

# **Support for survivors of domestic abuse and their children in safe accommodation**

A draft strategy for London

## COPYRIGHT

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## Foreword

As Mayor and a proud feminist, I want to ensure that London is a safe city for women and girls. This includes a sharp focus on preventing all forms of violence against women and girls, including tackling its root causes.

The lives of thousands of women and children each year, as well as some men, are devastated by domestic abuse. I'm committed to using all my powers to ensuring survivors can access support and justice, with every effort made to ensure that they can remain safely in their homes, and with action taken to tackle the perpetrators.

Effective and robust policing against domestic abuse is a key part of the solution to addressing the trauma caused by this awful crime. But equally important is that all survivors of domestic abuse, including children, can access high-quality support and— where they can't remain in their home - safe accommodation, tailored to their needs, to help them to recover from their experiences and positively move on.

Until now, accessing this support has been a postcode lottery for survivors, with particularly extreme shortages for specific groups, such as people with no recourse to public funds (NRPF), Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups, young women, Deaf and disabled people, men and those identifying as LGBTQ+. The system has clearly been failing some of the most vulnerable people in our city, with dire consequences for people's lives, health and wellbeing. Funding cuts are at least in part to blame, making it increasingly difficult for boroughs to provide the level and quality of services needed.

This is why I and others have lobbied the government for a step-change in the approach to the provision of refuges and other safe accommodation. We've been successful in this, achieving – through the new Domestic Abuse Act – new powers to regional and local authorities and additional funding for support services.

I'm committed to using these new powers to the full to ensure a well-resourced, clear and coordinated pan-London pathway of support through a survivor's journey, from crisis to recovery. I will also continue to use the other powers and resources available to me to tackle domestic abuse and support survivors more widely – including through my Police and Crime Plan, my Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy, my London Housing Strategy and my capital programmes delivering affordable rented homes.

To achieve my vision, all key agencies and organisations will need to work together to so that responses and support are better planned for, coordinated and delivered.

My new London Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Partnership Board<sup>1</sup>, which brings together a diverse range of organisations from across sectors, will play a critical role in making this happen.

With the new powers, new funding, continued investment by the boroughs and others and the tremendous energy, commitment and passion of all those involved in this vital area of work, I am confident that we will succeed in making sure that survivors and their children have the services they vitally need so that they can successfully rebuild their lives.

**Sadiq Khan**

Mayor of London

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/london\\_domestic\\_abuse\\_partnership\\_board\\_-\\_membership\\_and\\_terms\\_of\\_reference.pdf](https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/london_domestic_abuse_partnership_board_-_membership_and_terms_of_reference.pdf)

## Executive summary

Domestic abuse has a devastating impact on the lives of thousands of women and children each year, as well as some men. A raft of vital issues and challenges need to be addressed to prevent abuse from occurring in the first place and, where it does, to ensure that survivors are able to leave the perpetrators and move on with their lives.

The Mayor has new duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (the 2021 Act) to support survivors of domestic abuse and their children in safe accommodation, including producing a strategy and commissioning services. These new duties come with government funding - over £20m for London in 2021-22. This scope of this draft strategy is necessarily shaped by the requirements of these new duties. That is, it focuses specifically on support in safe accommodation. However, the Mayor is taking action to tackle violence against women and girls (VAWG) more widely through other strategies, funding programme and lobbying.

This document sets out proposals that will contribute to meeting the Mayor's vision that all survivors of domestic abuse, including children, are able to access and be supported by safe accommodation-based services, tailored to their needs, to enable them to move on with their lives.<sup>2</sup>

The vision is underpinned by six objectives which, in summary, are to ensure:

- a clear and integrated pathway of support through all stages of a survivor's journey
- that survivors can access physically and psychologically safe spaces
- that services reflect the diversity of the communities that they serve, including delivery by 'by and for' providers where appropriate
- that barriers to accessing services are reduced
- that the quality of services consistently high
- that commissioning is more strategic in its processes and how it is delivered and accessed.

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<sup>2</sup> Safety is defined as physical and psychological safety at each stage of a survivor's journey – see Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 2015.

The proposals are, in turn, centred around five overarching policies:

- improving early intervention
- improving access to and the provision of safe crisis accommodation
- improving access to and the provision of second-stage and move-on accommodation, and resettlement
- improving standards of safe accommodation
- tackling overarching issues.

The new duty and funding are a huge opportunity to make a real difference. Bringing this strategy to life, including by enhancing current and delivering new services, will require all key agencies and organisations to work in partnership and play their part. This includes the Mayor using the new funding and the other powers and resources at his disposal to the full, the boroughs and others continuing to invest in services through their own resources and service providers making the most of the new funding and opportunities available to them. The Mayor's new multi-agency London Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Partnership Board also has a critical role, by continuing to support the Mayor to deliver the new duties and by doing the work needed to take forward the proposals the strategy specifically ascribes to it.

The draft strategy has been informed by a pan-London needs assessment<sup>3</sup>. Its development has also been shaped by in-depth consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including London boroughs, service providers and survivors. The Mayor now welcomes further views and input on the draft strategy, particularly its vision, objectives, policies and proposals.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/housing-and-land/community-led-and-specialist-housing/mayors-draft-domestic-abuse-safe-accommodation-strategy>



# 1 About this strategy

The 2021 Act gives the Mayor major new powers to provide support services to survivors of domestic abuse, and their children, in safe accommodation. These include producing a strategy and commissioning services. The new duties come with government funding - over £20m for 2021-22, including for commissioning support services.

This strategy – the first of its kind in the capital – provides a blueprint to underpin the commissioning of support services over the next year and beyond, to meet the diverse needs of survivors and their children. It also sets out wider proposals to address the challenges many survivors of domestic abuse face accessing and receiving appropriate support for themselves and their children (who are now recognised as victims in their own right, under the 2021 Act). It is underpinned by the Whole Housing Approach, which covers all stages of a survivor's journey (see Appendix 2).

The strategy is informed by a recent London-wide needs assessment carried out in line with the new duties conferred by the 2021 Act. This has been published alongside the strategy and should be read in conjunction with it.

## Consultation

In-depth consultation with survivors and the partner agencies involved in tackling domestic abuse and supporting survivors was undertaken during the development of the strategy, as well as for the needs assessment (see Appendix 1). This included consultation with the Mayor's new London Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Partnership Board (the Partnership Board). The Partnership Board, which is key to advising and supporting the Mayor to develop and implement the strategy, includes London boroughs, the health sector, organisations representing the interests of survivors and their children, housing providers and domestic abuse service providers.

The publication of this document starts a three-week further period of consultation. The Mayor would like to receive Londoners' views about the issues raised in the draft strategy and, in particular, the plans for addressing them. The consultation ends on 21 November 2021. The strategy will then be revised in the light of comments received from the public and a final version will be published in early 2022.

## How to respond to this consultation

Please provide your comments on the consultation response form which can be found on the [London.gov website](https://www.london.gov.uk). This form can be completed online or downloaded and returned by email to [TierOneDuty@mopac.london.gov.uk](mailto:TierOneDuty@mopac.london.gov.uk) (with 'Draft Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy' as the subject) or by post to:

Draft Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy  
FAO: Tier 1  
MOPAC  
169 Union Street  
London  
SE1 0LL

Please let us know whether you are responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation. If the latter, please give the name of the organisation and your role.

Where relevant, please make clear which section(s), objective(s), policy(ies) and proposal(s) each of your comments relates to, by quoting the appropriate section/objective/policy/proposal numbers as they appear in this document.

All information in responses, including personal information, may be subject to publication or disclosure under Freedom of Information legislation. This document can be downloaded from the [London.gov website](https://www.london.gov.uk).

## 2 The Mayor's vision and objectives

The Mayor's vision is that all survivors of domestic abuse, including children, are able to access and be supported by safe accommodation-based services, tailored to their needs, to enable them to move on with their lives. This is essential to ensuring survivors' physical and psychological safety and recovery from the serious impact of domestic abuse on their lives and the lives of their children.

This vision is underpinned by the following objectives:

- 2.1 to establish a clear and integrated pan-London pathway of support through all stages of a survivor's journey, from early intervention, through to crisis and recovery and beyond; this must include supporting survivors to safely remain in their own homes or to return, if and when it is safe to do so
- 2.2 to support the right of survivors to access physically and psychologically safe spaces where they and their children can recover safely from abuse, supported by services rooted in a rights-based, trauma-informed and gender-informed approach
- 2.3 to ensure that services, including refuges, reflect the culture, language, religion and community of those they serve, and are run by 'by and for' specialist providers where appropriate
- 2.4 to reduce the barriers to accessing: services faced by survivors, such as through the provision of interpreters; and support for Deaf and disabled survivors, and those with no recourse to public funds (NRPF)
- 2.5 to ensure that services are of a consistently high quality, in terms of both support and the accommodation provided. Over time, all provision should be self-contained
- 2.6 to be more strategic in the way support is commissioned, delivered and accessed, with the development of more multi-borough and pan-London level services, where appropriate, and to ensure access is not constrained by postcode.

To achieve this, all key agencies and organisations will need to work together to make sure that responses and support are better planned for, coordinated and delivered. There is an important role for us all to play if we are to ensure high-quality joined-up support is available to all who are housed in safe accommodation.

### 3 Domestic abuse in London

Domestic abuse includes a range of physical and non-physical behaviours, which most frequently occur in the home. Recorded cases have risen dramatically in the capital over the past 10 years, with offences reported by the police increasing from around 46,000 in 2011 to around 95,000 in 2020. This equates to around 10.5 domestic abuse offences per 1,000 population in 2020 – an average of almost 3,000 in each London borough.<sup>4</sup>

Of the 2,140 homicide victims in London between 2005 and 2020, 361 (17 per cent) were victims of domestic abuse. Three-quarters of these domestic abuse victims were women; over half of these were aged between 25 and 44.<sup>5</sup>

Over the course of the coronavirus pandemic, and particularly during lockdowns, support services for domestic abuse across the country saw a significant increase in demand. In London, the police received a much-increased number of calls for domestic incidents during the lockdown period.<sup>6</sup> As part of his COVID-19 response, the Mayor provided emergency accommodation and support to over 200 survivors and their children, all of whom were supported to successfully move on.

Women and children are disproportionately affected and faced with fleeing their homes, often without access to the means to live their lives independently and free from abuse. The lack of a safe exit from an abusive relationship too often costs them their lives. More than four in 10 women killed by a male partner or former partner in 2018 had separated or taken steps to separate from them.<sup>7</sup>

Fleeing the home is traumatic in itself. But it is compounded by the fear of being found by the perpetrator; being left with debt, sometimes following economic abuse; and navigating the family and criminal court system, as well as the uncertainty of being able to find safe affordable housing near family, friends, children's schools and community.

London faces some specific challenges in supporting survivors. Services to meet the specific needs of its diverse population are not always available or easy to access, with particularly acute shortages of provision for some groups. These include people

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<sup>4</sup> Met Police, [Hate crime dashboard](#)

<sup>5</sup> Met Police, [Homicide dashboard data](#)

<sup>6</sup> The Office of National Statistics, [Domestic abuse during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic, England and Wales](#), November 2020

<sup>7</sup> Femicide Census, [UK Femicides 2009-2018](#), November 2020

with NRPF, some BAME groups, LGBTQ+ people, young women, Deaf and disabled people, male survivors, and people with multiple disadvantage<sup>8</sup>.

In addition, the approach has until now been characterised by a lack of strategic oversight and planning across areas and marked variations, unrelated to need, in the level of provision in different local authority areas. This means that the availability of support can be a postcode lottery, with different levels of provision in different parts of the capital and some services available only to local residents. As a result, support can be difficult if not impossible to access for the many people needing to flee from one area of the capital to another. Barriers to access can increase the risk of survivors returning to the perpetrator, lengthen the time it takes for recovery and exacerbate negative health impacts.<sup>9</sup>

A further particularly pressing London issue is the acute lack of stable long-term accommodation. As a result, stays in refuges and other crisis accommodation are much longer than those in the rest of the country – which is damaging to both those who cannot move on and those trying to access a safe space.

It is clear that a more strategic approach and additional funding is required, so that survivors of domestic abuse can receive the tailored support they need regardless of where they live. The new duties in the 2021 Act for the GLA, and associated funding, mean that progress to achieve this can now start to be made.

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<sup>8</sup> People with multiple disadvantage refers to those facing multiple and intersecting inequalities, including domestic abuse, substance use, mental ill health, homelessness, being involved in the criminal justice system and the removal of children.

<sup>9</sup> Solace Women's Aid, [Safe as Houses](#), October 2019

## 4 The Domestic Abuse Act and scope of the Mayor's new powers

Part 4 of the 2021 Act gives the Mayor new duties to support survivors of domestic abuse and their children in safe accommodation.

These include:

- assessing the need for domestic abuse support across London
- preparing and publishing a strategy for the provision of this support
- giving effect to the strategy – that is, commissioning the provision of support to meet the identified needs
- monitoring and evaluating the success of the strategy
- convening a Partnership Board to advise on the exercise of the above duties.

The new duties come with new government funding. For 2021-22, the Mayor has been allocated over £20m. This is mainly to fund the support services that will be enhanced or created through the implementation of this strategy.<sup>10</sup>

The 2021 Act, and associated regulations and statutory guidance, require the strategy, and other activities associated with the new duties, to focus on support in safe accommodation.<sup>11,12</sup> The Mayor recognises that a raft of other vital issues and challenges, which are beyond scope, need to be addressed to ensure that survivors of domestic abuse are able to leave their perpetrators and move on with their lives.

Some of these, such as the statutory framework around homelessness and changes to priority need are addressed in other parts of the 2021 Act. Others, such as tackling perpetrators, are covered by other legislation and are addressed in other Mayoral strategies such as the Mayor's Police and Crime Plan and the Mayor's VAWG Strategy, new versions of which are currently being developed. The Mayor also funds a number of interventions aimed at changing behaviour and better managing perpetrators in London. These include the DRIVE programme, London's

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<sup>10</sup> Around £5m has so far been allocated to boroughs and providers to continue, in 2021-22, to provide services that received direct government funding in 2020-21.

<sup>11</sup> [The Domestic Abuse Support \(Local Authority Strategies and Annual Reports\) Regulations 2021](#)

<sup>12</sup> The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), [Delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse in domestic abuse safe accommodation services](#), October 2021

Stalking Threat Assessment Centre (S-TAC) and a pilot to tag domestic abuse offenders with GPS tracking devices after prison release<sup>13 14 15</sup>.

In addition, while access to permanent accommodation is clearly a key issue for survivors of domestic abuse, it is beyond the scope of the Mayor's new duties under the 2021 Act and therefore this strategy. However, through his London Housing Strategy and investment programmes to increase the supply of social rented and other genuinely affordable homes, the Mayor is playing a major role in contributing to meeting the need for longer-term homes for Londoners, including survivors of domestic abuse.

The provision of new accommodation-based support services is clearly within scope. Services that will be commissioned with the new funding allocated to the Mayor are intended to enhance and complement those currently being funded and commissioned by London boroughs and others, to meet gaps in provision and emerging needs. Additionality is key – they are not intended to replace vital existing provision.

In many cases, new services will need buildings, and acquiring or improving buildings will need capital investment. The Mayor is therefore also making available capital funding from his housing investment programmes, where this is needed, to deliver new, or improve existing, buildings for new or expanded services.

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<sup>13</sup> [Drive Programme](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Stalking Threat Assessment Centre \(STAC\)](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Tracking pilot](#)

## 5 Overarching issues

Many of the issues and challenges that this strategy is seeking to address, and proposals to do so, relate to specific stages of a survivor's pathway. These are set out in sections 6, 7 and 8, below. However, some are overarching and cut across all stages and pathways; these are outlined in this section.

### Diversity of need

Services that are culturally and linguistically aligned with the survivor reduce isolation, and help survivors reintegrate into safe and settled lives. There is, however, a lack of culturally specific services to meet the needs of London's diverse population. There is also a lack of sign language and spoken language interpreters to support survivors through the different stages of their journey. This makes it challenging for both referrers and survivors to know what support is available for them and it means that some survivors may not fully benefit from the services that they do access.

Furthermore, there are specific challenges for survivors with NRPf in accessing services; once they do, there are often unacceptable delays in resolving issues around their immigration status. This can mean they are waiting in refuges for two or three years, while the Home Office determines their case.

While this strategy sets out several proposals to improve the position for survivors with NRPf, action is needed by the government to make a radical difference. Along with other stakeholders, the Mayor is lobbying for the introduction of a raft of measures to ensure that survivors with NRPf are able to seek support free from the fear of being penalised for coming forward, particularly as these penalties can be used as a threat by the perpetrator.<sup>16</sup> These include reinstating legal aid for immigration cases; reviewing the decision not to extend the destitution domestic violence concession; and introducing a set of stringent operational guidelines and principles for all immigration officials on how to respond to victims with insecure immigration status.

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<sup>16</sup> Imkaan, Vital Statistics 2 Key Findings Report on Black and Minority Ethnic and Refugee Women's and Children's Experiences of Gender-Based Violence, 2012



## **Data and information**

The London Needs Assessment found a lack of available data and information about the demand for services and survivors' needs. This makes it difficult to plan and deliver services in a strategic way.

Specific areas where data is lacking include:

- the numbers unable to access safe accommodation, and the reasons for this
- the unmet demand for services from, and the support needs of, specific groups of survivors: children; men; people with mental health issues; those aged 16-18; Deaf and disabled people; and those who identify as LGBTQ+
- the provision and effectiveness of sanctuary schemes
- the funding and commissioning of services across boroughs and other organisations
- the provision of and need for move-on accommodation
- the use and experiences of generic temporary accommodation for survivors and their children.

## **Policy 5 Tackling overarching issues**

### **Proposals**

- 5.1 Services should not be restricted to local residents.
- 5.2 Where required, services should be culturally specific, respond to the specific needs of different communities, and be run by 'by and for' specialist providers, where appropriate.
- 5.3 All services should have, and fully implement in all aspects of their delivery, robust equality, diversity and inclusion policies, including anti-racism policies.
- 5.4 All services should have, or be able to access, sign language and spoken language interpreters for the survivors they are working with.
- 5.5 Information about services and support, and how to access these, should be available in languages and formats that meet survivors' diverse needs.

- 5.6 Wraparound support for those with NRPF should include access to accredited immigration legal advice to support them at all stages of their journey, and the Home Office should fast-track all domestic abuse cases.
- 5.7 Commissioning processes and requirements should not disadvantage smaller and/or specialist providers, including 'by and for' providers, and should support these providers to build their capacity.
- 5.8 The Partnership Board should work with partners:
  - 5.8.1 to improve the provision of information to survivors about the range of services and support, and how to access these
  - 5.8.2 to explore and develop improvements to the collection and use of data, and information on the demand for services and survivors' needs, including for those who are severely and multiply disadvantaged
  - 5.8.3 to identify the need for and availability of move-on and second-stage accommodation.
- 5.9 The Mayor will provide funding for services that are culturally specific, responsive to the needs of different communities and meet survivors' diverse needs.
- 5.10 The Mayor will ensure that his commissioning processes and requirements do not disadvantage small, specialist and 'by and for' providers, and support capacity-building.

## 6 Improving early intervention

Many survivors of domestic abuse are forced to flee their homes, and end up losing stable and secure accommodation for themselves and their children.<sup>17</sup>

Social landlords have a key role to play in supporting survivors who are social tenants at the earliest possible stage, including by seeking to remove perpetrators. The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance's (DAHA's) accreditation scheme enables landlords to ensure that they are providing appropriate support, and delivering safe and effective interventions.<sup>18</sup> It has eight priority areas: policies and procedures; case management; risk management; inclusivity and accessibility; perpetrator management; partnership working; training; and publicity and awareness. Many, though not all, of London's social landlords are currently accredited.

In a few areas of London, co-locating independent domestic abuse advisers (IDVAs) in borough housing-options services has been beneficial to both individual caseworkers and survivors. However, this arrangement is by no means universal across the capital.

Where survivors would prefer to remain in their homes, and it is safe for them to do so, it is essential not only that their property is made secure, but also that the perpetrator is effectively removed and essential support is provided to both the survivor and any children. Though beyond the scope of this strategy and associated funding, work with perpetrators to change their behaviour is also vital.

Sanctuary schemes offer additional security to the home through better locks, cameras and in some cases 'a panic room', as well as associated measures to ensure physical safety. However, they are not a panacea or a viable option for all survivors, and where deployed must be victim-led. They are also not available everywhere or in all tenures, and not all of them meet the standards set out in the DAHA Toolkit.<sup>19</sup>

Many survivors who wish to remain in their home have difficulties doing so because it is not rented in their own name and/or there are rent arrears, which can be as a result of economic abuse. Also, while the Secure Tenancies Act 2018 enables some survivors with an existing lifetime-assured social-housing tenancy to retain this,

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<sup>17</sup> Solace Women's Aid, [The Price of Safety](#), 2016

<sup>18</sup> DAHA, [Accreditation for housing providers](#)

<sup>19</sup> DAHA, [Sanctuary Scheme Toolkit](#)

some survivors who flee a social-housing tenancy and move to crisis accommodation do still ultimately lose their home or previous security of tenure.

It is essential that survivors living in social housing who need to move can do so easily. However, processes are not always as swift, streamlined and effective as they should be and there is a lack of available properties. Current options include management transfers, the pan-London Housing Reciprocal scheme, funded by MOPAC, and the Mayor's Housing Moves mobility scheme.<sup>20</sup>

## **Policy 6 Improving early intervention**

### **Proposals**

- 6.1 All social landlords should have DAHA accreditation.
- 6.2 Sanctuary schemes should be available to residents of all boroughs, and meet the standards set out in the DAHA Toolkit.
- 6.3 The London Partnership Board should undertake work on early intervention, including:
  - 6.3.1 ensuring consistent high quality for sanctuary schemes is in place across London, and exploring options for providing sanctuary schemes in the private rented sector and for homeowners
  - 6.3.2 improving options for survivors who are social tenants and need to move to another social rented home, or retain their current one, including reviewing the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal scheme
  - 6.3.3 exploring the roll-out across London of the co-location of IDVAs in local authority housing-options services.
- 6.4 The Mayor will provide funding to improve and expand early intervention services.

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<sup>20</sup> The pan-London Housing Reciprocal scheme offers an alternative pathway to long-term accommodation for social housing households at risk of homelessness from domestic abuse and other forms of VAWG, hate crime, gang violence or other serious violence.

## 7 Improving the provision of and access to safe crisis accommodation

The period between seeking support and accessing safe accommodation is a key point of vulnerability for survivors. Poor levels of support at this stage can lead to survivors remaining with the perpetrator; or being vulnerable to other forms of abuse, exploitation and even death.<sup>21</sup> Also, the longer it takes for people to access services, the longer it takes them to recover and the more negative health impacts are exacerbated.<sup>22</sup>

Safe crisis accommodation for survivors and their children includes respite services, refuges and dispersed accommodation with intensive floating support. Refuges currently form the main source of crisis accommodation. In addition, many survivors who approach their local authority as homeless are placed by local authorities in generic temporary accommodation, where they do not necessarily receive the support they need.

Respite services, also known as assessment services, provide safe spaces where survivors can think about their situation and, with the support of expert advisers, make any plans needed to increase their safety. These services help stop survivors falling through the cracks, and bridge the gap between the homelessness and VAWG sectors.<sup>23</sup> However, with no respite services in the capital currently, there is clearly a gap in this type of provision.

Providers of safe crisis accommodation frequently refuse access to those with NRPF because of the difficulty with financing their stay. There is also a lack of access to immigration advice, interpreters and move-on accommodation for this group. Survivors experiencing severe multiple disadvantage are also frequently turned away from refuges and other safe accommodation, because of the limited level of support on offer and the difficulty accessing community support.

Safe crisis accommodation is accessed through the National Helpline, London-wide helplines, self-referral, or agency referral. Information about vacancies is collated nationally via the Women's Aid Routes to Support service. For security reasons, only organisations providing direct services to women and children experiencing domestic and sexual abuse can access Routes to Support. Vacancies cannot therefore be

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<sup>21</sup> Femicide Census, [UK Femicides 2009-2018](#), November 2020

<sup>22</sup> Solace Women's Aid, [Safe as Houses](#), October 2019

<sup>23</sup> Homeless Link, [Respite Rooms: Creating a safe space for women sleeping rough, survivors of domestic abuse](#), August 2021

accessed by local authority housing options or other statutory services, or by services that are not specifically for women and children. Also, data is not collected about, for example, how many times a survivor is turned away or what happens to people when they are refused a space.

Refuges are not necessarily the best option for everyone who needs to flee their home. Hosting approaches, along the lines of PSS Shared Lives, could offer an alternative, but are not currently available specifically for survivors of domestic abuse.<sup>24</sup> Other options, such as Housing First, can lead to better outcomes for those with severe and multiple disadvantage, but again this provision is extremely limited in the capital.

In addition, current provision of safe crisis accommodation is not meeting the demand from or needs of a number of specific groups of survivors:

- there is a shortage of spaces for survivors with NRPF; and for families with more than two children and/or boys aged 12 and older
- there is no ongoing specialist refuge accommodation for LGBTQ+ and/or male survivors
- there is limited specialist provision for survivors who are BAME; Deaf and disabled; young survivors of interpersonal or family violence; those affected by multiple disadvantage; and people with a learning disability.

Furthermore, safe crisis accommodation provision is often not effectively integrated with wider services, such as IDVAs and social services. This presents challenges for survivors in dispersed accommodation and those transitioning into move-on accommodation. This can cause survivors to remain in refuges longer, effectively blocking access for others in desperate need.

Onward moves from safe crisis accommodation need to be planned well in advance, and to include assessing the housing and support needs of the survivor and any children. Boroughs working on an in-reach basis with refuges and other safe crisis accommodation to manage pathways out and identify suitable accommodation can be extremely beneficial to outcomes, but such approaches are rare.

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<sup>24</sup> PSS, [Shared Lives](#)

## **Policy 7 Improving the provision of and access to safe crisis accommodation**

### **Proposals**

- 7.1 A respite service should be piloted.
- 7.2 The provision of refuge and other safe crisis accommodation, including new specialist accommodation, should be increased, with a particular focus on meeting the needs of the following under-served groups:
- families with more than two children and/or boys aged 12 and older
  - LGBTQ+ survivors
  - male survivors
  - people from BAME communities
  - Deaf and disabled people, including those with a learning disability
  - young people
  - survivors of interpersonal or family violence
  - those affected by multiple disadvantage
  - those with NRPF.
- 7.3 The level of support to people in existing refuges and other safe crisis accommodation should be enhanced, where this would improve outcomes. This could include floating support that can be delivered across several services, a borough or group of boroughs, such as young people's support workers.
- 7.4 Specialist support should be available to survivors and their children placed by boroughs in generic temporary accommodation.<sup>25</sup>
- 7.5 There should be a greater range of safe crisis accommodation, to meet diverse need. This should include an expansion of Housing First and piloting host-care provision for survivors of domestic abuse.

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<sup>25</sup> Note that the statutory guidance accompanying the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 states that non-self-contained generic temporary accommodation is beyond the scope of the Part 4 duties.

- 7.6 Survivors with NRPF should be able to access crisis safe accommodation, where finances are in place and they meet other access criteria.
- 7.7 There should be a new pan-London single point of entry (that is, provision via a single organisation) to safe accommodation for survivors with NRPF and/or multiple disadvantage.
- 7.8 There should be satellite accommodation with wraparound support, to enable larger family groups to remain in the same locality safely.
- 7.9 The provision of borough in-reach services to plan onward moves for those in safe crisis accommodation should be enhanced.
- 7.10 The London Partnership Board should ensure that good practice and learning from evaluations and pilots is shared across delivery partners, so that continuous improvement and learning is developed.
- 7.11 The Mayor will provide funding to improve the provision of and access to safe crisis accommodation.



## 8 Improving the provision of and access to move-on and second-stage accommodation, and resettlement support

Move-on and second-stage accommodation enables those in refuges and other safe accommodation who no longer need the level of intense support provided by these services to move through the system. This frees up refuge spaces for other survivors in need. The provision of resettlement support (both when survivors move to a settled home and when they move on to generic temporary accommodation) can play a vital role in ensuring that survivors can establish themselves in their new home. Emerging evidence suggests that survivors without support at this stage are far likelier to return to their previous perpetrator, or become a repeat victim with another perpetrator.

The essential need for move-on accommodation has been recognised by the Mayor, through his £50m Move-On programme.<sup>26</sup> This is delivering accommodation and support provided via specialist providers, primarily the Casa Project – a partnership of VAWG organisations. Other examples of good practice include the COVID-19 Emergency Accommodation Project with the Outside Project, funded by the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime<sup>27</sup>; and Galop's second-stage self-contained accommodation, with specialist support, for survivors who identify as LGBTQ+.

There are very few second-stage refuges and a lack of move-on accommodation for those with ongoing support needs, and those with NRPF. This means that survivors remain in refuges for much longer than they need to, often past the point where they need the intensive level of support provided. In addition, some survivors end up moving on without the support they need to live independently and free from abuse.

There is also no standardised resettlement support offer for survivors, including children. Support is most frequently at a very low level and delivered over the phone, due to the lack of capacity in refuges.

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<sup>26</sup> [Mayor of London Move On Programme](#)

<sup>27</sup> This project was developed in response to COVID-19 and provided emergency accommodation for LGBTQ+ survivors of domestic abuse.

## **Policy 8 Improving the provision of and access to move-on and second-stage accommodation, and resettlement support**

### **Proposals**

- 8.1 Move-on from crisis accommodation should be planned well in advance. This should include assessing the housing and support needs of the survivor and any children. To help achieve this, the provision of domestic abuse referral pathway coordinators within boroughs should be enhanced, with boroughs working on an in-reach basis with refuges, and other safe crisis accommodation, to manage pathways out and identify suitable move-on accommodation.
- 8.2 The provision of move-on and second-stage accommodation should be expanded. This should include developing new move-on pathways for specific groups, informed by those provided for LGBTQ+ survivors, as set out above.
- 8.3 Resettlement support should be available for those moving on from refuges and other safe accommodation for a minimum of three months, including wraparound support provided by the accommodation provider where possible. Resettlement packages should include transport, utility connections, white goods (where not available) and all basic requirements.
- 8.4 The Mayor will provide funding to improve the provision of and access to move-on and second-stage accommodation, and resettlement support.

## 9 Improving the quality of safe accommodation

Safe accommodation services across the board should be of consistently high quality, in terms of both the support they provide and the physical standards of the buildings and environment, in line with standards produced jointly by Women's Aid and Imkaan, and those contained in the statutory guidance accompanying the Part 4 duty.<sup>28, 29</sup> However, this is not the case across London, negatively impacting the recovery of survivors.

Providers, particularly smaller specialist providers, may not receive the support they need to provide, strengthen and sustain high-quality services. In addition, commissioning approaches tend to weight economies of scale and value for money over quality and expertise. Also, services are not always set to high and consistent standards when they are commissioned; nor are they given the support they need to continuously improve. Furthermore, there is often a lack of training to equip support staff to deal with the often complex and traumatic issues they face. Staff are also not always able to access high-quality wellbeing support.

These issues are largely the impact of cuts to local authority funding. These have severely reduced the capacity of commissioning teams (at both the procurement and contract monitoring/management stages) and constrained the funding available to deliver high-quality services. In addition, the specific additional government funding that has been made available in the past has been short-term and insufficient, impeding strategic and longer-term planning and the delivery of sustainable services. There are also limited opportunities for sharing good practice across boroughs and service providers.

There are also issues around the quality of the accommodation being provided, with a lack of investment in many of the buildings as well as the fixtures and fittings. In addition, many do not have self-contained facilities such as en suite bathrooms and kitchen areas. Self-containment is vital to giving survivors and their children independence and dignity, and its provision is even more important in the COVID-19 era. Furthermore, most safe accommodation does not meet the needs of disabled people as it is not accessible. Through his capital housing programmes, the Mayor can fund the delivery of new, and the improvement of existing, safe accommodation.

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<sup>28</sup> Women's Aid/Imkaan, [National quality standards for services supporting women and children survivors of domestic violence](#), 2018

<sup>29</sup> DLUHC, [Delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse in domestic abuse safe accommodation services – Annex B, DLUHC Quality Standards](#), October 2021

There is also scope to fund minor repairs and improvements to fixtures and fittings through the new funding secured by the Mayor to implement this strategy.

## **Policy 9 Improving the quality of safe accommodation**

- 9.1 Safe accommodation should meet high-quality standards, for both support services and accommodation, including those produced by Imkaan/Women's Aid and set out in government guidance on Part 4 of the 2021 Act.
- 9.2 There should be a consistent, high level of support, training and access to recognised qualifications for people working in domestic abuse services. In addition, all staff should be able to access independent and high-quality wellbeing support, which should be gender and race-informed.
- 9.3 The quality of the fabric of existing refuges and other safe crisis accommodation should be improved.
- 9.4 The Mayor will provide funding to improve the quality of safe accommodation.

## 10 Next steps

Many of the proposals in this strategy can start to be implemented immediately with the funding the Mayor has secured from the government for 2021-22, and a commissioning round is now underway. In line with the strategy, this is focusing on increasing the level and quality of provision across the entire pathway, by both enhancing current services and developing new ones. Up to £12.5m is being made available for this purpose. More information can be found on the [London.gov website](https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/what-we-are-doing/strategy-for-survivors-of-domestic-abuse-and-their-children-in-safe-accommodation).

Other proposals are longer-term and will be taken forward under the oversight of the Partnership Board. The Board has a key role to play in ensuring the successful implementation of the strategy, by driving forward and monitoring all aspects, and directly working on the specific proposals assigned to it.

## **Appendix 1: The Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment and consultation on this strategy**

The proposals in this strategy are informed by the findings of the London Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment and consultation with key stakeholders (in addition to that undertaken for the needs assessment).

### **London Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment**

The London Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment identifies gaps in current provision, and the many challenges that need to be overcome to ensure the current system for providing safe, accommodation-based support for survivors of domestic abuse is fit for purpose.

### **Consultation on development of this draft strategy**

A survey was sent to all London boroughs, and 76 groups and individual stakeholders. All stakeholders were also offered an opportunity to meet and provide input to the strategy, in either a group setting or a one-to-one meeting. In total, 25 boroughs (mainly VAWG coordinators), 47 service providers, 10 housing providers and 14 other key stakeholders responded to the survey and/or participated in a consultation meeting. In addition, seven survivors contributed to the consultation.

## Appendix 2: The Whole Housing Approach model for sanctuary schemes

The model includes the following components.

- The key priority is safety: understanding the survivor's fears and treating them very seriously. This option should be explored only if it is safe to do so.
- Priority should be given to disabled women who have accessible homes and care/support packages in place. However, support must be adapted to need – e.g. specialist, disabled-accessible locks.
- The support offered should include non-security-required repairs to property caused by the perpetrator, and safety measures will be high-quality to promote psychological safety.
- Sanctuary scheme security works should be accompanied by specialist advice and support that is accessible to all groups of survivors, and available irrespective of risk-level (i.e. not just high-risk multi-agency risk assessment conferences), with regular check-ins by support agency (where relevant, from 'by and for' providers) and a 24/7 emergency number.
- The offer should include access to funds to: repair furniture damaged by the perpetrator; and pay off housing arrears incurred as a result of the domestic abuse.
- Good collaboration between agencies to recognise that remaining in their own home is a preferred option, and it is intended to make it a reality.
- Effective action should be made available to prevent the perpetrator from returning, including that the police will: prioritise their response to a call from that address; and effectively enforce Domestic Abuse Protection Notices and Domestic Abuse Protection Orders where they have been applied.
- Literature and information needs to be widely available, including in languages other than English, and to be accessible and tailored for disabled survivors.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Shaping Our Lives, [A Refuge for All Project and Findings Report](#), March 2019

## **Other formats and languages**

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