

SHEFFIELD DOMESTIC ABUSE SAFE ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY

October 2021 – September 2024

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The government introduced the Domestic Abuse Bill to promote more awareness and understanding of domestic abuse; protect and support victims/survivors¹ and their families; ensure that victim/survivor safety is prioritised in the justice and court systems and provide a more effective response to those who perpetrate domestic abuse. On the 29th of April 2021, the Domestic Abuse Act² was enacted and new duties were placed on Sheffield City Council with the council now required to

- *'Assess or make arrangements for the assessment of, the need for, accommodation-based support in its area,*
- *Prepare and publish a strategy for the provision of such support in its area, and*
- *Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy'*

Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (England). Section 57

This safe accommodation strategy will meet the new duty outlined in Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act in relation to the support element of safe accommodation. It is an addendum to the Sheffield Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy 2018-2022³ and is linked to Sheffield City Council's Homeless Prevention Strategy 2017-2022.⁴

In 2023 both domestic abuse strategies will be refreshed and aligned, and the links outlined in the main strategy (p14) apply equally to this strategy.

The Domestic Abuse Act has a broad definition of safe accommodation in recognition of the diversity of housing in which victims/survivors and their children may live. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC, formally the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) have, in the Domestic Abuse Act and Statutory Guidance⁵, defined supported accommodation to include:

- refuge accommodation;
- specialist safe accommodation;
- dispersed accommodation;
- sanctuary schemes (properties where target hardening equipment has been supplied to enable people to stay safe in their own homes)
- and move-on or second stage accommodation.

The Statutory Guidance has defined 'support' as, advocacy, domestic abuse prevention advice, specialist support for victims/survivors (including those with relevant protected characteristics and additional and/or complex needs), children's support, housing related support, financial, employment and benefits advice and counselling and therapy for both victims/survivors and their children.

¹ *In this report those who have experienced domestic abuse will be referred to as victim/survivor. This is to acknowledge the journey that whilst initially they may feel like victims in the situation, upon receiving support and moving on with their lives, they will often then identify with the term survivor.*

² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/contents/enacted>

³ <https://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/documents/s31158/Domestic%20And%20Sexual%20Abuse%20Strategy%20202.pdf>

⁴ <https://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/documents/s29089/Homelessness%20Prevention%20Strategy%20203.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-support-within-safe-accommodation>

Local authorities have a new duty to:

'Appoint a domestic abuse local partnership board for the purposes of providing advice to the authority about –

- *The exercise of the authority's functions under section 57, and*
- *The provision of other local authority support in the authority's area.'*

Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (England). Section 58

In Sheffield, the Local Partnership Board has been established around the existing Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategic Board. The board will work to ensure that the priorities set out in this strategy are met and that services provide the high-quality support that victims/survivors of domestic abuse and their children deserve and need.

An action plan will be agreed with each recommendation given a measurable target to be monitored by the Local Partnership Board for report back to central government on the progress made.

This strategy has been approved by Sheffield City Council and key stakeholders including but not exclusively: Sheffield's Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategic Board and Provider Consultation Group; Sheffield Equalities Partnership; and the Domestic Abuse Service User Reference Group.

STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES

This strategy is underpinned by the principles below which are designed to ensure that Sheffield takes a holistic approach to deliver a rounded, multi-agency offer of support to victims/survivors of domestic abuse and their children across all types of safe accommodation. We acknowledge that there is a severe shortage of affordable housing across the city and that this is a complex issue that isn't easily resolved, however, **this strategy relates only to safe accommodation, as defined by the DLUHC⁶, for victims/survivors of domestic abuse and their corresponding support needs.**

1. The services we are planning to commission are informed and shaped by the lived experience of people who have used them or have needed to use them.
2. Those accessing safe accommodation will have individual and varying needs and support must be tailored to the individual. To meet the needs of all victims, paying special attention and consideration to those who share protected characteristic(s) under the Equality Act 2010 or who share a vulnerability requiring additional support.
3. We will make services easier to access by identifying and removing barriers and creating clear pathways to access support for those living in safe accommodation, including, for example, quick access to independent, specialist services to help them with any financial difficulties they may be experiencing as a result of economic abuse.
4. Children are recognised in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 as victims in their own right. We will ensure that children's individual needs and preferences are taken into account and that all children affected by domestic abuse in safe accommodation have access to support that will help them recover from abuse.

⁶https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/993825/Domestic_Abuse_Act_-_draft_statutory_guidance.pdf

5. Support in safe accommodation for victims/survivors and children will enable recovery and aim to prevent those living in safe accommodation from experiencing domestic abuse again in the future.
6. We will continue to take every possible opportunity to spread awareness and understanding of domestic abuse and promote the support available to all victims in line with the '*Domestic Abuse is Everyone's Business*' principle in the Sheffield Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy 2018-2022
7. We believe that everyone who needs to use safe accommodation deserves access to high quality support in high quality accommodation. All accommodation we commission will be self-contained (with the possible exception of shared units for young people) and will also offer opportunities for mutual peer support. We will endeavour to work towards the National Statement of Expectations for Supported Housing⁷ along with the DLUHC Quality Standards⁸ for domestic abuse support in safe accommodation.

PATHWAYS

In Sheffield victims/survivors who are fleeing their home due to domestic abuse can approach Sheffield City Council for accommodation. The single route of access is the Housing Support Pathway (HSP). An Officer in Housing Solutions will complete an assessment including a DASH risk assessment and will determine under the Housing Act if the person is eligible for domestic abuse priority need.

An Officer in Housing Solutions will then consider a range of solutions, which includes refuge in and outside of Sheffield, Safe Zones/dispersed accommodation, temporary and supported accommodation, and their own property with the offer of sanctuary measures. Allocation is based on need, statutory duties, risk, each individual's circumstances and preferences, and availability.

However, we know that access to safe accommodation is more complex than this. Professionals, including the Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA - support worker) service, social workers, and other partner agencies can advocate for the victim/survivor. Where risk is high and immediate action is required, IDVAs and other professionals can work directly with refuges to get access to safe accommodation out of city. There is limited data to let us know how many victims/survivors of domestic abuse leave the city when they would rather have stayed. We also know that a proportion of people in safe accommodation in Sheffield access this from out of city, again, this may be due to not being safe in the area they are living, issues with capacity or the personal preference of the victim/survivor.

"I was offered refuge out of city, I didn't know why at the time. It took me away from my support and my family. I think it is wrong the victim has to move, you feel as if you are being punished and you haven't done anything wrong, you feel like you are being controlled again, we need to know what our options are and then feel as though we are being listened to about what we want and need to keep safe" – a service user

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supported-housing-national-statement-of-expectations/supported-housing-national-statement-of-expectations>

⁸ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/993825/Domestic_Abuse_Act_-_draft_statutory_guidance.pdf

We also know that unfortunately, especially with the additional demands that have arisen because of the Covid pandemic, there are a number of individuals and families who are placed in emergency accommodation which would be considered unsuitable in line with the DLUHC definition of 'safe' in relation to domestic abuse. This includes temporary accommodation, such as a bed and breakfast, or a hotel. We recognise that this is not the best housing option for a victim/survivor of domestic abuse, and we are working to reduce the number of these placements over the duration of this strategy.

We know that moving on from short term safe accommodation to more settled accommodation can be difficult, and we also know that since the Sheffield Choice Based Lettings⁹ service reopened towards the end of 2020 following the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of households bidding for available properties has increased and the average wait time for council and social housing has lengthened, therefore officers in Housing Solutions support people to look at all options available to them, such as the private rented sector.

During the pandemic in 2020/21 there were 692 homeless presentations because of domestic abuse, which equates to around 13 households needing to flee their home per week. This is a significant increase on the previous year.

Looking at pre-pandemic data, we estimate that homeless presentations because of domestic abuse by 2030 could be somewhere between 618 and 1,350 households with a mid-point figure of 984.

WHAT WE WILL DO

- We will work with partners and stakeholders, including survivors, to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the current pathway process for victims/survivors of domestic abuse during the course of this strategy.
- We will consider implementing a reciprocal agreement with other housing authorities in the region to facilitate out of area moves for victims of domestic abuse in line with the Homeless Code of Guidance for local authorities.¹⁰
- We will work with partners and stakeholders to understand more about the pressures which lead to victims/survivors being placed in unsuitable temporary accommodation (as defined by the DLUHC in relation to domestic abuse). We will continue to work on this and aim to see a reduction in numbers over the course of this strategy.
- We will work with staff to ensure that the victim/survivor is offered appropriate support to resolve issues such as arrears, ASB and debt, and that where they are related to domestic abuse, they do not prevent them from moving on to more settled accommodation and sustaining a new tenancy.

⁹ Choice Based Lettings allows prospective tenants to bid for available social housing

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities/chapter-21-domestic-abuse>

SHEFFIELD SAFE ACCOMMODATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT 2021

To inform this strategy, and in line with statutory guidance, a comprehensive Needs Assessment has been undertaken.¹¹

It is not possible to understand and plan for the support needs of those accessing safe accommodation without considering what the actual need for such accommodation is currently and what it is projected to be in the future. Although Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act does not place a duty on LAs to provide a specific number of units per head of population the data gathered in the Needs Assessment has raised the issue more broadly across the city around the amount of safe accommodation and the functionality of the pathways used to access it.

It should also be acknowledged that we know there are individuals who are experiencing domestic abuse, or who have experienced domestic abuse who are living in temporary accommodation which is not considered 'safe' in relation to domestic abuse by the DLUHC whose support needs must not be overlooked.

PREVALENCE OF DOMESTIC ABUSE IN SHEFFIELD AND THE CORRESPONDING NEED FOR SAFE ACCOMMODATION

We estimate that in Sheffield in the last year there were almost 20,000 people who experienced domestic abuse, this amounts to almost 15,784 women and 3,914 men

The Crime Survey of England and Wales (CSEW)¹² provides a national estimate of the prevalence of domestic abuse. We have used these findings in the Needs Assessment and applied them to the Sheffield population of 16-74 year olds to estimate the prevalence of domestic abuse in our city.

Gender

Domestic abuse is a gendered crime and is recognised as both a cause and consequence of gender inequality with women more likely to be 'highly victimised' compared with male victims. Women are also much more likely to suffer all forms of violence including fatal domestic abuse, stalking, harassment, and physical abuse at the hands of a male perpetrator than men¹³.

Whilst we recognise that all genders can be victims/survivors of domestic abuse we have considered the research and evidence which indicates it is prudent to reduce the estimated number of male victims from that in the CSEW by 50%. The same was applied in the published Sheffield Domestic and Sexual Abuse strategy and this is discussed in detail in the Needs Assessment.

We know that many men and women flee domestic abuse in Sheffield each year and present to housing services. However, feelings of shame, stigma and fear may be making men less likely to disclose the abuse and/or report to the police and it may be that there are male victims we are missing. We also know that male victims/survivors disclosing and presenting to services is lower than prevalence estimates in the same way it is for female victims. We know this is not unique to Sheffield, with Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference data indicating that Sheffield male cases are on par

¹¹ <https://sheffielddact.org.uk/domestic-abuse/resources/danac/>

¹² <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice>

¹³ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabusevictimcharacteristicsenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2020#domestic-homicide>

with national and other similar police force areas. This echoes the findings in the Mankind report 'Making Invisible Men, Visible'¹⁴, thereby highlighting the need for further work to be undertaken during the course of this strategy to make a more informed and accurate estimate about the prevalence of male victims/survivors in Sheffield.

Disability

The 2019/20 CSEW estimates that 14.7% of disabled women and 7.5% disabled men have been a victim/survivor of domestic abuse in the last year, rates are more than twice as high as rates amongst people who are not disabled¹⁵.

In Sheffield, out of 54 respondents to a survey, 18.5% considered themselves to be a disabled person with the largest proportion of these stating that they had mental ill health (e.g. depression, bipolar disorders).

Refuges in Sheffield provide some accommodation that is accessible for people with mobility issues, but more work needs to be done to understand if this is sufficient to meet demand. And, whether people who are disabled in other ways have enough support to access safe accommodation e.g. re. visual or hearing impairment. Safe Zones accommodation is not currently accessible to those with significant mobility difficulties therefore there are gaps in relation to accessibility for the cohort of male GBT+ victims/survivors that may need to use this provision.

“The council really don’t understand my situation, I live on the second floor and there are a lot of stairs and it is a struggle, I have physical and mental health needs and this area is no good for me either, I am scared going out, even to the shops” – a service user

We recognise that there is much about the links between disability and domestic abuse that we don’t fully understand and therefore, a key priority will be to improve our data collection and analysis and undertake further consultation with disabled victims/survivors to ensure that we are meeting the needs of our disabled population.

Age

The CSEW found that prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year was highest among the younger age groups, with 14% of females aged 16-19 reporting experiencing domestic abuse. Sheffield has a specific pathway with Children’s Social care relating to homeless 16 and 17 year olds. This data suggests many of the people accessing accommodation are likely to be younger and either in need of single properties or have small children and need family units.

Although this is a clear indication that accommodation and support needs be suitable for younger people it does also mean that there may be barriers for those aged over 60 to reporting domestic abuse, accessing safe accommodation, and benefiting from support.

¹⁴ Supporting Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Boards, Mankind Initiative, June 2021

¹⁵ The definition of disability used in the CSEW is consistent with the core definition of disability under the Equality Act 2010. A person is considered to have a disability if they have a long-standing illness, disability or impairment which causes difficulty with day-to-day activities.

There is a lack of data nationally on the prevalence of domestic abuse in older adults and a risk that this group may be ‘hidden’ from services and their needs overlooked in Sheffield. The most frequently quoted data source, the CSEW only goes up to age 74 for technical reasons relating to how questions on domestic abuse are asked, so does not give us an accurate national picture from which we can estimate the local position.

The average age of a refuge resident in 2020 was 34 with the youngest aged 20 and the oldest aged 64.

Ethnicity

We recognise the additional issues and barriers to accessing support faced by people from non-white ethnicities who are experiencing domestic abuse, and acknowledge that we need to do better as an authority to meet the needs of those who are marginalised due to race in our city including improving our data collection, consultation and analysis.

“Housing needs to understand our additional needs, I was moved with my 4 children to an area where I suffered racial abuse. The police got involved and I was moved”
– a service user

A consultation survey with service users told us that those who responded from the BAMER¹⁶ community would overwhelmingly prefer to have the choice of receiving support from a specialist BAMER worker. It is essential that those experiencing domestic abuse are supported by workers who have clear understanding and experience of the additional barriers that people of colour can often face and can understand a victim/survivor’s cultural and/or religious needs and values and how they impact on or support their recovery from domestic abuse. We are fortunate in having a high proportion of BAMER staff in refuge services at present.

The Needs Assessment tells us that the numbers of BAMER victims/survivors accessing certain types of safe accommodation are very high and we recognise that more work needs to be done with BAMER communities and groups to understand this high prevalence and to address the harm caused by domestic abuse.

40% of clients accessing safe accommodation via Safe Zones in 2020/21 were BAMER as were 56% of those supported by the domestic abuse floating support service and 33% of refuge residents.

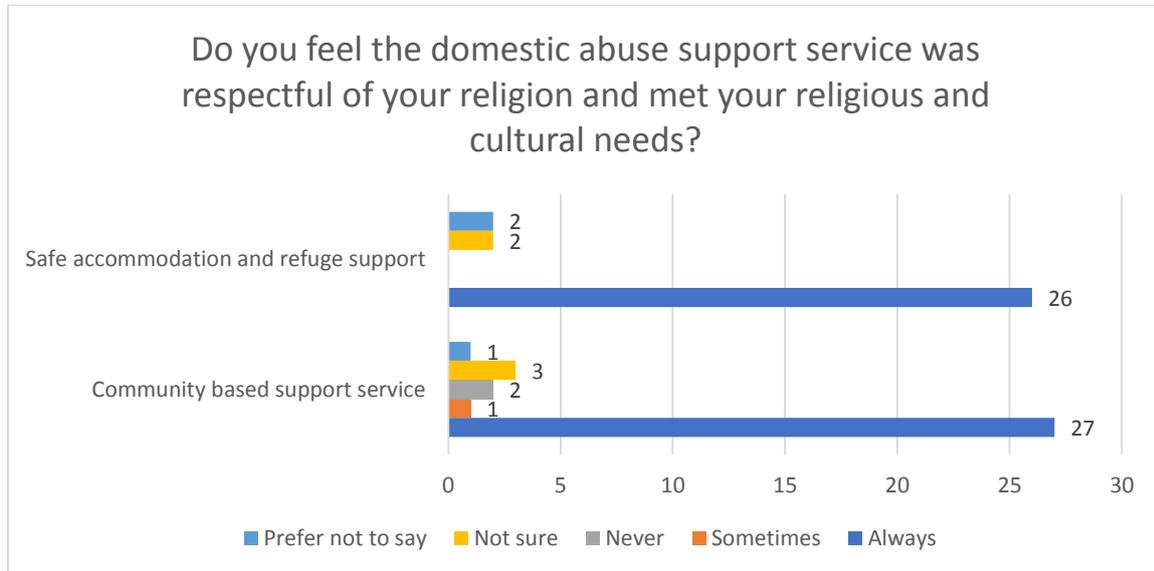
Religion

Data taken from HSP and the Oasis case management system (used in Sheffield refuges) tells us that 31% of victims at the refuges during 2020 stated they had no religion, 36% were Muslim, 18% were Christian, 10% did not have this information recorded and the remaining 5% were ‘Other Religion’.

¹⁶ BAMER – Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee community

We know there are issues such as forced marriage and so called ‘honour’ based abuse that disproportionately affect certain faith groups in the city. Safe accommodation providers, the police and social care work closely together to protect adults and children affected by these issues. However, we know that data collection on prevalence needs improving.

A service user survey told us that the large majority of those accessing domestic abuse support felt that support offered was respectful of their religion and met their cultural needs.



LGBT+¹⁷ Community

The national CSEW estimates show that domestic abuse prevalence is proportionally higher amongst gay, lesbian, and bi-sexual people. In contrast to this, the Sheffield data on people accessing safe accommodation shows that LGB people are underrepresented. We also know that the wider LGBT+ (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and trans +) communities are underrepresented in other domestic abuse services in the city, supporting the view that there are barriers to LGBT+ people accessing support.

Sheffield’s Call It Out project¹⁸ has helped us understand more about the how ‘the public story on domestic abuse’, has usually focused on cis¹⁹-heterosexual couples and can lead to LGBT+ people believing that what is happening to them does not count as domestic abuse. Existing services appear to be designed with the needs of cis-heterosexual women in mind, and LGBT+ people are wary of services that are not explicitly LGBT+ inclusive due to a fear of discrimination and/or a belief that their

¹⁷ LGBT+ - Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and all other sexual orientations and gender identities that are not cis-heterosexual.

¹⁸ Call It Out is a South Yorkshire wide project, run by a Sheffield charity, which aims to raise awareness of domestic abuse in LGBT relationships.

¹⁹ Describes a person whose gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth

experiences will not be understood. This leads to a distrust of services because of perceived or experienced instances of homophobia and transphobia.

The Call it Out Project tells us that in Sheffield, a third of LGBT+ people experiencing abuse from a partner or an ex-partner told no one about the abuse, and, 15% of people experiencing abuse from a family member told no one.

Prevalence of domestic abuse amongst LGBT+ people is at least as high (proportionately) as it is for cis-gender heterosexual women. It is therefore imperative that services are inclusive (in line with current legislation²⁰) to all people and that the promotion of services informs the public that anyone can be a victim of domestic abuse and that support is available for LGBT+ people.

It has also been identified through the Needs Assessment that there is very little data locally on LGBT+ victims/survivors. This may be due to a lack of confidence of staff in asking about sexual orientation or gender identity, or that assumptions are made about this when the perpetrator is male. Work needs to be done to implement appropriate data collection in order to accurately collect this information. Due to these data issues and lack of visibility of these communities in Sheffield, the national findings need to be taken into consideration in local commissioning.

“I was 4 or 5 inches taller than her, she was a tiny wee thing and I thought people were never going to believe me. They were going to go, ‘Oh look, she couldn’t beat you up!’”

– Sarah, a white lesbian woman in her thirties, describing an incident where her partner had pushed her down the stairs

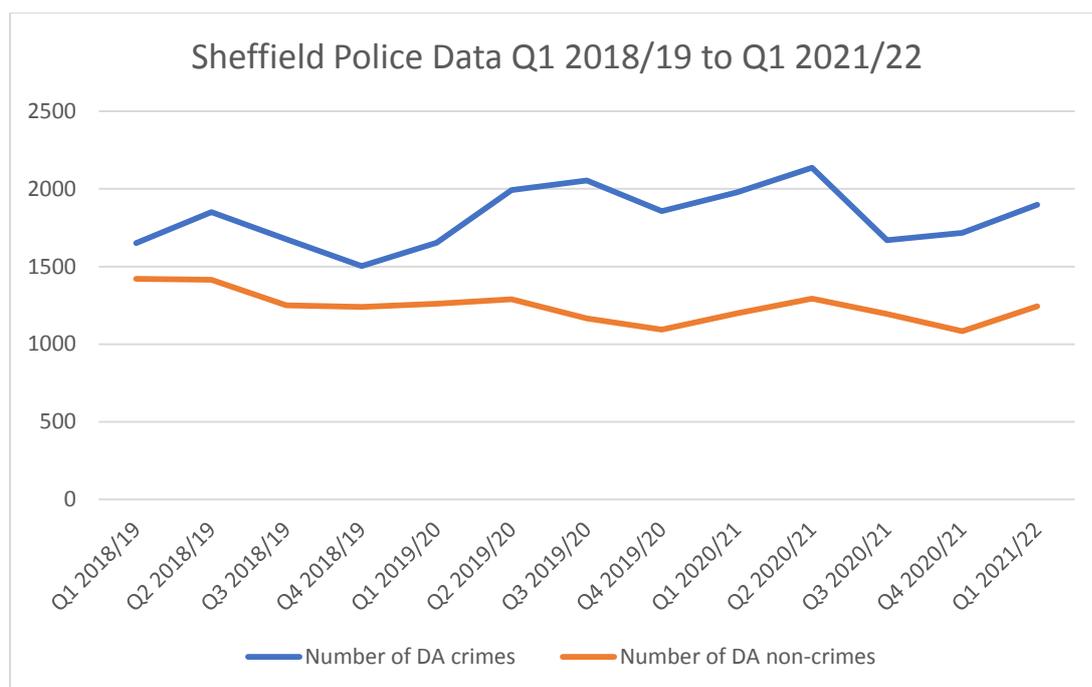
[Factsheet-for-professionals-challenging-our-thinking-around-LGBT-domestic-abuse-1.pdf \(sayit.org.uk\)](#)

We recognise that a victim/survivor of domestic abuse may experience multiple types of discrimination and that there are intersections between these issues. We know this makes it even harder for some victims/survivors of domestic abuse and can further increase the barriers faced when seeking support because of domestic abuse. We know that every victim/survivor of domestic abuse has their own unique needs and support should be tailored to the individual to reflect this.

THE CURRENT NEED FOR SAFE ACCOMMODATION

On a national level, the CSEW shows us that the number of domestic abuse related offences has increased significantly since January 2018. Across Sheffield, the number of offences recorded since January 2018 has fluctuated and the impact of the ongoing pandemic is evident in the chart below. Considering the quarter April – June 2020, at the beginning of the first UK ‘lockdown’ due to Covid-19 restrictions, the number of domestic abuse related crimes and non-crimes recorded in Sheffield was +9% (+263, from 2915 to 3178) higher than the same three month period in the previous year.

²⁰ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>



Taken alone however, this information does not tell us conclusively what we wish to know about the need for safe accommodation and support.

In Sheffield, the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC - process for managing risk to high-risk victims/children) data tells us that severity of reported domestic abuse has increased: cases referred to MARAC increased three months in to the Covid-19 pandemic and have remained high since. In 2020/21 1,131 cases were discussed at MARAC exceeding the SafeLives expectation that 920 cases are referred in Sheffield per year.

Referrals to IDAS, the community based domestic abuse support service, have risen by 6% compared to the 52 weeks before the pandemic, and high-risk referrals rose by 27%²¹.

An increase in the number of cases being discussed at MARAC, the rise in referrals to IDAS, and a general upward trend in reports to the police suggest that more victims/survivors may be known to services and may present in need of safe accommodation in Sheffield and other types of support.

The estimated rate of domestic abuse in the last year among 16-74 year olds has been relatively static over the last three years ranging from 5.3% to 5.7% suggesting that the number of victims/survivors experiencing domestic abuse in Sheffield will continue to increase in line with population growth.

We know that there are thousands of people a year experiencing domestic abuse in Sheffield who live with their abuser and we recognise that there are multiple reasons including the presence of children, disability, economic abuse, cultural factors and pressure from wider family which may mean that victims/survivors of abuse feel as though leaving is impossible.

²¹ Data from Oasis case management system week ending 20th August 2021

We estimate that there were 988 victims/survivors of domestic abuse in Sheffield in the past year who did not leave their abuser because they believed that they had nowhere to go and that there wasn't enough support for them.

We also know that there is at least one perpetrator for every victim / survivor, and we need to develop a process to manage the housing needs of perpetrators. When a perpetrator applies as homeless, and we are aware of domestic abuse concerns this will be used to inform decisions on allocations of housing in order to keep victims/survivors and children safe.

The Needs Assessment tells us that in 2020/21 out of the total of 692 homeless presentations as a result of domestic abuse, 42% of those were supported into safe accommodation via the HSP. We do not have enough data telling us what the outcome was for the 58% who were not supported via the HSP, though it could be that a proportion of these were accommodated in refuge out of city or that they chose to make their own arrangements whilst waiting for housing to deal with their case, and we may not always get to know how their issues were resolved. However, this is evidence that consideration needs to be given to ensuring we have sufficient capacity in Sheffield to accommodate victims of domestic abuse quickly and safely.

In Sheffield currently, there are two commissioned women's refuges providing 37 self-contained units of accommodation with accompanying specialist domestic abuse support. These units are for single women and families and can accommodate large families (up to 6 children) and dependent male children up to 18 years or older if they are in full time education or dependent on their mother for care. We are also fortunate in Sheffield to benefit from a 'crash pad' provision in refuge for very short term, emergency accommodation.

The local authority also has a fluctuating number of properties that are used as dispersed accommodation to avoid victims/survivors being placed in less suitable accommodation such as hotels. These are available from the wider housing stock, and at the time of writing the Needs Assessment, there were 29 properties in various locations around the city being utilised by domestic abuse victims / survivors; this number has increased since then.

There are 25 individual Safe Zones properties in Sheffield with specialist domestic abuse support offered by IDAS, this provision is for all victims of abuse but the intention is that priority should be given to male victims, those from the LGBT+ community, and women with more complex needs.

There were also 593 households across the city provided with Sanctuary Scheme target hardening²² on their home in 2020/21, these households will include male and LGBT+ victims / survivors.

At the time of writing, the Young Women's Housing Project provides 17 units for young women aged between 16 and 25 in need of safe, supported accommodation as a result of abuse from partners or family members including those with children, this will increase to 20 units by November 2021.

In some cases, when someone has been awarded priority need, they may choose to stay in their existing property, sometimes with the person who is harming them, until they are offered settled safe accommodation. We need to understand more about these cases and how best to offer support to people in these situations.

²² The Sanctuary Scheme provides victims/survivors with safety equipment to make their homes more secure and keep them safer in their own homes

IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON DOMESTIC ABUSE SUPPORT IN SAFE ACCOMMODATION

The Covid-19 Pandemic and repeated lockdowns meant that many people were spending much more time at home and in isolation. In households where domestic abuse was happening this placed victims / survivors and their children at much greater risk.

Women's Aid²³ surveyed women experiencing domestic abuse at the start of the first lockdown in Spring 2020 and again over the summer and have released their findings.

- Two thirds of women currently experiencing abuse said the abuser had started using lockdown restrictions and the Covid-19 virus and its consequences as part of the abuse.
- Over half (52%) of those currently experiencing abuse experienced deteriorating mental health which left them feeling less able to cope with the abuse.
- Women reported that the abuse they experienced got worse during the pandemic, especially for those living with the abuser.
- Over three quarters of survivors (78%) living with an abuser said they felt they could not leave or get away because of the pandemic.
- Over half (51%) of survivors with children who were currently experiencing domestic abuse said that their children had witnessed more abuse and 38% said the abuser had shown an increase in abusive behaviour directed towards their children.
- Despite the restrictions women faced in accessing support most services have seen an increase in demand during the pandemic.

2020/21 saw a 21% increase in Sheffield for homeless presentations because of domestic abuse²⁴, this is a large increase in demand for housing and support resulting in stretched capacity for providers. We also know that since the Sheffield Choice Based Lettings²⁵ service reopened towards the end of 2020, the number of households bidding for available properties has increased and the average wait time for council and social housing has lengthened, although there are other options such as private rentals.

All safe accommodation providers reported increased demand for their services during the pandemic, and through temporary Covid related government funding they were able to increase their capacity to support more people. This extra capacity has been continued thanks to Part 4 Domestic Abuse Act funding from the DLUHC.

It was also reported that there had been a large increase in presentations from women with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) but that options for supporting people in these circumstances were limited.

The pandemic brought changes in the way people work and how support services were provided. This presented its own challenges, but providers tell us that they intend to retain some of the changes and provide people with more flexible ways to access support from now on. This gives the service user the opportunity to choose what works best for them and can have a positive impact on the capacity of providers to deliver support to more people.

WHAT WE WILL DO

- **Continue to assess demand for safe accommodation and explore options to increase provision in line with population growth.**

²³ <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/research-and-publications/evidence-briefings-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-survivors-and-services/>

²⁴ Data from the Housing Support Pathway (HSP)

²⁵ Choice Based Lettings allows prospective tenants to bid for available social housing

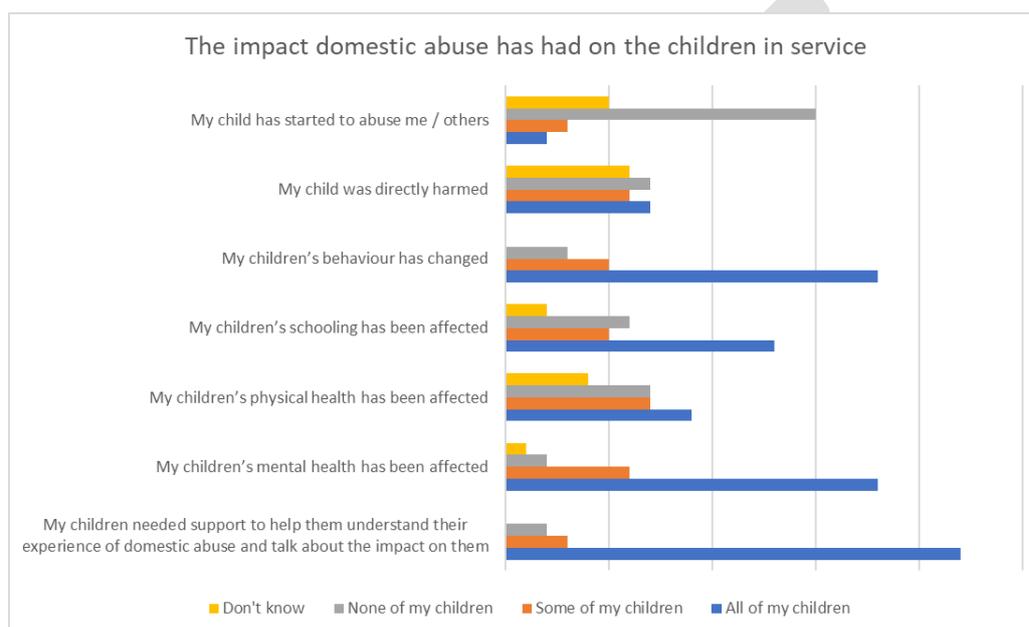
- We will work to better understand why victims/survivors may remain with the perpetrator rather than go into safe accommodation to ensure that there is appropriate support available for people in this situation.
- We will develop a process for addressing housing needs of perpetrators to reduce risk to victims/survivors and their children.
- We will work to ensure that all victims/survivors of domestic abuse are made aware of the safe accommodation and support available in the city through awareness campaigns and targeted promotion to underrepresented groups such as those who are disabled, older people and people who are LGBT+.
- We will continue to commission professional domestic abuse awareness training, including information about the support offer, to help professionals identify and support victims.
- We will maintain specialist young people's safe accommodation to increase both the numbers of young people accommodated and also increase the support offer to them.
- We will ensure that safe accommodation provision is suitable for single people and those with children.
- We will develop our understanding of the barriers facing older adults in reporting domestic abuse and accessing safe accommodation and support. We will consult with providers and those with lived experience to make sure that future commissioning meets their needs.
- We will improve the collection of data around disability and domestic abuse in the course of this strategy and consult with disabled people to better understand what reasonable adjustments we could make to ensure our safe accommodation is accessible to the disabled victims/survivors who need it.
- We will consult with the BAMER communities to explore in greater depth the issues facing BAMER people accessing safe accommodation and domestic abuse support. We recognise the relatively high proportion of BAMER workers in our services but will consider the possibility of including specialist BAMER workers in our commissioning.
- We will work with all providers to improve the data collected locally in respect of people who are transgender and those who are non-binary, and we will use this data to inform future commissioning of safe accommodation and support for these groups.
- We will continue to build on lessons learned during the Covid-19 pandemic and encourage services to be delivered through innovative methods and utilising available technology so that online group work or counselling sessions can be offered dependent on survivor choice.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AFFECTED BY DOMESTIC ABUSE IN SHEFFIELD

Children are recognised in the Domestic Abuse Act as victims in their own right and we know that experiencing domestic abuse as a child can have a significant and long-lasting impact.

We estimate that there were between 25,973 and 28,834 children affected by domestic abuse in Sheffield in the last year.

As part of a service user consultation people were asked about the impact of domestic abuse on their child(ren), see chart below.



These responses from victims/survivors with children show the extent to which children are affected by domestic abuse and gives us a clear indication of the current gaps in support needs.

"It's like lighting their soul up, they're coming out to play and laughing, it lifts the spirits to see them... it makes you feel as if you have done the right thing" - a service user

We also know from consulting with service users that for some children, living in refuge can be a positive experience.

The survey also asked respondents to give more detail of how their child(ren) were affected or if there were other impacts on them, a variety of answers were received and included children experiencing:

- Emotional Abuse and manipulation by the perpetrator
- Low confidence / self esteem
- Direct abuse of children by the perpetrator
- Child turned against the parental victim/survivor

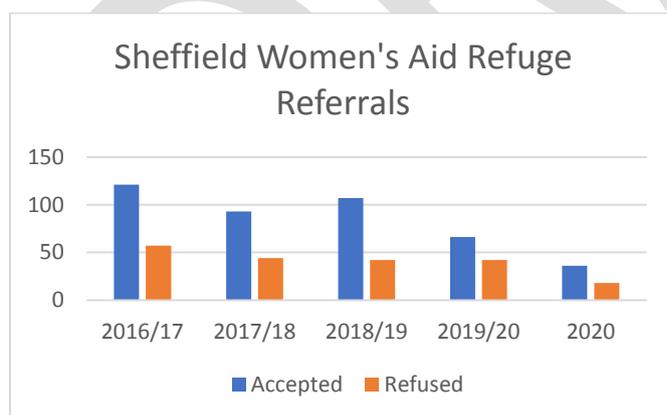
- Child doesn't see consequences because the perpetrator was not held to account

58% of respondents to our survey did not think that support for children in Sheffield was good enough.

WHAT WE WILL DO

- Ensure that there is more provision in the city to support children affected by domestic abuse to help them recover and that is delivered in a trauma informed way. We will develop a counselling service for children/young people.
- Work with partners to make sure support for children is included as an essential support requirement when commissioning future domestic abuse safe accommodation.
- Ensure that families living in safe accommodation have the opportunity to discuss their children's needs, without judgement, with an impartial worker who understands the impact of domestic abuse on them as a parent and on their child and can help.
- Develop support groups/healthy relationship programmes designed specifically for young people who have experienced domestic abuse in their families to prevent them from experiencing domestic abuse in their own intimate relationships.
- Continue to offer training to services in Sheffield on the impact of domestic abuse on children and young people and ensure that services providing homeless support to young people are able to identify those who have been affected by domestic abuse and are aware of the support offer available to them.

SHEFFIELD REFUGEE ACTIVITY



In 2019/20 66 new referrals were accepted and entered the refuges²⁶. This is in comparison to an average of 107 referrals being accepted per year between 2016/17 and 2018/19. In 2020 just 36 referrals to refuge were accepted, however this is linked to the Covid-19 pandemic and the challenges faced in housing people and moving on to other appropriate accommodation during the national and regional lockdowns. In 2020, 97 children were accommodated in refuges with their mother, this includes 36 boys with an age range from 0-17.

²⁶ HSP Data

In addition to this we also know that in 2020 there were 28 young women under the age of 25 accommodated by the Young Women’s Housing Project (YWHP).

60% of refuge places were occupied by a female under 35 and over 97% of all service users were 54 years old or younger

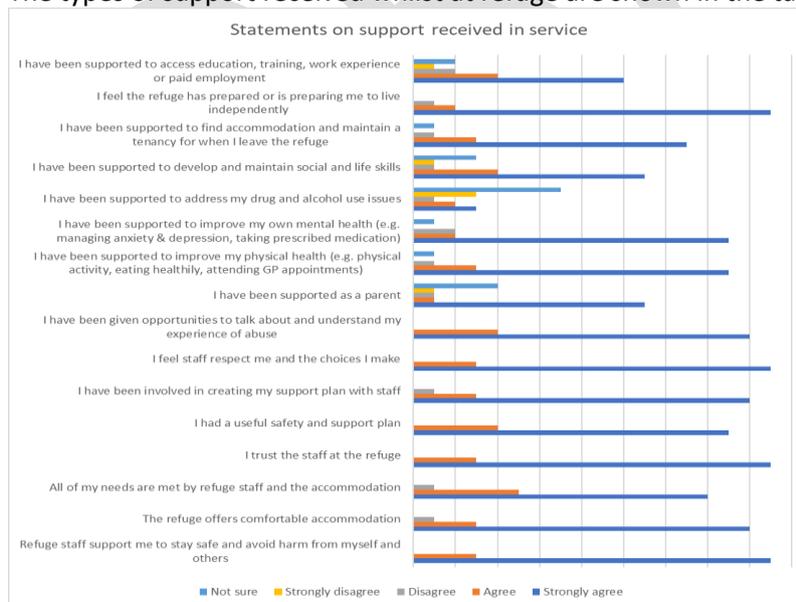
Around 80% of those leaving refuge in Sheffield reported at least one health outcome. Over half of these received support for physical health and for mental health. A higher proportion of people felt better able to manage their mental health than accessed treatment for mental health, which shows that being at the refuge and the support from staff, in a psychologically informed environment, has a positive impact on the victim’s mental health.

90% of refuge residents told us they felt safe and secure at refuge and the remaining 10% felt somewhat safe

In consultation with service users it was apparent that more out of hours support and more support around the impact of domestic abuse on mental health was needed.

“I had no money, no food and no clothing, I had nothing, and it was late and there was no one to talk to. You are so confused; you don’t know who to believe or trust. You need someone to explain to you what is happening and what to expect. It is amazing what a difference a few words can make.” – a service user

The types of support received whilst at refuge are shown in the table below:



The positive responses to this survey are very reassuring but it is clear that there is a need to make improvements in some areas.

-
- **25% of respondents from refuge did not feel as though they were supported to address their drug and alcohol issues**
 - **71% of those living in other safe accommodation did not feel as though they were provided with support to address their substance misuse issues**
 - **16% of respondents did not feel as though they were supported to access education, training, work experience or paid work**
 - **11% of respondents did not feel supported as a parent**
-

Sheffield has a proud history of maintaining and growing its refuge provision. During austerity when some other local authorities closed their refuges, Sheffield continued to develop and invest, and this approach will continue through the course of this strategy. Data from the Needs Assessment tells us how, in comparison to national data, Sheffield refuges accommodate women with complex needs, in 2020/21:

- 20% of residents had an insecure immigration status including being on a spouse visa, no status, and being on a visitor's visa
- 19% required an interpreter
- 13% had no recourse to public funds
- 4% had accessibility requirements
- 8% were pregnant
- 18% had drug or alcohol support needs
- 16% had a physical disability
- 70% had mental health needs
- 16% were offenders
- 43% had physical health needs
- 80% were unemployed
- 4% at risk of trafficking
- 5% at risk of forced marriage
- 28% at risk of so called 'Honour' Based Abuse (HBA)
- 9% involved in sex work

Refuges receive referrals from across the country and therefore, is not a provision exclusively for Sheffield residents, equally, Sheffield residents are able to access refuge provision out the city without coming using Sheffield's HSP. There is limited data on the numbers of women who leave Sheffield for another area and further work needs to be undertaken to understand the circumstances around this and whether this is a decision led mainly by the lack of refuge accommodation in Sheffield, the level of risk that the perpetrator poses or the personal choice of the victim/survivor.

We know that one of the barriers to accessing safe supported accommodation is that rents are high – this means that people who are working either have to give up work to be able to claim benefits to pay their rent, or they chose not to access supported accommodation, maybe remaining with the abuser as a result. We aim to address this through subsidising the rent costs of supported accommodation for people in this situation.

No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) in Refuge

Sheffield refuges provide accommodation for domestic abuse victims who have no recourse to public funds (NRPF); people in the UK with a temporary or precarious immigration status.

The local authority has had a duty since April 2012 to pay housing benefit for such individuals for an initial three-month period if they are granted temporary recourse to public funds under the Destitution Domestic Violence Concession. The concession however only applies to women on partner visas²⁷, therefore it is more complex for victims who are *'over stayers'* or for those not on spousal visas (e.g., student visas) to access safe accommodation.

However, during the Covid-19 pandemic the Home Office has announced a £1.5 million pilot fund to support those with NRPF without children in securing safe accommodation. This pilot will also be used to assess the level of support needed for migrant victims, to inform future funding decisions - in Sheffield this is administered by Ashiana.²⁸

Out of all females accessing a Sheffield refuge in 2020, 37% did not have recourse to public funds and of these 50% had multiple vulnerabilities including those at risk of so called 'honour' based abuse.

Individuals who have NRPF are more likely to need support for other needs than other victims/survivors. Given the numbers of those with NRPF in Sheffield refuges it is important that this fact is not overlooked in future commissioning.

WHAT WE WILL DO

- **We will continually review the need for refuge provision with specialist domestic abuse support in Sheffield and aim to provide refuge space for every Sheffield resident who needs to access this type of refuge in their own city.**
- **We will work to understand more about Sheffield residents who access refuge out of city and identify the primary motivations to inform our future commissioning plans.**
- **Continue to ensure that refuges/other safe accommodation will accommodate those with multiple and complex needs and offer them high quality, multi-agency support.**
- **Ensure that refuges are able to provide more wrap around support, including additional parenting support for mothers and support for their children informed by what they tell us they need.**
- **We will ensure that specialist advice and support with work, education, housing, debt, and welfare benefits is available to people in all forms of safe accommodation with a focus on enabling a seamless and straightforward move on to more settled accommodation, and to include practical help, such as transport grants and access to support with removals.**

²⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/application-for-benefits-for-visa-holder-domestic-violence>

²⁸ <https://migrate-uk.com/no-recourse-to-public-funds-nrpf-temporary-concessions/>

- We will offer those who wish to access it, specialist drug and alcohol and mental health support, in all types of safe accommodation.
- We will offer those, living in any form of safe accommodation, counselling to support them to recover from their experience and heal from trauma.
- We will investigate ways to make refuge / safe accommodation accessible to people in employment e.g., by establishing a process for subsidising rents for people for whom safe supported accommodation is currently unaffordable.
- We will ensure that domestic abuse awareness raising publicity makes it clear that refuge are accessible to those with NRPF and that this is publicised in community languages.
- We know that those with NRPF are more likely to have more support needs so we will ensure that additional support options commissioned are targeted at this group.

SHEFFIELD SAFE ZONES

Safe Zones, a project offering dispersed safe accommodation with specialist domestic abuse support, was commissioned to work with male victims/survivors, women with complex needs, as well as people from LGBT+ communities. During the Covid-19 pandemic, a decision was made to accommodate anyone with a domestic abuse need as demand had increased and there was pressure on refuges, and other supported and temporary accommodation including B&Bs. Since September 2020, Safe Zones has been moving back to the original commissioning intentions.

During 2020 4 males were accommodated in Safe Zones properties, including 2 fathers accompanied by their children.

In Safe Zones properties there is also a lack of representation of older adult victims of domestic abuse which again supports our intention to better understand the needs of this group.

Half of the Safe Zones residents have more than one disability with 83% reporting that they had a mental health disability, there are also those accommodated with a learning disability, physical disability, and long-term illness. This may suggest that the dispersed model of refuge accommodation is more accessible and this needs to be considered in future plans.

WHAT WE WILL DO

- We will continue to provide this offer of safe dispersed refuge accommodation with specialist domestic abuse support
- We will make sure that Safe Zones is promoted as accessible for all victims of domestic abuse including, but not exclusively, male victims/survivors.
- Ensure further promotion of Safe Zones as LGBT+ inclusive refuge accommodation, consider setting a target, in consultation with providers and specialist LGBT+ organisations for numbers of victims accommodated from LGBT+ community

SANCTUARY SCHEMES AND SUPPORT IN THE COMMUNITY

Where victims / survivors of domestic abuse do not wish to leave their own home, we recognise that every possible effort should be made to support them to be safe. The Sanctuary Scheme provides victims of domestic abuse with safety equipment for their home to increase victim's / survivor's feelings of safety, and we know that this scheme has a positive impact on those who access it.

95% of those who accessed the Sanctuary Scheme in 2020/21 did not move to a new address.

The equipment provided in this scheme can vary according to need but is typically window alarms, door chains, and door bolts. Some victims / survivors also receive lockable letter boxes and solar alarms, and some will receive all of the above.

In consultation with those receiving the Sanctuary Scheme, 86% of people stated that the measures made them feel safer in their own home. However, we know that none of the equipment supplied had the ability to record videos (such as CCTV or recordable doorbells) and victims/survivors felt that the equipment offered was not always sufficient.

Service users also told us that they felt that they needed more support for their children and help to keep them safe so this is reflected in our future plans to increase specialist help for children living in homes with Sanctuary measures in place.

"You leave the refuge with all the support and moving into your own home, but then support drops off which is difficult as you still need it while you settle in and get things sorted" – a service user

Properties where Sanctuary measures have been installed count as 'safe accommodation' under the DLUHC definition and people living in them are therefore eligible for additional support. Specialist domestic abuse floating support is also offered in the community and we recognise the importance of continuing with this support, particularly for those who are in the process of leaving safe accommodation and establishing themselves in their own homes.

WHAT WE WILL DO

- **Ensure that information about the Sanctuary Scheme is widely promoted to make more people aware of it and make it easy for those who need the support to get it.**
- **We will make sure that those living with Sanctuary Schemes are aware of the new additional support options available to them and their children**
- **We will undertake a review into the types of equipment available in the Sanctuary Scheme to make sure that the equipment available meets the needs of users**
- **Commit to further investment into the floating support service to enable victims and their children to remain safe and supported in their own homes**

HOW WILL WE IMPLEMENT THIS STRATEGY?

An action plan will be developed and monitored via Local Partnership Board / Sheffield Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategic Board.

SAFE ACCOMMODATION DUTY FUNDING

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC. Formerly the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) has allocated £1,325,868 to Sheffield for 2021/22 to deliver the new duty to provide support in safe accommodation. At this time, it is not clear whether this financial allocation will be at the same level in future years as this will be contingent on Central Government Spending Reviews. This impacts on our ability to commission long term at present. The table below indicates the allocation of the funding as agreed thus far (NB in many cases this funding is *additional* to existing grants or contracts) - time constraints may mean it is not possible to spend the entire allocation this year – this does not reflect a lack of need. Some of these initiatives are not finalised and are still in development.

Women's refuges	£175,000
Support for young women	£70,218
Support for people in safe accommodation other than refuges	£155,498
Housing and resettlement support	£59,994
Support for mental health and substance misuse	£63,750
Support for children and young people	£87,190
Sexual abuse counselling	£30,000
Money and debt advice	£71,000
Therapeutic support in refuges	£12,500
Group work for LGBT+ survivors	£7,500
Children / young people's counselling	£70,000
Youth / prevention group work	£50,000
Adult Domestic Abuse counselling commission	£60,000
Fund for access to safe accommodation	£50,000
Other initiatives	£160,000
Various memberships, Service user engagement role	£47,000
TOTAL	£1,169,650