women and children.</p> <p>Routes to Support information on refuge provision across London was used in this needs assessment. In 2022/23, that dataset captures 1,791 successful referrals and 978 unsuccessful referrals.</p>	<p>Summary:</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Campbell Tickell conducted a review of the scheme in 2023 which evaluated its progress and effectiveness, and highlighted key issues that it has faced.</p>	

Annex 2: Additional content

What does support in safe accommodation look like?

Once victims/survivors are placed in safe accommodation, London services also provide support. Domestic abuse support alongside safe accommodation available in London includes, but is not limited to:

- **Advocacy support**, including the development of personal safety plans and liaison with other services
- **Domestic abuse prevention advice**, including assistance to victims/survivors to recognise the signs of abusive relationships, to help them remain safe and to prevent re-victimisation
- **Specialist support for victims/survivors with relevant protected characteristics**, including faith services, translators and interpreters, immigration advice, interpreters for victims/survivors identifying as D/deaf and/or hard of hearing, and dedicated support for LGBTQ+ victims/survivors
- **Specialist support for victims/survivors with additional and/or complex needs**, including mental health advice and support, and drug and alcohol advice and support, including sign posting
- **Support for children**, including play therapy, child advocacy or a specialist children worker
- **Housing-related support**, for example, securing a permanent home and advice on rights to existing accommodation and on how to live safely and independently
- **Advice services**, including on financial and legal support, accessing benefits, supporting victims/survivors into work and establishing independent financial arrangements
- **Counselling and therapy**, for both adults and children, including emotional support.

Domestic Abuse: The context in London

London continues to have a growing and diverse population. This is an important consideration in the provision of domestic abuse safe accommodation services. See figures 35 to 38.⁷³

⁷³ Source: Police recorded crime from the Home Office, ONS data release 2022/23, Please note that when a survivor of DA reports incidents to the Met Police, they are increasingly recording multiple crimes as one crime. Therefore, the number of people experiencing DA may be increasing more than the statistics here suggest. Census, 2021

Figure 35 London population size, total and by ethnicity 2011 to 2023

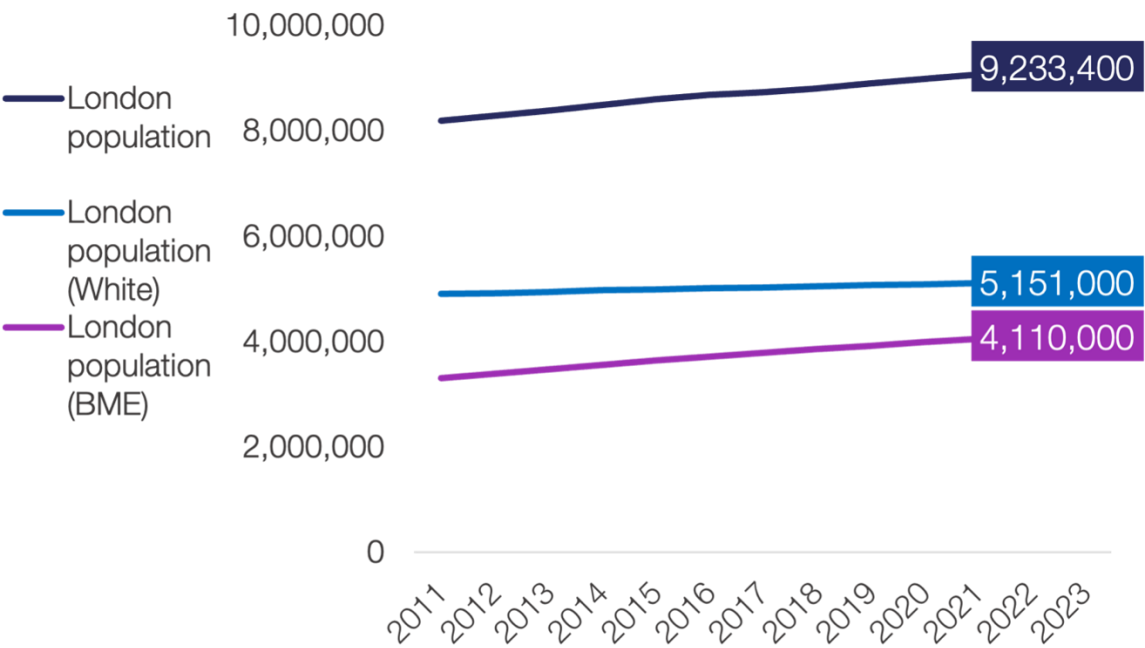


Figure 37 London population by gender, Census 2021

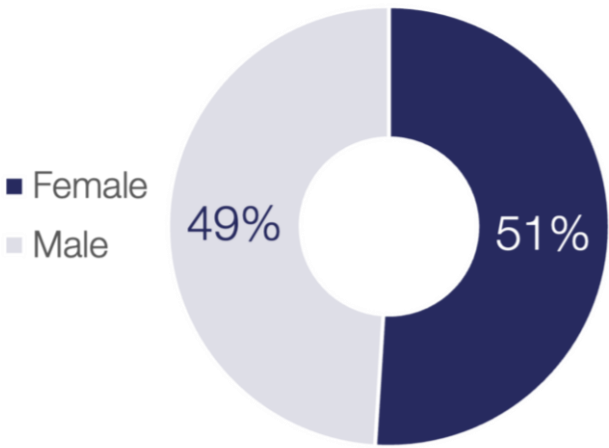


Figure 36 London population by ethnicity, Census 2021

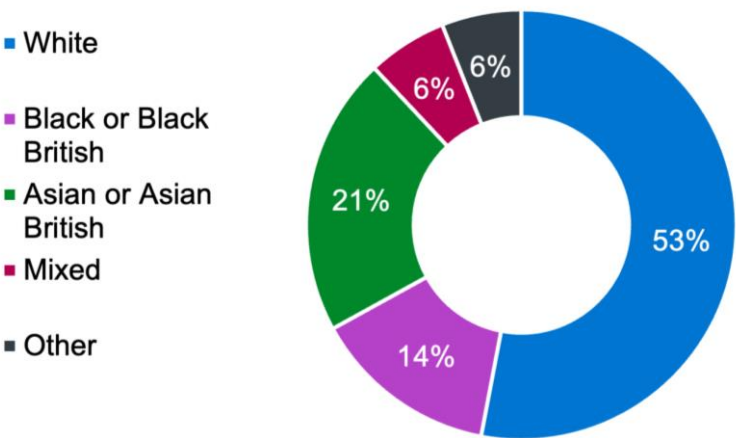
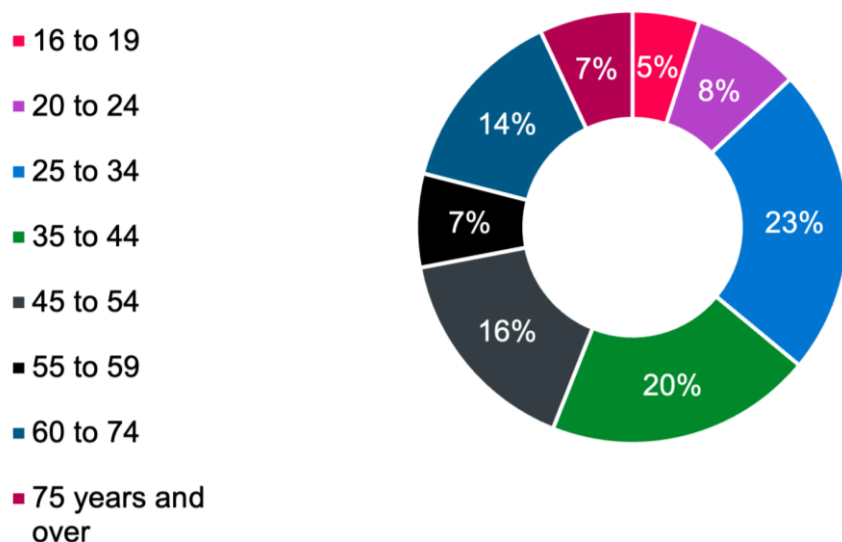


Figure 38 London population by age, Census 2021

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) shows a decrease in experiences of domestic abuse nationally, however, please note that the CSEW has been temporarily suspended from National Statistics status due to sampling and response challenges post-COVID. This should therefore not be a guiding statistical analysis.

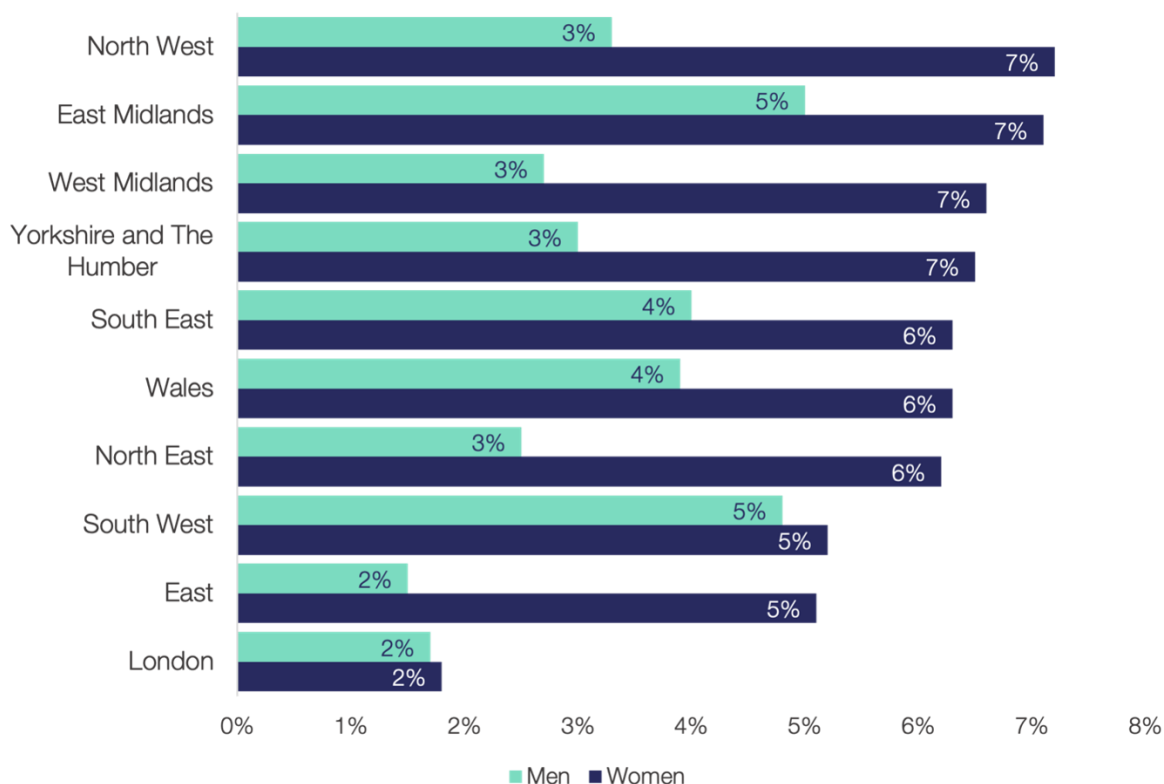
The CSEW year ending March 2023 estimated that 5.1% of people aged 16 years to 59 experienced domestic abuse in the last year.

The proportion of women who reported experiencing domestic abuse in the last year was lowest in London (2%) across the whole of England and Wales.⁷⁴ See figure 39.

⁷⁴ Source: Crime Survey of England and Wales, Domestic Abuse release 2022/23

Method note: There has been a temporary suspension to the National Statistics status for estimates from the Crime Survey for England and Wales, due to recording limitations in COVID-19.

Figure 39 Estimated percentage of the population aged 16 to 59 years old, that have been a victim/ survivor of domestic abuse based on the CSEW, by region 2022/23



Domestic abuse takes different forms. Therefore, in addition to recognising the importance of victim/survivor characteristics, support services need to be adaptable to respond to various types of abuse.

The CSEW and police recorded crime data includes a range of offence types that are classed as domestic abuse. The most common types of domestic abuse recorded in 2022/23 by the CSEW were inter-partner (2.6%) and family abuse (1.6%). See figure 40.⁷⁵

Police recorded crime indicated that in 2022/23, 34% of domestic abuse related offences were violence against the person, followed by 17% as sexual offences. See figure 41.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Source: Crime Survey of England and Wales, Domestic Abuse release 2022/23 ; Police recorded crime from the Home Office, ONS data release 2022/23

⁷⁶ Ibid.

Different types of abuse experienced by victims/survivors will create different needs for services provision.

Figure 40 Estimated percentage of the population aged 16 to 59 years old, that have been a victim/survivor of domestic abuse based on the CSEW, by type of abuse 2022/23

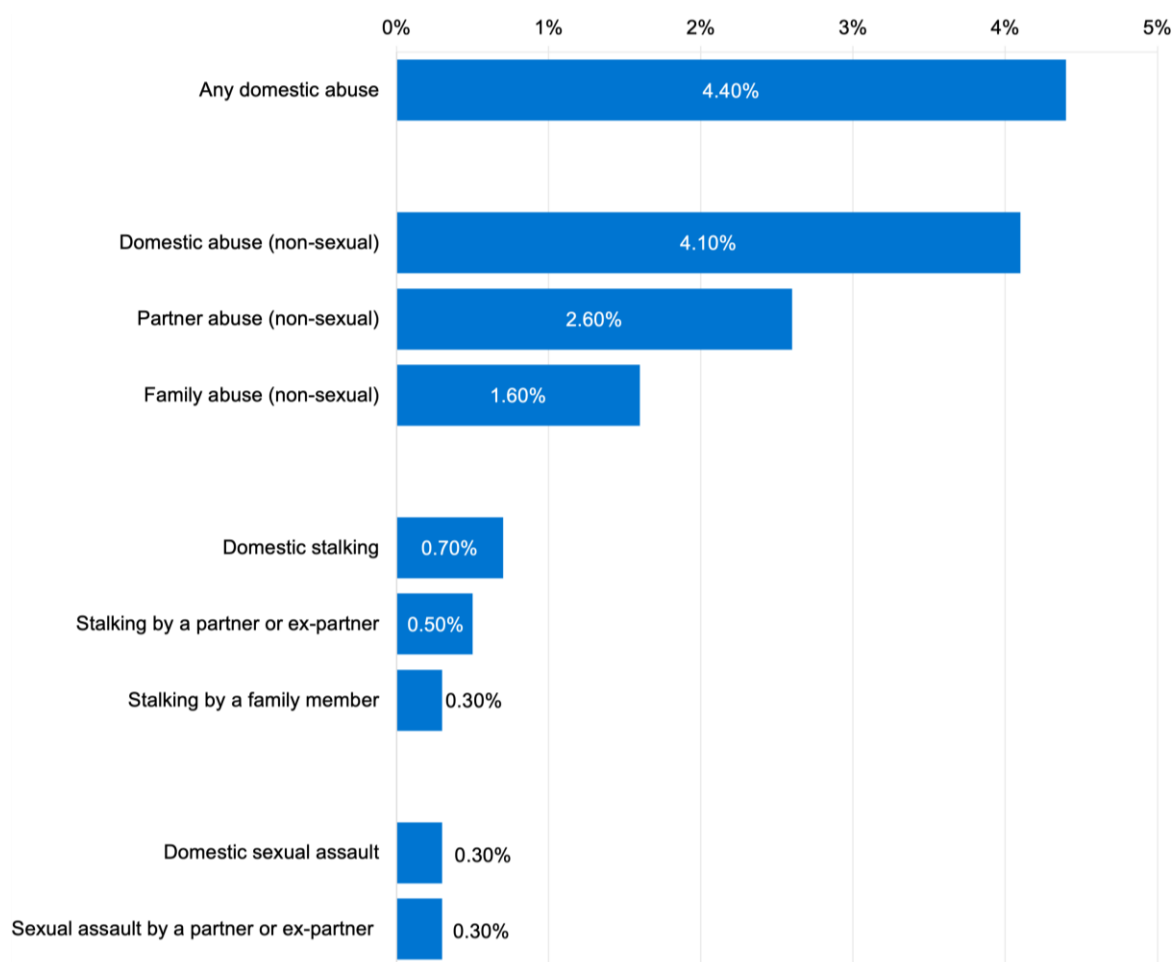
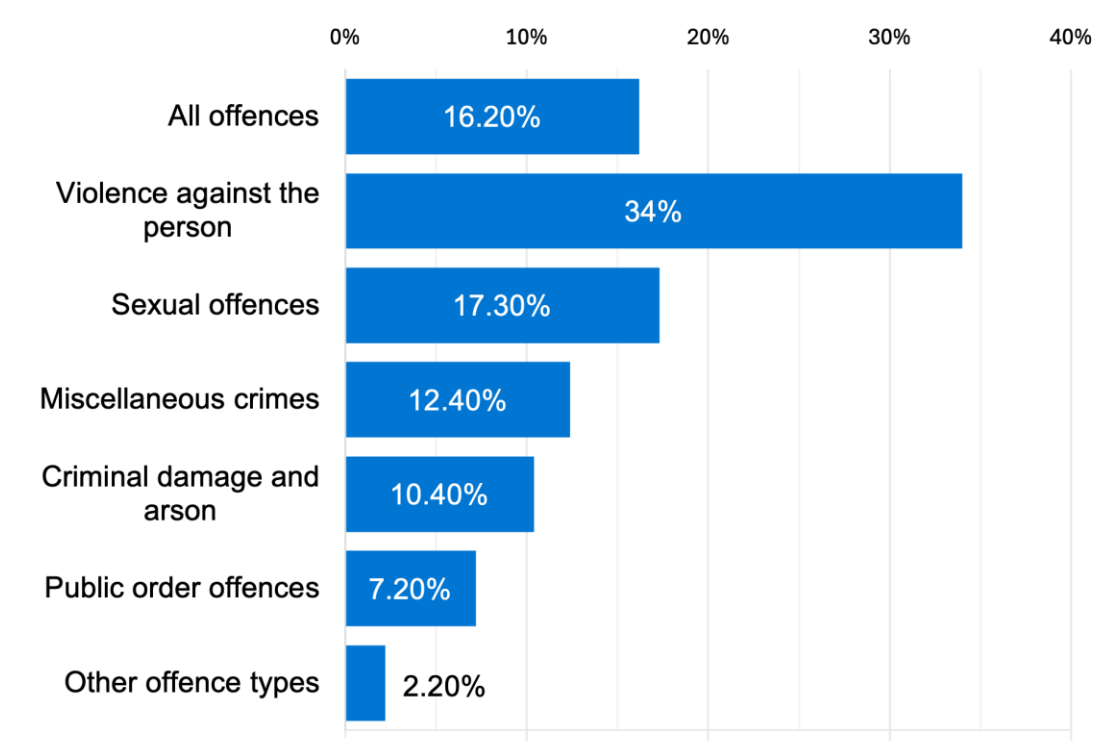


Figure 41 Percentage of offences recorded by the police that were identified as domestic abuse-related, England and Wales (excluding Devon and Cornwall), year ending March 2023



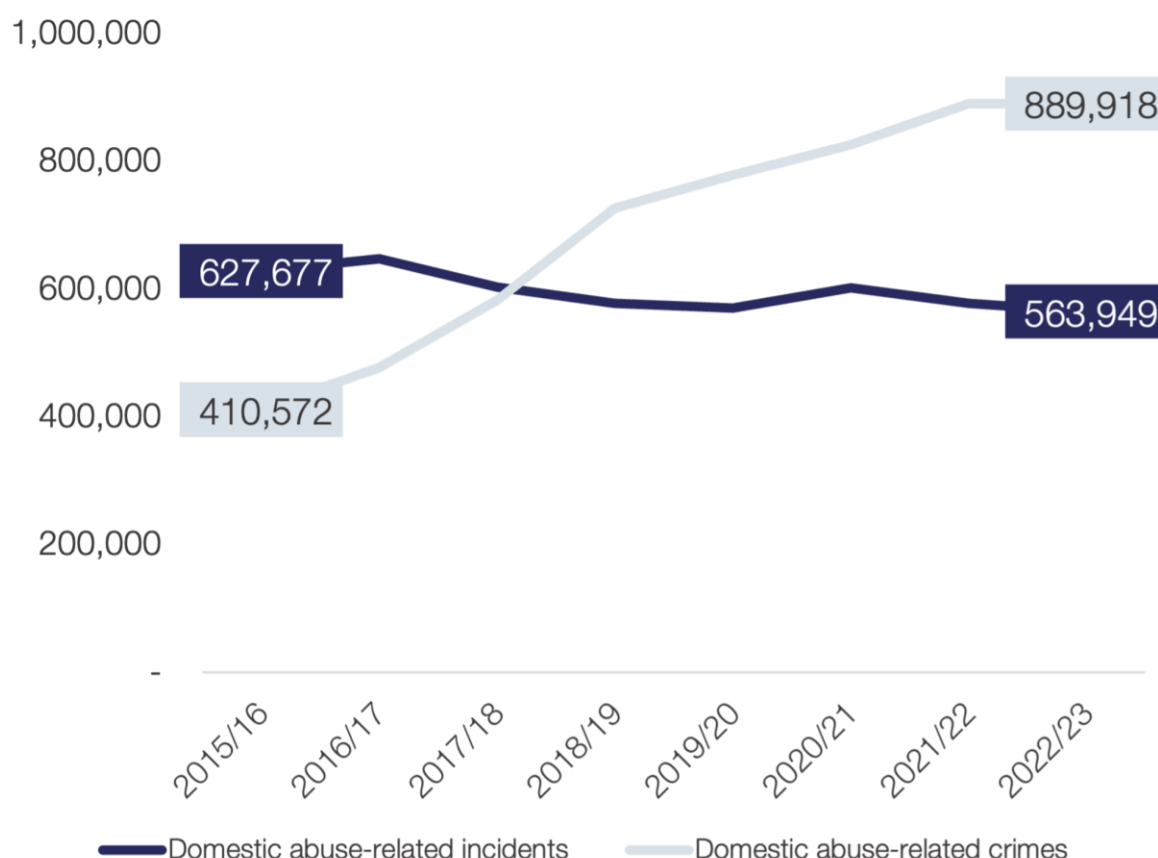
The London context of demand and provision

Domestic abuse has increased by 14.4% nationally as a police recorded crime since March 2020.⁷⁷ See figure 42.

⁷⁷ Source: Police recorded crime from the Home Office, ONS data release 2022/23

Please note that when a survivor of DA reports incidents to the Met Police, they are increasingly recording multiple crimes as one crime. Therefore, the number of people experiencing DA may be increasing more than the statistics here suggest.

Figure 42 Number of domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes recorded by the police, England and Wales (excluding Devon and Cornwall), year ending March 2016 to year ending March 2023



London's housing market has faced significant challenges in recent years. Affordable housing has decreased which practitioners suggest has increased the demand on social housing. See figure 43 and 44.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Source: London data store - Housing statistics. Figure 43: Method note: The average house price/earnings ratio is an important indicator of housing affordability. Ratios are calculated by dividing the median house price by the median earnings of a borough (residence based full-time individual earnings). Higher ratio indicates a more challenging housing market. Figure 44: Method note: The ONS private rents index compares trends (rather than levels) in average private sector rents. It uses a complex mix-adjustment and weighting process to produce a single index. The figures on the chart are the percentage change in private rent levels compared to a year earlier.

Figure 43 Median housing affordability ratio, London compared to England

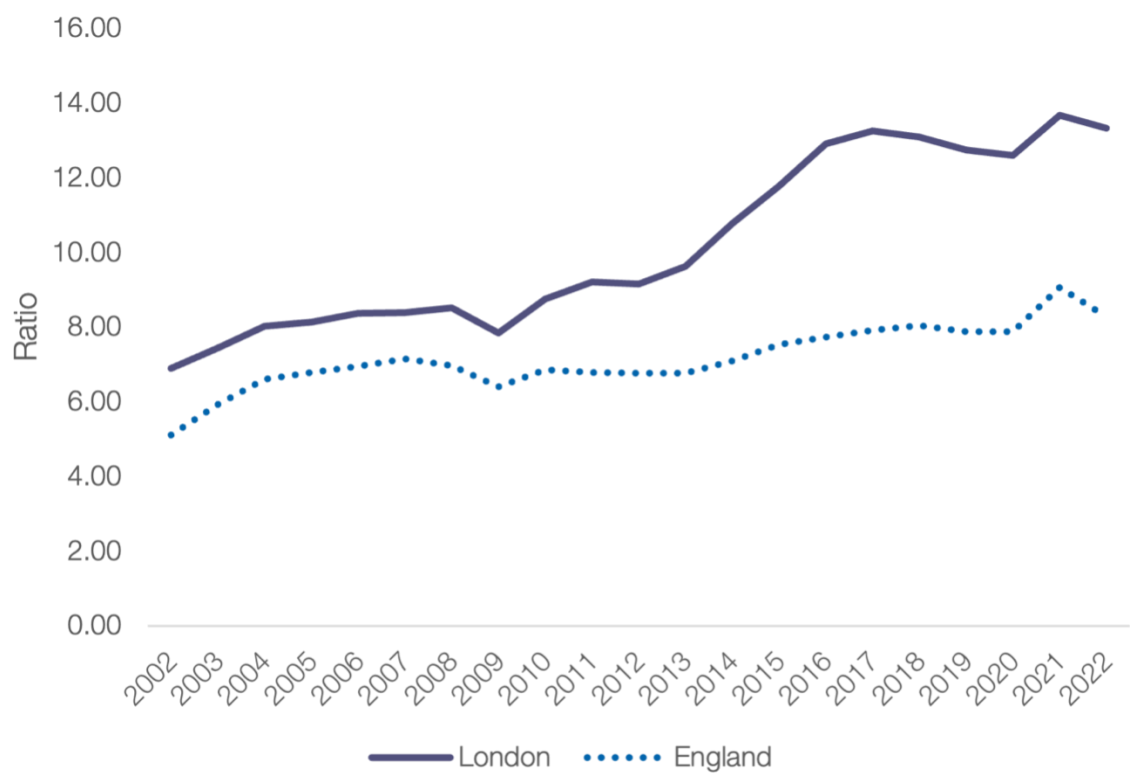
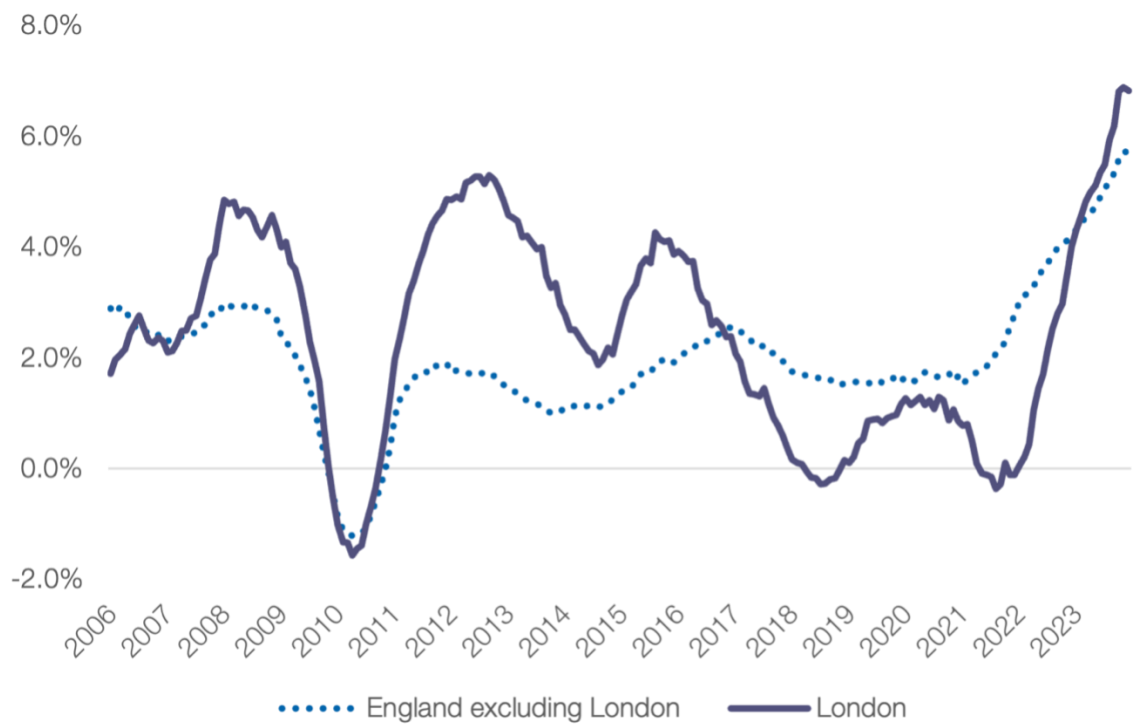


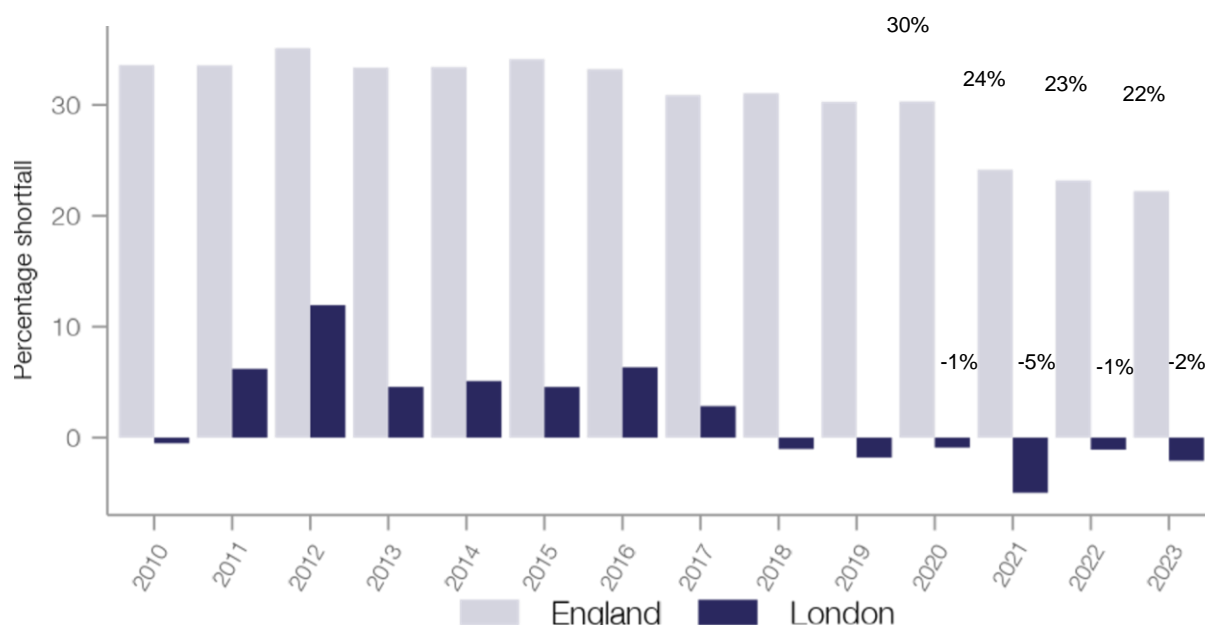
Figure 44 Annualised change in private rents, London compared to the rest of England (2006 to 2023)



Provision⁷⁹

In 2022/23 London's volume of refuge bedspaces was 2% higher than the recommended volume by the Council of Europe.⁸⁰ See figure 45.

Figure 45 Refuge bed spaces - Percentage shortfall in refuge spaces against Council of Europe minimum recommendation, for England and London, 2010 to 2023



Specialist services can provide support to survivors with specific needs. However, practitioners have reflected that there is not enough specialist provision to meet demand.

Specialist services are commissioned to tailor DASA support to meet the needs of victims/survivors of domestic abuse. 71 specialist domestic abuse safe accommodation services reported that they were providing support to victims/survivors across London in 2022/23.

⁷⁹ For table: Data note: Mayoral commissioned services holds information on the 63 services in the Mayoral commissioning portfolio. Method note: 64 total services were reported to be providing specialist support. However, some services are providing multiple specialist support, so the volume of specialist support services exceeds the total number of individual services.

⁸⁰ Source: Women's Aid Federation of England - data from Routes to Support, the UK violence against women and girls service directory

26 of these services were 'by and for', tailored to also support those who share particular protected characteristic(s) and/or who share one or more vulnerabilities requiring additional support. See below figure 46 for further details.

Figure 46 Specialist services commissioned to support specific characteristics and needs

LGBTQ+	Black, Asian and minority ethnic	Disabled victims/survivors	Specialist services for other needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10% of specialist services commissioned by the Mayor were offering specialist support for LGBTQ+ victims/survivors. • 6 of the 8 specialist LGBTQ+ services were 'by and for' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 39% of specialist services commissioned by the Mayor were offering specialist support for Black, Asian and minority ethnic victims/survivors • 17 of the 27 specialist minority ethnic group services were 'by and for'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11% of specialist services commissioned by the Mayor were offering specialist support for disabled victims/survivors • 3 of the 8 specialist disability services were 'by and for'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 31% of specialist services commissioned by the Mayor were offering specialist support for victims/survivors with other needs including: no recourse to public funds; VAWG needs; rough sleepers; mental health needs; multiple disadvantages; children's needs

The value of holistic and specialist support

There were multiple ways in which holistic support was provided across London. Including specialist roles and co-location

Practitioners and victims/survivors alike valued comprehensive services through which they can access multiple channels of support in one place. Practitioners suggest that a good way to achieve this is through co-location (when multiple organisations work in the same physical location). In-person communication can make partnership working stronger and improve victim/survivor needs assessments.

“Local authorities used to run something called a one stop shop that used to be quite popular. That would be where, as a survivor, you could get housing, legal, financial, emotional, school support, you could get everything in one place.” - MOPAC commissioners

A single point of contact (SPOC) for the victim/survivor was greatly advocated by the practitioners. This professional role positively impacts the victim/survivor journey by tailoring DASA-based support. Such initiatives where the victim/survivor only engages with a single point of contact means:

- Reduced possibility of the victim/survivor having to be re-traumatised
- Mediation with other support services are more effective
- Reduced appointment no-shows as SPOC supports victim/survivor in attending.

Ensuring that DASA services are channelled 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 centred around the needs of the victims/survivors.

“In effect, we run a team around the caseworker so that the child only has to engage with an individual.” -CYP focus group

“It’s very confusing to be getting harassing phone calls, from GP phone calls to HR and like just all of it coming in at different times, especially if you’re not in a safe space.” - Traveller Movement

Another way to ensure victims/survivors receive holistic and tailored support is through the use of specialist roles. It has long been known the role of the IDVA is of paramount importance in DA victims/survivors’ journeys as well as helping with liaising with relevant partners.⁸¹ This was supported in the interviews and workshops undertaken in this project too. Other specialist roles such as resettlement workers were also highlighted as key to supporting victims/survivors’ journeys. For example: Safer London has invested heavily in

⁸¹ SafeLives. Domestic abuse response in the UK

resettlement workers, who provide holistic support for victims/survivors moving into new domestic abuse safe accommodation.

Move-on

Compared to other regions across England, London housing services are providing the least longer-term accommodation once their homelessness duty has expired for households owed a homelessness duty due to domestic abuse.

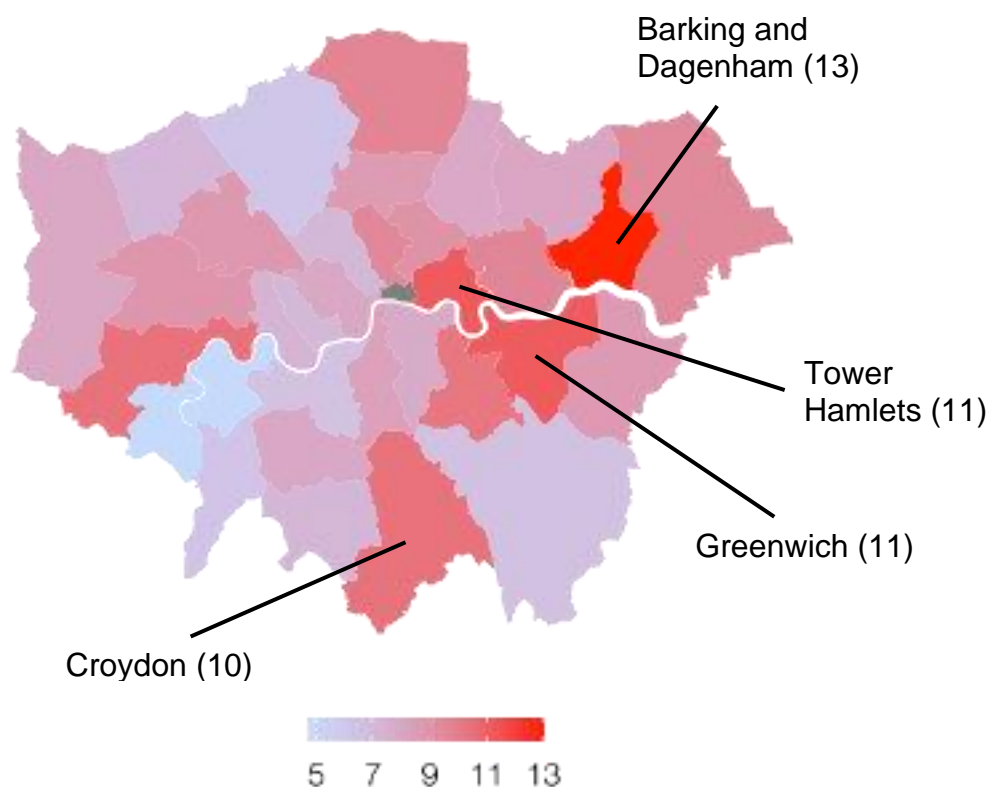
The Homelessness Duty 2017 legislation requires local authorities to take reasonable steps to try to prevent or relieve a household's homelessness by helping them to secure accommodation that will be available to them for at least 6 months. These duties usually last for up to 56 days each, although may be extended in some circumstances.

Data recorded by H-CLIC shows there has been a reduction nationally in the proportion of households securing accommodation after their prevention or relief duty has ended.

In 2022/23 only 31% of households impacted by domestic abuse in London whose homelessness duty ended managed to secure accommodation. This is the lowest rate of secured accommodation across England.

Challenges to DASA across London

Figure 47 Rate of Domestic Abuse crimes per 1,000 population recorded by the Met, by London borough, 2022/23



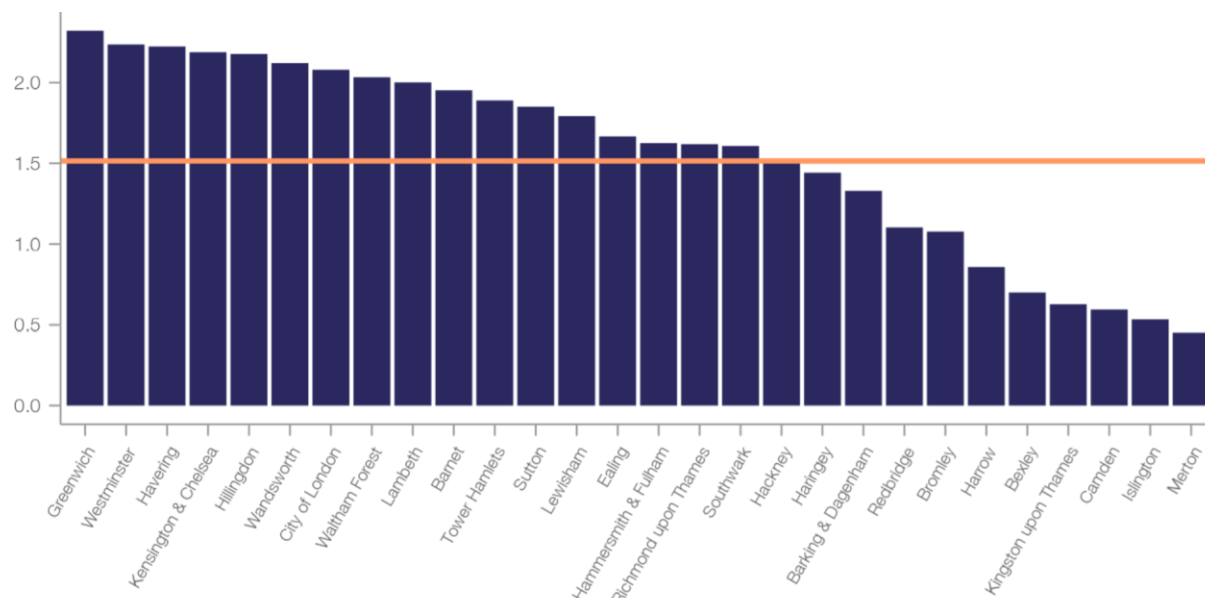
In 2022/23, Barking and Dagenham continued to have the highest rate per 1,000 population of recorded domestic abuse offences.⁸² See figure 47.

Greenwich, Westminster and Havering had the highest demand in 2022/23 for households impacted by domestic abuse who required a homelessness duty, with rates much higher than the national average. See figure 48.⁸³

⁸² Source: MPS Crime Dashboard

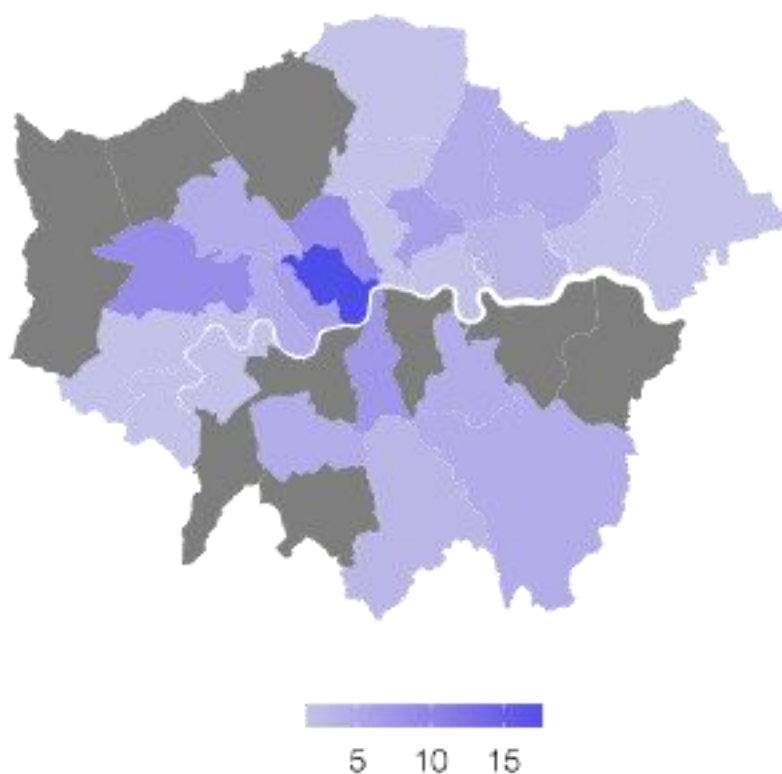
⁸³ Source: H-CLIC, 2022/23. Data note: H-CLIC holds information on victims/ survivors accessing housing support through their Local Authority

Figure 48 Rate per 1,000 households of prevention and relief duties owed due to domestic abuse, London 2022/23. Orange line is the rate for England = 1.4



As in previous years, the borough in which the greatest number of domestic abuse victims/survivors were seen rough sleeping in 2022/23 was Westminster, with 12 domestic abuse victims/survivors (18% of the overall London total). Camden and Ealing saw the second

Figure 49 Number of domestic abuse victims/ survivors rough sleeping in London 2022/23



highest number of domestic abuse victims/ survivors. However this is still only half of the need in Westminster.⁸⁴ See figure 49.

Victim/survivor experience

Negative experiences of accessing support

Stakeholders 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
- They do not know how to access support
- There are barriers in physically accessing support. For example, not all victims/survivors have access to a phone or the internet (particularly if they're homeless). Some people can't afford the bus/train to receive support.

“Any service can be seen as sort of this, like an inaccessible black hole of you don't really know what it does, you don't really know who's there, you don't really know what it's going to look like to engage with that.... if you're thinking about someone who is, you know, rough sleeping or sofa surfing, where do they find out about services?” - VCS practitioner

One victim/survivor said she had tried calling support services for four or five days. Each time she called, she was on hold for an hour or two. Because she lived with the perpetrator, it was hard to be on hold for long periods of time - so she had to go to the park to make the calls. The survey indicated that some people didn't get any support when they tried to access it - both from statutory partners and voluntary partners.

Positive experiences of accessing support

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.

Feedback is collected from victims/survivors on their service provision from domestic abuse safe accommodation services. This is part of the Mayoral monitoring forms. The feedback reflects the valuable support these services provide, with access to Mayoral commissioning.

Victims/survivors receiving support from these services highlight the essential work being done to support them in finding safety and regaining confidence when fleeing the abuse they experienced.

⁸⁴ Source: CHAIN, 2022/23. Data note: CHAIN holds information on victims/survivors seen rough sleeping across London, 68 domestic abuse victims/survivors

"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." - Victim/Survivor

"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 of the support I have received" - Victim/Survivor

"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" - Victim/Survivor

Victims/survivors receiving DASA and DASA-based services expressed the invaluable practical support received from services which has meant they have regained their independence. Practical support is highly valued by victims/survivors: Alongside a bed space and emotional support, 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 and rebuild their lives.⁸⁵

"The vouchers are extremely helpful, especially when waiting for benefit process to be completed. As we are residing at an emergency temporary accommodation with no board, kitchen or a fridge. If I wouldn't have the community's support, the vouchers would be a lifesaver and still will be for us in a weak time" - Victim/Survivor

"I received an email showing I was awarded housing benefits for the hotels where I had rent arrears. Thank you for all your support and help. It feels like a huge weight has been lifted off my shoulders and life is changing for the better post-abuse. I appreciate your assistance in helping me keep my kids safe" - Victim/Survivor

"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." - Victim/Survivor

⁸⁵ All quotes below: Source: Quotes from Mayoral monitoring of Mayoral commissioned services 2022/23

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