

Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy

Support for victims/survivors of domestic abuse and their children in safe accommodation

Key information

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Foreword

As Mayor and as a proud feminist, I want to ensure that London is a safe city for women and girls. This includes maintaining a sharp focus on preventing all forms of violence against women and girls, as well as 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 ensure victims/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 must form a key part of dealing with this awful crime. But equally important is that all victims/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 the trauma they have experienced and look ahead to a more hopeful future.

Until now, accessing this support has been a postcode lottery for victims/survivors, with particularly extreme shortages for certain groups, including non-UK nationals with no or limited recourse to public funds, Black and minoritised women, young women, Deaf and disabled women, those who identify as LGBTQ+, people with multiple disadvantage and men. 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 for regional and local authorities and securing 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'll also continue to use the other powers and resources available to me to tackle domestic abuse and support victims/survivors more widely – including through my Police and Crime Plan, my Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, my London Housing Strategy and my capital programmes delivering affordable rented homes.

To achieve my vision, agencies and organisations will need to work together so that responses and support are better planned for, coordinated and delivered. My new London Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Partnership Board, which brings together a diverse range of organisations from across sectors, will play a critical role in making this happen.

With new powers and 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'm confident that we will succeed in making sure that domestic abuse victims/survivors and their children receive the services they desperately need in order to successfully rebuild their lives.

Sadiq Khan

Mayor of London

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 victims/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 victims/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, including the refresh of his VAWG strategy [Reference:1](#) currently under way, and through funding programmes and lobbying. This includes work to prevent VAWG and a raft of perpetrator programmes.

This document sets out proposals that will contribute to meeting the Mayor's vision in relation to the Part 4 duties. This is that all victims/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. [Reference:2](#)

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 victims/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 faced by victims/survivors in accessing services are reduced
- that the quality of services is consistently high
- that commissioning is more strategic in its processes and how it is delivered and accessed, and supports providers to deliver high-quality services.

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 the quality of safe accommodation
- tackling overarching issues.

The vision, objectives, policies and proposals in this strategy are intended to apply to safe accommodation services across the board, not solely those commissioned with the funding allocated to the Mayor to deliver the new Part 4 duties.

The new duty and funding are a huge opportunity to make a real difference to the lives of victims/survivors and their children. 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 in continuing to support the Mayor to deliver the new duties, and in doing the work needed to take forward the proposals the strategy specifically ascribes to it.

The strategy has been informed by a pan-London needs assessment, the report of which is a companion document to this one. [Reference:3](#) It has also been shaped by in-depth consultation with a wide range of

stakeholders, including London boroughs, service providers, victims/survivors and the Partnership Board – both during the development of the draft for consultation and during the consultation on that draft which took place in November 2021.

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 victims/survivors and their children across every stage of their pathway to recovery. It also sets out wider proposals to address the challenges many victims/survivors of domestic abuse face in 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 principles of the Whole Housing Approach, which covers all stages of a survivor’s journey.[Reference:4](#)

It outlines the Mayor’s vision, objectives, policies and proposals in relation to the new duties. These are intended to apply to safe accommodation services across the board, not solely those commissioned with the funding allocated to the Mayor to deliver the new Part 4 duties.

Delivery partners

Through the London Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Partnership Board, the Mayor has brought together the agencies and organisations that are key to the effective delivery of this strategy. This includes London boroughs; the health sector; criminal justice partners; specialist organisations representing the interests of victims/survivors and their children; housing providers; and domestic abuse service providers.

The Board has a critical role in advising and supporting the Mayor to implement the strategy, both as a collective and through action by the individual organisations and bodies its members represent.

The strategy and the work arising from it will also link more widely into the Mayor’s VAWG Board, which oversees the delivery of the VAWG Strategy, and his Homes for Londoners Board, which has oversight of the London Housing Strategy and housing delivery in the capital. In addition, while the legislation places the new statutory duties on the Greater London Authority, the Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) are playing a major role in supporting their implementation. These firm links with wider VAWG and housing structures, MOPAC’s substantial involvement in implementation and the support of the new multi-agency Partnership Board will ensure that the new duties are not delivered in isolation, and that there is a firmly joined-up approach across all of the interrelated issues and policy areas that will improve outcomes for victims/survivors.

Evidence base and equalities impact assessment

The strategy is informed by a 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.

[Reference:5](#)

The development of the strategy has been subject to an equalities impact assessment, which has also been published alongside it. This assessment has influenced the preparation of the strategy, ensuring that it has been taken into account at each stage of the development process.

Consultation

A draft version of this strategy was subject to a consultation exercise with organisations, including with the London Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Partnership Board, and with the public during November 2021. A consultation report has been published on [our website](#) alongside this strategy.

There was also in-depth consultation with victims/survivors, agencies involved in tackling domestic abuse, and organisations delivering support during the development of the draft version of the strategy, as well as for the needs assessment.

2. The Mayor's vision and objectives

The Mayor's vision, in relation to his new powers under the 2021 Act, is that all victims/survivors of domestic abuse, including children, are able to access and be supported by safe accommodation-based services, tailored to their needs. This is essential to ensuring victims'/survivors' physical and psychological safety and recovery from the serious impact of domestic abuse; and to enabling them to rebuild and move on with their lives.

This vision is underpinned by the following objectives.

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, recovery and beyond. This must include supporting victims/survivors to safely remain in their own homes, or to return if and when it is safe to do so.
2. To support the right of victims/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.
3. To ensure that services, including refuges, meet the cultural, language, religious and other needs of those they serve, and, where appropriate, are run by 'by and for' specialist providers.
4. To reduce the barriers to accessing services faced by victims/survivors, such as those requiring interpreters, Deaf and disabled victims/survivors and non-UK nationals with no or limited recourse to public funds (NRPF). [Reference:6](#)
5. To ensure that services are of a consistently high quality, in terms of both support and the accommodation provided, to enable victims/survivors to recover and rebuild. Over time, all provision should be self-contained, to support independence and dignity.
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 victims'/survivors' access to safety and recovery 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.

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.[Reference:7](#)

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.[Reference:8](#)

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.[Reference:9](#) 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 by domestic abuse and many face being forced to flee their homes, often without access to the means to live their lives independently and free from abuse. The lack of a safe pathway 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.[Reference:10](#)

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/or navigating the family and criminal court system; and the uncertainty of being able to find safe affordable housing near family, friends, children's schools and the community. Domestic abuse also has a devastating impact on children and young people that can last into adulthood, including both short and long-term cognitive, behavioural and emotional effects.

London faces some specific challenges in supporting victims/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 those with NRPF; some Black and minoritised groups; LGBTQ+ people; young women; Deaf and disabled people; men; and those facing multiple disadvantages.[Reference:11](#)

In addition, the approach to safe accommodation has 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 forced to flee from one area of the capital to another. Barriers to access can increase the risk of victims/survivors returning to the perpetrator, lengthen the time it takes for recovery and exacerbate negative health impacts.[Reference:12](#)

A further particularly pressing issue in London 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. This creates a bottleneck, which is damaging to both those who cannot move on to independent lives, and those desperately in need of a safe space. The Mayor is already taking steps to address this, including through his planning powers and investment programmes to increase the supply of social rented and other genuinely affordable homes; his funding for the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal scheme; and the priority afforded to victims /survivors of domestic abuse in his Housing Moves mobility scheme.

It is clear that a more strategic approach and additional funding is required, so that victims/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 boroughs, and associated funding, mean that progress to achieve this can now start to be made.

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 victims/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.[Reference:13](#)

The 2021 Act, and associated regulations and statutory guidance,[Reference:14](#) require the strategy, and other activities associated with the new duties, to focus on support in safe accommodation.[Reference:15](#) The Mayor recognises that a raft of other interrelated vital issues and challenges, which are beyond scope, need to be addressed to ensure that victims/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, which is implemented by local authorities, are addressed in other parts of the 2021 Act. Other related issues that contribute to preventing and addressing domestic abuse and wider VAWG are covered by other legislation and are addressed by the Mayor in other strategies – primarily the Mayor's Police and Crime Plan, and the Mayor's VAWG Strategy, new or refreshed versions of which are currently being developed.

The Mayor's wider work on VAWG includes interventions aimed at changing behaviour and better managing perpetrators in London. These include the DRIVE programme[Reference:16](#), London's Stalking Threat Assessment Centre (STAC)[Reference:17](#) and a pilot to tag domestic abuse offenders with GPS tracking devices after prison release.[Reference:18](#) Most recently, he has invested a further £2.4m to expand existing and implement new programmes to address the behaviour of perpetrators and protect victims/survivors.[Reference:19](#)

In addition, while access to permanent accommodation is clearly a key issue for victims/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 victims/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 of victims/survivors. 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.

5. Tackling 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 5, 6 and 7, below. However, some are overarching and cut across all stages and pathways; these are outlined in this section.

5a: Meeting the diversity of need

Services that are culturally and linguistically aligned with victims/survivors reduce isolation, and help victims/survivors recover and rebuild safe, 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 independent sign language and spoken language interpreters to support victims/survivors through the different stages of their journey. This makes it even more challenging for both referring agencies and victims/survivors themselves to know what support is available for them. It also means that some victims/survivors may not fully benefit from the support on offer, even when they do gain access to services.

Furthermore, there are specific challenges faced by victims/survivors with NRPF, including EU nationals impacted by Brexit, in accessing services. Many will not be aware that they are entitled to support. There are also often unacceptable delays in resolving issues around their immigration status. This can mean they can wait in a refuge for two or three years (well over the recommended six-month period) while the Home Office determines their case.[Reference:20](#) The impact is immense, and can lead to a deepening of mental health issues and a return to or exploitation by perpetrators.

While this strategy sets out several proposals to improve the position for victims/survivors with NRPF, urgent 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 victims/survivors with NRPF are able to seek support free from the fear of being penalised for coming forward, which is often used as a threat by the perpetrator.[Reference:21](#) These measures include reinstating legal aid for immigration cases; reviewing the decision not to extend and expand the destitution domestic violence concession; introducing a firewall to prevent information-sharing with border control; and having a set of stringent operational guidelines and principles for all immigration officials on how to respond sensitively and appropriately to victims with insecure immigration status.

5b: Improving data and information

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

Specific areas where data is lacking include:

- the number of victims/survivors who are unable to access safe accommodation, and the reasons for this
- the unmet demand for services from, and the support needs of, specific groups of victims/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 victims/survivors and their children.

5c: Improving the provision of buildings

Very few providers of accommodation-based domestic abuse services are able to directly access grant funding from the Mayor to improve or extend buildings in which current services are located or to deliver new buildings for new services. This is because they: are not registered providers; lack development experience or capacity; and, for existing services, do not usually own the building accommodating the service (most are leased or rented from registered providers). [Reference:22](#)

Given their access to development funding, including grant funding, and their development expertise, registered providers have a key role to play in enabling buildings being used for domestic abuse services to be maintained and, where needed, refurbished to meet the needs of victims/survivors. They are also vital to the delivery of (new) services that require new buildings, including safe crisis accommodation, second-stage and move-on.

5d: Creating a more equitable and sustainable approach to funding across London

It is vital that victims/survivors who need to flee their homes can access accommodation and services in different locations, to ensure their safety. Provision is therefore needed in all areas for victims/survivors from all areas. However, as set out in section 3, there are marked variations between boroughs, unrelated to need, in the level of funding for and provision of accommodation-based services for victims/survivors. For example, whereas some boroughs' provision of safe accommodation exceeds the Council of Europe's recommended level, others' provision falls way below this. The Mayor's Part 4 funding for commissioning services is focused on creating additionality, rather than addressing the currently uneven pattern of provision. That is, its purpose is to create new provision rather than replace funding for services that already exist. However, the new strategic oversight enabled by Part 4, particularly through the new Partnership Board, provides a valuable opportunity to explore how a more equitable approach to funding across London can be achieved.

In addition, the fact that the first round of Part 4 funding is so short-term (for only one year) severely limits the opportunities to develop and deliver new services and prevents strategic planning. Funding settlements that are both longer-term and sufficient in scale are needed to maximise the transformative impact of the Mayor's new duties.

5.1 Policy 5: Tackling overarching issues

Proposals

1. Safe accommodation services should not be restricted to local residents.
2. Where required, services should meet the cultural and other specific needs of different communities; and, where appropriate, be run by 'by and for' specialist providers.

3. All services should have, and fully implement in all aspects of their delivery, robust equality, diversity and inclusion policies, including anti-racism policies.
4. All services should have, or be able to access, independent sign language and spoken language interpreters for the victims/survivors they are working with.
5. Information about services and support, and how to access these, should be available in languages and formats that meet victims/survivors' diverse needs.
6. Wraparound support for those with NRPF should include access to independent accredited immigration legal advice to support them at all stages of their journey; and the Home Office should fast-track all domestic abuse cases.
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.
8. Registered providers should work with service providers to ensure that buildings accommodating existing services are fit for purpose; and, where appropriate, are refurbished or remodelled to meet the needs of victims/survivors. They should also support service providers to develop new services by partnering with them to deliver new buildings.
9. Periodic refreshes of the London Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment will include monitoring the level of provision of safe accommodation services in London, including any decommissioning.
10. The Partnership Board will work with partners:
 1. to improve the provision of information to victims/survivors about the range of services and support, and how to access these
 2. to explore and develop improvements to the collection and use of data, and information on the demand for services and victims'/survivors' needs, including for those who are severely and multiply disadvantaged
 3. to identify the need for and availability of move-on and second-stage accommodation
 4. to explore how a more equitable approach to funding safe accommodation services across London can be achieved
 5. to ensure effective communication between home and host boroughs.
11. The Mayor will provide funding for services that are culturally specific and responsive to the needs of different communities; and that meet victims /survivors' diverse needs.
12. The Mayor will ensure that his commissioning processes and requirements do not disadvantage small, specialist and 'by and for' providers, and support capacity-building.
13. The Mayor will continue to lobby the government for future Part 4 funding that is both sufficient in scale and longer-term.

6. Improving early intervention

Prevention of domestic abuse and wider VAWG, by intervening early to tackle the attitudes and behaviours that can lead to these crimes, must be the first priority. This important area of work is beyond the scope of the Mayor's new duties in the 2021 Act but is addressed in the Mayor's VAWG Strategy, a refreshed version of which will be published in early 2022.

Many victims/survivors of domestic abuse are forced to flee their homes, with devastating and long-lasting impacts on themselves and their children. This includes losing stable and secure accommodation, which can leave them vulnerable to homelessness, poverty, and further exploitation and abuse.[Reference:23](#)The primary

focus of this section of the strategy is on the action that can and should be taken to tackle and prevent further domestic abuse, to enable victims/survivors to stay in their homes (where it is safe to do so) and prevent homelessness.

Social landlords have a key role to play in supporting victims/survivors who live in social housing at the earliest possible stage. This should include using all powers at their disposal to identify domestic abuse occurring in their properties and taken robust action against perpetrators, including eviction, relocation, exclusion and banning orders to remove the harm. The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance's (DAHA's) accreditation scheme gives guidance to housing associations and boroughs, as both landlords and providers of wider services, to ensure that they can provide appropriate support, and deliver safe and effective interventions.[Reference:24](#) The accreditation covers 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. Though the scheme does not currently cover private landlords, DAHA – through its Private Rented Sector Project – is progressing work in this area. Local authorities' staff over and above those in housing options and management services, such as environmental health officers, also have an important role to play in identifying residents and tenants experiencing domestic abuse and signposting them to specialist support and services.

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 victims/survivors. This approach enables cases to be accurately identified and assessed sensitively and appropriately. However, this arrangement is by no means universal across the capital.

Where victims/survivors would prefer to remain in their homes and community, 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 support is provided to both the survivor and any children. This should include regular risk assessment, and therapeutic and practical support. Though beyond the scope of this strategy and associated funding, programmes to work with perpetrators to change their behaviour are also vital. As outlined in section 1, the Mayor and other partners are supporting and undertaking key work in this area.

Sanctuary schemes usually offer additional security to the home through target hardening, including better locks, cameras and in some cases 'a safe room', as well as associated measures to ensure physical safety. They are generally focused on enabling victims/survivors to stay in their own home, but can also be used for temporary, move-on and permanent accommodation. However, they are not a panacea or a viable option for all victims/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 Whole Housing Approach Sanctuary Scheme Toolkit.[Reference:25](#)

Many victims/survivors who wish to remain in their home and community have difficulties doing so because their home is not rented in their own name and/or there are rent arrears, which can be as a result of economic abuse. The Secure Tenancies Act 2018 enables some victims/survivors with an existing lifetime or assured social housing tenancy to retain this. However, some victims/survivors who flee a social housing tenancy and move to crisis accommodation do still ultimately lose their home or previous security of tenure. The impacts of insecure housing are well evidenced and far-reaching. Poor recovery from the original trauma can leave victims/survivors vulnerable to further exploitation and abuse. Victims/survivors are further isolated and unable to find work or continue with their own education; and are thrust into financial instability and reliance on welfare benefits. These impacts disproportionately affect Black and minoritised groups; and those who face multiple disadvantages, such as mental health and substance misuse issues, and those in single-parent households.

It is essential that victims/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.[Reference:26](#)

6.1 Policy 6: Improving early intervention

Proposals

1. All housing associations and boroughs should have DAHA accreditation, to cover both their role as housing providers and their provision of services such as housing options. The opportunity for accreditation should be extended to private landlords.
2. Sanctuary schemes should be available to residents of all boroughs, regardless of tenure and tenancy status; and should meet the standards set out in the DAHA Toolkit.
3. The London Partnership Board will undertake work on early intervention, including:
 1. ensuring consistent high-quality sanctuary schemes are in place across London, and exploring options for providing sanctuary schemes in the private rented sector and for homeowners
 2. improving options for victims/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
 3. exploring the roll-out across London of the co-location of IDVAs in local authority housing-options services.
4. The Mayor will provide funding to improve and expand early intervention services.

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

The period between seeking support and accessing safe accommodation is a key point of vulnerability for victims/survivors. Poor levels of support at this stage can lead to victims/survivors remaining with the perpetrator; or being vulnerable to other forms of abuse, exploitation and even death.[Reference:27](#) 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.[Reference:28](#)

Safe crisis accommodation for victims/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 victims/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. Despite the Mayor and partners pressing for its inclusion, support for victims/survivors in non-self-contained generic temporary accommodation is unfortunately beyond the scope of the Part 4 duties. It must therefore be funded from sources other than the Mayor's Part 4 funding.

Respite services, also known as assessment services, provide safe spaces where victims/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 victims/survivors falling through the cracks, and bridge the gap between the homelessness and VAWG sectors.[Reference:29](#) Respite services specifically for victims/survivors of VAWG

with multiple disadvantage at risk of rough sleeping are currently being piloted in two London boroughs. However, there is a gap in this type of provision for victims/survivors more widely.

Providers of safe crisis accommodation frequently turn down referrals from those with NRPF because of the difficulty with financing their stay. There is also a lack of access to accredited immigration advice, independent interpreters and move-on accommodation for this group. Victims/survivors experiencing severe multiple disadvantage are also frequently turned away from refuges and other safe accommodation, because of the limited and often non-specialist level of support on offer and the difficulty accessing appropriate community support.

Safe crisis accommodation is currently accessed through the National Domestic Violence 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 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, or people who never get to the point of being referred because there are no available spaces.

Refuges are not always the preferred option for those who need to flee their home. Hosting approaches, along the lines of PSS Shared Lives, could offer an alternative in some cases, but are not currently available specifically for victims/survivors of domestic abuse. [Reference:30](#) Other options, such as Housing First, offer a stable home with intensive support; this can lead to better long-term 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 victims/survivors:

- there is a shortage of spaces for victims/survivors with NRPF; and for families with more than two children and/or boys aged 12 or older
- there is no ongoing specialist refuge accommodation for LGBTQ+ and/or male victims/survivors
- there is limited specialist provision for victims/survivors who: are Black and minoritised; are Deaf and disabled, including those with a physical disability, a learning disability and mental health support needs; are young; are affected by multiple disadvantages; or have substance misuse support needs.

Furthermore, safe crisis accommodation provision is often not effectively integrated with wider community-based services, such as IDVAs and social services. This presents challenges for victims/survivors in dispersed accommodation and those transitioning into move-on accommodation, who are faced with a disjointed and disparate set of services and being retraumatised by having to tell their story over and over to multiple agencies. This can cause victims/survivors to remain in refuges longer, effectively blocking their own path to recovery and independence and access for others in desperate need.

Onward moves from safe crisis accommodation need to be planned well in advance to ensure a seamless journey, and include assessing the housing and support needs of the survivor and their children. Boroughs working on an in-reach basis with refuges and other safe crisis accommodation to better support and manage pathways out, and to identify suitable accommodation, can be extremely beneficial to outcomes, but such approaches are by no means universal.

7.1 Policy 7: Improving access to and the provision of safe crisis accommodation

Proposals

1. Further respite services should be piloted.
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 of victims/survivors:
 1. those with NRPF
 2. families with more than two children and/or boys aged 12 or older
 3. people who are LGBTQ+
 4. men
 5. people from Black and minoritised communities
 6. Deaf and disabled people, including those with a physical disability,
 7. a learning disability and mental health support needs
 8. young people
 9. those affected by multiple disadvantage
 10. those with substance misuse support needs.
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, such as young people's support workers, that can be delivered across several services, a borough or a group of boroughs.
4. Specialist support should be available to victims/survivors and their children placed by boroughs in generic temporary accommodation. The Mayor will continue to lobby for its inclusion in the Part 4 duties.
5. There should be a greater range of safe crisis accommodation, to meet the diverse needs of victims/survivors and their children. This should include an expansion of Housing First and piloting host-care provision for victims/survivors of domestic abuse.
6. Victims/survivors with NRPF should be able to access safe crisis accommodation, where finances are in place and they meet eligibility criteria.
7. A pan-London single point of entry (that is, provision via a single organisation) should enable effective access to safe crisis accommodation for all victims/survivors, including those with specialist needs such as NRPF and/or multiple disadvantage.
8. There should be satellite accommodation with wraparound support, to enable larger family groups to remain in the same locality safely.
9. Move-on from crisis accommodation should be planned well in advance. This should include assessing the housing and support needs of victims/survivors and their children, and effective communication between boroughs where they have moved to a different area (see proposal 5.10.5). To help achieve this, the provision of domestic abuse referral pathway coordinators within boroughs should be enhanced, with boroughs working directly with and going into refuges and other safe crisis accommodation, to plan and manage pathways out and identify suitable move-on accommodation.
10. The London Partnership Board will seek to ensure that good practice and learning from evaluations and pilots is shared across delivery partners, so that continuous improvement and learning is developed.
11. The Mayor will provide funding to improve the provision of and access to safe crisis accommodation.

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

For many victims/survivors ready to move on from refuges and other safe crisis accommodation, a long-term home is the most appropriate next step. However, move-on and second-stage accommodation can provide a more appropriate option for those who need continued but less intensive support. This enables them to move through the pathway, freeing up refuge spaces for other victims/survivors in need.

In addition, the provision of resettlement support (both when they move or return to a settled home; and when they move on from safe crisis accommodation to generic temporary accommodation) can play a vital role in ensuring that victims/survivors can establish themselves in their new home/accommodation. Emerging evidence suggests that victims/survivors without support at this stage are far more likely to experience re-victimisation through returning to a previous perpetrator, or encountering another one.

The essential need for move-on accommodation has been recognised by the Mayor, through his £50m Move-On programme.[Reference:31](#) This is delivering accommodation and support provided via specialist providers, primarily the Casa Project – a partnership of VAWG organisations. Other successful examples of move-on include the COVID-19 Emergency Accommodation Project with the Outside Project, funded by MOPAC and Galop’s second-stage self-contained accommodation, with specialist support, for victims/survivors who identify as LGBTQ+.[Reference:32](#)

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 victims/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 victims/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 victims/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.

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

Proposals

1. 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+ victims/survivors, as set out above.
2. Resettlement support should be available for those moving on from refuges and other safe crisis 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.
3. 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. These should be in line with standards produced jointly by Women's Aid and Imkaan,[Reference:33](#) and those contained in the statutory guidance accompanying the Part 4 duty.[Reference:34](#) However, this is not the case across London, negatively impacting the recovery of victims/survivors.

Traditional models of commissioning have favoured economies of scale and value for money over quality and expertise. This has disadvantaged many smaller 'by and for' organisations from accessing funds needed to support some of the most marginalised and vulnerable victims/survivors in the capital. Providers, particularly smaller 'by and for' providers, usually run services where funding barely covers the project costs, relying on the commitment and dedication of staff to fill the gaps in resource. This does not support them to develop their capacity and/or grow sustainably. Furthermore, resources to support staff who are dealing with complex trauma and develop staff through training/qualifications are not always available.

These issues have been exacerbated by cuts to local authority funding, which 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 physical quality of the accommodation being provided, with a lack of investment in many of the buildings as well as the fixtures and fittings (see section 5c – improving the provision of buildings). In addition, many do not have self-contained facilities such as en suite bathrooms and kitchen areas. Self-containment is vital to giving victims/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. 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.

9.1 Policy 9: Improving the quality of safe accommodation

Proposals

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.
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.
3. The quality of the fabric of existing refuges and other safe crisis accommodation should be improved.
4. The design of safe accommodation, including refuges and other crisis accommodation, second-stage and move-on, should meet the needs of disabled victims/survivors.
5. Physical security should be ensured, with newly built or refurbished safe accommodation meeting Secured by Design requirements and surveys by the Metropolitan Police's Designing Out Crime Officers

undertaken where appropriate.

6. 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 under way. 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. It also enables a level playing field for specialist and ‘by and for’ providers; is outcome-based; and sets clear expectations for providers in terms of quality and the promotion of diversity and inclusion, including anti-racism. Up to £12.4m is being made available for this purpose. More information can be found on [our website](#).

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. It will develop a detailed workplan with clear objectives and timescales, with expert task-and-finish groups on specific areas set up where needed. Interaction with the VAWG Board and the Homes for Londoners Board will ensure a joined-up approach to tackling the issues and taking forward the proposals in this strategy, as well as wider related issues and initiatives to prevent and address VAWG.

Both the strategy and needs assessment will be reviewed and refreshed on a regular basis.

Appendix 1 Domestic abuse support within safe accommodation

The statutory guidance for local authorities across England issued by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 describes domestic abuse support within safe accommodation as:

- overall management of services within relevant safe accommodation – including capacity building, support and supervision of staff, payroll, financial and day to day management of services and maintaining relationships with the local authority (such functions will often be undertaken by a service manager)
- support with the day-to-day running of the service – for example scheduling times for counselling sessions, group activities (such functions may often be undertaken by administrative or office staff)
- advocacy support – development of personal safety plans, liaison with other services (for example, GPs and social workers, welfare benefit providers)
- domestic abuse prevention advice – support to assist victims to recognise the signs of abusive relationships, to help them remain safe (including online), and to prevent re-victimisation
- specialist support for victims
- designed specifically for victims with relevant protected characteristics (including ‘by and for’), such as faith services, translators and interpreters, immigration advice, interpreters for victims identifying as deaf and/ or hard of hearing, and dedicated support for LGBTQ+ victims

- designed specifically for victims with additional and/or complex needs such as, mental health advice and support, drug and alcohol advice and support [not limited to], including sign posting accordingly
- children's support – including play therapy, child advocacy or a specialist children worker (for example, a young people's violence advisor, IDVA or outreach worker specialised in working with children)
- housing-related support – providing housing-related advice and support, for example, securing a permanent home, rights to existing accommodation and advice on how to live safely and independently
- advice service – including financial and legal support, including accessing benefits, support into work and establishing independent financial arrangements
- counselling and therapy – (including group support) for both adults and children, including emotional support.

This is not an exhaustive list and other relevant support services can be put in place, based on victims' needs.

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