

# Safe Accommodation Strategy

**DRAFT 2024-2027**

## Peterborough City Council

### 1.0 Context

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 set in statute that Tier One authorities must prepare and publish a local strategy based on a robust needs assessment that sets out the ways in which provision for accommodation-based domestic abuse support will be developed, commissioned, and delivered, the first of which should be published by 31<sup>st</sup> October 2021. Thereafter, Strategies must be reviewed every three years.

Accommodation-based domestic abuse support includes provision of support to victims and their children in a range of settings, including:

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

Alongside provision of safe accommodation, the following types of domestic abuse support will be provided:

- Advocacy support – development of personal safety plans, liaison with other services (for example, GPs and social workers, welfare benefit providers)
- Trauma informed domestic abuse prevention advice and support to assist victims to recognise the signs of abusive relationships, to help them remain safe (including online) and to prevent re-victimisation.
- Specialist trauma informed domestic support for victims/survivors with relevant protected characteristics and or complex needs, offering cultural competency and an understanding of the additional challenges these survivors may experience when seeking support.
- Children’s support within Refuge including play therapy and child advocacy.
- Housing-related support – providing housing-related advice and support (for example, securing a permanent home and advice on how to live safely and independently)
- Counselling and emotional support for children who have witnessed/experienced domestic abuse.

These services are explored in more detail later in this strategy.

Combined, this strategy clearly sets out the overall and holistic approach to deliver a rounded offer of support to victims in safe accommodation.

## 2.0 Identification of Local Needs

- The VAWG (Violence against women and girls) needs assessment conducted in November 2023 into March 2024 offered the opportunity for specialist providers and services operating in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough to give feedback as well as attend face to face meetings with the authors of the VAWG needs assessment so that providers had the opportunity to discuss and identify the key needs, gaps and changes/ challenges they are currently observing. The following is a summary of the points that were raised by providers that provided input into the identification of local need.
- Concern over lack of housing to move people into once they are ready to leave refuge. This included examples of long delays in women leaving refuge accommodation.
- All of the specialist services highlighted the impact of the cost-of-living crisis. This has meant that people are coming to services to seek support for basic needs more frequently (food, clothing, sanitary products and basic items needed for children) alongside (and in addition to) their specific DASV (Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence) related needs. Clients not knowing their eligibility for benefits and financial support was also seen as a compounding factor.
- There was concern that cultural norms around DASV in some communities make it unclear to victims that their experience is unacceptable and in fact abuse. This was seen as a further barrier to victims accessing support. It is unclear from discussions as to how cultural normalisation of DASV are being addressed locally.
- There was a wider concern that the kind of support available for victims/survivors needs to better reflect the demographics of the local area. The Census figures at the beginning of this needs assessment and should provide a starting point for this. Further work can be done to develop cultural competence and recognise intersectionality. It should be noted that a variety of resources on local Census 2021 statistics are available via the dedicated pages of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Insight: Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Insight – Population – Census 2021 ([cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk](http://cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk)).
- There is a willingness across the voluntary sector to support victims/survivors of domestic abuse but specialist services which are well trained, are best placed to provide the right level of support and mitigate the very real threat of harms to victims/survivors.

**Key challenges for the Domestic Abuse system, are currently:**

- Provision of easily accessible safe accommodation to those at risk of abuse and their children, acknowledging survivors' choice where it is safe, to stay within the area and near established links if provided with additional support.
- Provision of therapeutic support for survivors and their children who have experienced domestic abuse.
- Need for cultural competency among service providers, navigating highly complex circumstances for survivors, particularly, language barriers and concerns around immigration status.
- Ensuring support and training is provided across the housing sector in Peterborough to continue to improve awareness of and support to, those experiencing domestic abuse.
- Ensuring a consistency of support across all communities.

**2.1 Local Need – Peterborough Headline Figures, 2022/23**

- Estimated number of victims of Domestic Abuse (aged 16+) in Peterborough (Cambridgeshire Constabulary covers both Cambridgeshire & Peterborough) based on the Crime Survey for England and Wales prevalence estimates for 2022/23\* - 7,000.
- 64% of domestic abuse-related incident and crimes in Peterborough were subsequently recorded as crimes in the year ending March 2023. *The majority of victims were recorded as female (66%), with 32% of victims being male*
- Violence against the person accounted for the majority of Domestic Abuse related offences in Peterborough ranging from 77%-78% of all offences over the last four years. Arson and criminal damage were the next most prevalent category of DA offence, accounting for 7% of offences in 2022/23
- LGA: Calculate domestic abuse rate per 1000 population in Peterborough over 16 in 2022/23 as being 24.4. [Domestic abuse rate per 1,000 population over 16 in Peterborough | LG Inform \(local.gov.uk\)](#)
- 32% of children responded that there had been 'any physical aggression **or** any shouting or arguing at home in the last month that frightened them' (Source: Data provide by Public Health from Health-Related Behaviours Survey Cambridgeshire & Peterborough) 2022.
- Referrals to the Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) have increased largely due to the increase in specialist staff and threshold for referrals. There

were 1214 referrals of victims/survivors in Peterborough to the IDVA service 2022/23.

### **3.0 Whole Housing Approach to Domestic Abuse**

Our strategy is based on a Whole Housing Approach model Peterborough City Council and our partners Cambridgeshire County Council were one of the key delivery systems in developing and adopting the Whole Housing Approach (WHA), with funding from DHLUC. This approach is endorsed by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, Nicole Jacobs, as well as being highlighted as good practice within the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 government guidance. The approach has enabled victims of domestic abuse to access safe accommodation regardless of the tenure of property and enables specialist domestic abuse staff to offer a range of flexible options with regards to increasing the safety of those suffering domestic abuse and their children.

A whole system approach is needed to effectively address the key issues and barriers experienced by survivors and to ensure they have access to a safe place to call home. The WHA model offers a framework for the domestic abuse and housing sectors to work together to address the immediate and longer-term housing needs of survivors. The model incorporates the experiences of survivors, the expertise of system leaders, and established, evidence-based practice.

In adopting this approach, we can ensure access to a range of tailored housing options and initiatives to give people experiencing domestic abuse the choice to either relocate or remain in their existing accommodation.

The full suite of housing options enables agencies and organisations to work together more collaboratively.

Effective coordination efforts consider the long-term safety of the victim/survivor and their children, as well as managing crisis situations.

This strategy will ensure the needs of all victims with relevant protected characteristics are considered and met, including sex, race, gender, language, religion, sexual orientation, age, state of health and disabilities.

The action plan will set out how the barriers faced by victims with relevant protected characteristics and / or multiple complex needs, will be addressed.

Based on the Whole Housing Approach model, and informed by our needs assessment and data, our strategy has three key aims:

- To achieve earlier identification and intervention for domestic abuse through access to domestic abuse support, local authority housing advice, and social and private landlords

- To work towards a reduction in the number of people who are made homeless because of domestic abuse
- To increase housing sustainment options so that people experiencing domestic abuse can remain safely in their home when it is their choice to do so, or do not lose their tenancy status if they relocate.

Model of the Whole Housing Approach:



#### 4.0 How we will address the Needs in Peterborough

The following section describes the services and interventions that we will develop, commission and/or deliver to meet the objectives of this strategy.

##### 4.1 Refuge Support

We will provide the support costs for a refuge, equating to space for 8 women and up to 18 children at any given time. These will be available to those fleeing from out of area, and within area if there is a significant distance and this is deemed to be safe.

Within the package, there will be funding for children’s support workers and a flexible fund to enable those who need it to access talking therapies.

In addition to this, refuge will have access to “Flexible Funding”, to support those moving on from refuge, who will need resources to support their new home. All refuges will be expected to be as accessible as possible to those with additional support needs, in line with “Refuge for All” principles.

#### 4.2 Dispersed Safe Accommodation

This will increase the options and choice for survivors across Peterborough.

The accommodation is primarily for residents in this area who are experiencing domestic abuse.

It will provide access to safe accommodation for: victims/survivors and their children who are not able to live in Refuge and /or LA temporary accommodation such as: large families; those with disabilities; people with pets; male victims; families with teenage boys (many refuges will not allow boys over the age of 12); people from the LGBT community; and EM survivors whose needs are not met with traditional accommodation and the risk and needs of the victim will be paramount.

Being supported in this accommodation give survivors 'thinking time' while they decide on safe housing options available to them, without having to make a homeless application, flee to refuge but away from the accommodation where they are at risk.

Survivors can still access their support network if safe to do so, and they will have regular support provided by the Housing IDVAs who will support them to move back to their own homes with all safety measures in place, for example Occupation Orders, Restraining Orders, and target hardening where this is safe to do so.

There are two dispersed houses currently in Peterborough, provided in conjunction with DASS/Impakt. The properties are fully furnished to a high standard. The properties are let on a licence agreement and seen as 'temporary accommodation'. The cost of the rent is paid via Housing Benefit payment and calculated on survivors' income and family circumstances. The clients are responsible for the utilities. Survivors living in this accommodation receive support from housing support workers and IDVAs. Survivors are referred to these properties via DASS/Impakt and the Cambs & Peterborough IDVA service.

A new unit of dispersed safe accommodation is opening in Peterborough in 2023/24 in conjunction with PWA(Peterborough Women's Aid) and will offer shared accommodation to survivors with NRPF (No recourse to Public Funds).

#### 4.3 Housing IDVAs

A team of Housing IDVAs across Cambs and Peterborough offer a direct referral service for housing teams and social landlords' victims/survivors who wish to access IDVA support for homeless applicants and tenants who have disclosed domestic abuse. There is a dedicated Housing IDVA taking referrals from housing and housing providers in Peterborough and there have been positive outcomes for survivors in housing crisis with this joint working approach.

This post will be co-located within Peterborough city Council Housing Teams. Cross Keys Housing Association provide office space for the Housing IDVA to facilitate meetings with their tenants and the IDVA in a safe space. Housing IDVAs also offer case management support and deliver awareness raising training to staff based in housing departments, The Housing IDVA has developed a greater understanding of housing processes and the local challenges for housing teams and social landlords.

#### 4.4 Flexible Funding

Flexible funding supports victim/survivors to achieve or maintain safe and secure housing. It is low-barrier and is not means tested. Unlike most other funding sources, there is no set list of what will be funded, and victims/survivors are encouraged to ask for whatever will make the most difference to their housing situation and their lives, in order that the victim/survivor and their children can stay safe. This is offered in conjunction with working with a domestic abuse specialist.

#### 4.6 Additional security

As part of the Safe Accommodation Strategy, we will ensure that IDVA clients or survivors working with other specialist domestic abuse services in Peterborough, have quick and easy access to additional enhanced security in their home. This additional security will be installed by professionals who understand domestic abuse and the needs of clients/survivors to feel safer in their homes. Additional security reduces the risk of repeat victimisation through the provision of enhanced security measures. Additional security can also reduce the need for survivors to seek moves to alternative accommodation and enable them and their families to stay close to local links and support such as schools, families, and health providers.

#### 4.7 Managed Reciprocals

This is a mechanism whereby those suffering domestic abuse in a social tenancy can relocate to a different area across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough whilst maintaining their security of tenure. It is a voluntary scheme for housing associations and stock holding landlords to increase safe housing options available to survivors/victims without the need for homeless applications, temporary accommodation, or special circumstance requests on local housing allocations registers. Reciprocals are referred to within the government's safe accommodation strategy guidance to local authorities, as an additional housing option for survivors/victims.

#### 4.9 Therapeutic Support for children experiencing domestic abuse

To provide therapeutic and emotional support for children who are victims of domestic abuse.

#### 4.10 Mobile Advocacy Outreach Support

This is a direct service to victims/survivors, at location of their choosing including a range of community settings where the service can expand their access. Support is offered to victims/survivors to secure stable housing, which includes exploring and pursuing options for remaining in an existing property and relocating if needed for safety reasons. The specialist workers would have access to all elements within this strategy.

#### 4.11 Awareness of Domestic Abuse Amongst Social Landlords

Working with local private landlords and the local Private Rented Sector team in Peterborough, by means of webinars and face to face meetings to increase the awareness of domestic abuse and how this affects their tenants. Also increasing awareness of how private landlords can assist survivors/victims where there is domestic abuse.

This very much follows the WHA model in which all providers of accommodation regardless of the tenure can offer support to survivors of domestic abuse. It also reflects the increasing use of private sector tenancies as a means for local councils to discharge their duty to homeless applicants. Peterborough saw the East of England's joint third-largest percentage-point rise (alongside Cambridge and Norwich) in the proportion of privately rented homes 24.4% in 2021 (Census Data 2021)

#### 4.12 Sheltered Accommodation/Supported Accommodation/Hostels

For all commissioned providers to have a domestic abuse policy for residents and staff.

#### 4.13 Victims with No Recourse to Public Funds

The Housing IDVAs and Mobile Advocacy Support Workers will work with clients with NRPF (No recourse to Public Funds). They will sign post/refer them to appropriate immigration advice in regards applying for visa changes such as the MVDAC (Migrant Visa Domestic Abuse Concession), or organisations advising people with pre-settled status about changes to DWP rules for survivors of domestic abuse. For housing teams being able to refer a survivor/victim who is in housing crisis/homeless but ineligible for housing/NRPF to a domestic abuse support services is a valuable resource.

Housing IDVAs and mobile advocacy support workers will provide institutional advocacy for these clients, ensure interpreting services if needed are made available to these clients and recognises the multiple vulnerabilities these survivors and their children can face. Clients with NRPF or unable to qualify for benefits/housing due to pre-settled status would still be eligible for all the options outlined within the strategy, except for refuge support and dispersed accommodation\* where additional funding would be needed from agencies such as Childrens Services.

5.2 Proposed additions to the strategy for 2024-27 are:

#### Shared Lives Project:

This is a Pilot scheme to offer support to survivors of domestic abuse with learning disabilities support. The pilot, led by a Shared Lives Co-ordinator follows the Shared Lives approach of carers welcoming people with support needs into their own homes. Research shows that it is harder for people with additional needs/learning disabilities to leave an abusive relationship and they may not identify the relationship as abusive or want to end the relationship.

In these cases, it can be beneficial for the victim to have a form of respite from the abuse, a safe space from the abusive behaviour. This time free of abuse can enable them to build confidence and have time and space to consider options for the future.



### Eastern European IDVA

Continued funding for an A8 IDVA in Peterborough, to recognise the need for support from specialist IDVAs who can communicate in a survivors first language and understand their lived experience. The need for additional domestic abuse support for survivors/victims who are Lithuanian in Peterborough has been evidenced by DHRs (Domestic Homicide Review) and demographics within Peterborough, 3.6% of Peterborough's population were born in Lithuania (Census data 2021). The IDVA will speak Lithuanian as their first language.

### Ethnic Minority IDVA

Funding for an Ethnic Minority IDVA (all ethnic groups except white ethnic groups, it does not relate to country origin or affiliation) to recognise the need for support from specialist IDVAs who can communicate in a survivors first language and understand their lived experience. Often these survivors/victims are additionally victimised/controlled by their perpetrators due to their immigration status. If these survivors/victims flee the perpetrator, they can find themselves unable to claim benefits and access emergency housing.

An Ethnic Minority IDVA will provide professional advocacy, explore available routes to support for these clients and signpost to and support with available immigration options available to them. In Peterborough, 21.9% of the population identify as another ethnic group to white British, white other.

## **6.0 Delivery**

The strategy is the statutory responsibility of Peterborough City Council and must be agreed by cabinet. This strategy will be overseen by the Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence Strategic Partnership Board and Violence Against Women & Girls Operations Group, in conjunction with the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Housing Board. Through this strategy, feedback mechanisms for victims and their children will be developed to ensure there is independent representation which operates from views gathered independently of the commissioned services.

Once published a working action plan will be developed to ensure all elements are working in conjunction with each other and the needs of all victims are being met appropriately, and there will be mechanisms in place to ensure effective oversight.