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Policy paper

Annual progress report from the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation National Expert Steering Group 2021- 22

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Applies to England



Forewords

Foreword from Felicity Buchan, Minister for Housing and Homelessness

Domestic abuse is a vile form of life-threatening abuse, which leaves victims and their children living in fear in the place where they should feel most safe – their own homes. This is why ensuring that victims of domestic abuse and their children can access support within safe accommodation at the point of need is a key priority for the government.

I am pleased that great progress had been made since the landmark Domestic Abuse Act 2021: all local authorities have created their Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation strategy and 36,545 individuals have been supported in safe accommodation within the year.

This is a key part of this government's wider work to tackle violence against women and girls and is just the start of the journey – there is still work to be done. As the report shows, many victims are still unable to find the right support in safe accommodation when they need it. It is crucial that local authorities continue to work closely with all their local partners and specialist providers. The input of specialist domestic abuse charities is essential to ensure that local areas are meeting the needs of all victims including those who have struggled to find the right support in the past.

I am proud to Chair the National Expert Steering Group alongside the Domestic Abuse Commissioner Nicole Jacobs. The rich and varied expertise within the group has enabled us to come together to monitor and evaluate the delivery of the Duty in its first full year. I am especially grateful for all of the contributions and data provided by local authorities.

To continue to get this right and provide the support victims and their families deserve, we must continue to work together, with local authorities working with a wide range of local partners and specialist providers, and providers helping local authorities to better understand what works for different needs. Only by doing this can the right kind of support be provided in the right kind of environment for all victims.

Foreword from Nicole Jacobs, Domestic Abuse Commissioner

The 2021 Domestic Abuse Act brought about a major legislative shift in the understanding of and response to domestic abuse – in particular, in the statutory requirements for the provision of accommodation-based services.

Part 4 of the Act, or the Safe Accommodation Duty, places a duty on Tier 1 local authorities in England to provide accommodation-based support to victims of domestic abuse and their children, who are also victims in their own right. It provides an important opportunity for local areas to consider the needs of survivors and provide life changing support in accommodation-based settings.

I am proud to co-chair the National Expert Steering Group with the Minister for Housing and Homelessness, Felicity Buchan, bringing together some of the top experts in the domestic abuse sector to monitor the implementation of this critical duty and provide support to local areas.

I am grateful to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities for their

important work gathering data from local authorities and compiling this report. We now know that all local authorities have published domestic abuse safe accommodation strategy documents and are cooperating with local partners through their domestic abuse partnership boards. As the first of its kind, this report and the data within it shows the new landscape of accommodation-based services that these statutory requirements have created, giving us an important baseline for the provision of domestic abuse safe accommodation nationally.

This report also sets the direction for the future focus of the National Expert Steering Group. There is much more to be done to ensure that all survivors and their children can access safe accommodation, regardless of their identity or circumstances. It is my view that it is vital that service capacity is strengthened, there is more quality, wraparound support for those with multiple and complex needs and that more by and for services are commissioned to support some of the most marginalised in our society.

In the coming year, we need to ensure that local authorities are supported to provide the services to victims and survivors of domestic abuse required of them by the duty, and that the data which they report allows us to better understand the year-on-year improvements and lingering gaps in the provision of domestic abuse safe accommodation. I will continue to work with DLUHC to ensure accountability in the implementation of the Duty, in order to maximise the opportunities, we have to improve provision for victims and survivors.

It is absolutely crucial that victims and survivors are supported in safe accommodation, no matter who they are or where they live. I look forward to continuing to work with the minister and the National Expert Steering Group to ensure that this aim is realized.

Executive summary

The Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation National Expert Steering Group (NESG) was set up to monitor the delivery of the Part 4 duties within the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, to support the Minister for Housing and Homelessness through the provision of expert advice, sharing of evidence, data and best practice to ensure that local authorities receive the right level of guidance and support to deliver these duties. The group agreed to publish an annual report summarising progress across the country. This is the first annual report.

With the first year of this Statutory Duty comes the first year of the national data collection, provided by Tier 1 local authorities. This data forms a baseline for domestic abuse safe accommodation services nationally which will be used as a comparator in subsequent years. During this first-year local authorities reported there were at least 36,545 recorded instances of individuals (adults and children) supported in commissioned safe accommodation services (46% supported in refuge, 28% sanctuary schemes, 13% dispersed accommodation, 5% specialist accommodation, 1% second-stage accommodation and 7% in other safe accommodation).

This report highlights the hard work put into the first year of the Duty, including the key metrics from the data collection with case studies and acknowledges the challenges in the safe accommodation area, with the proposed action that the NESG and DLUHC will take.

Introduction

1. Domestic abuse is an abhorrent crime. It is why this government has made tackling domestic abuse and supporting victims a priority.

Government action to date

2. The Domestic Abuse Support in Safe Accommodation Duty, introduced as part of the [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#), placed new duties on Tier 1 local authorities in England relating to the provision of support for victims of domestic abuse within relevant Safe Accommodation, and a duty on Tier 2 authorities to co-operate with Tier 1 authorities. Under the new duties local authorities are required to appoint a domestic abuse local partnership board to assist them as they assess the need for, prepare and publish strategies to provide appropriate and tailored support for all victims and their children who reside in safe accommodation locally. Under the new duties, all Tier 1 local authorities in England are required to report to government annually by 30 June. Local authorities reported by the end of 30 June 2022 on how they have met their duties Between April 2021 and March 2022, including the following:

- Evidence that a Local Partnership has been established and operating in line with relevant guidance
- The number and type of commissioned safe accommodation services, including specialist services
- Details of the types of support commissioned within safe accommodation services
- Number of victims/survivors supported within safe accommodation services
- Demographic breakdown of victims/survivors supported, including those with specialist characteristics
- Details of victims/survivors unable to be supported within safe accommodation
- Details of move-on information for those who leave supported safe accommodation

3. The Duty is a key part of the government's wider Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls work, which emphasises the importance of providing the right support to victims and their children, including [men and boys](#), to enable them to recover and move on with their lives free from abuse. To accompany the new duties, which commenced on 1 October 2021, DLUHC has set out a clear definition of domestic abuse safe accommodation in regulations and has emphasised through [statutory guidance](#) that victims of domestic abuse and their children should have access to the right accommodation-based support when they need it. DLUHC allocated £125 million to fund the new local authority duties in each of 2021/22 and 2022/23, then £127.3 million and £129.7 million for the delivery of these duties in 2023/24 and 2024/25.

Progress in the domestic abuse safe accommodation sector

4. The Domestic Abuse Support in Safe Accommodation Duty holds significant potential to improve support to victims and survivors who need to flee their homes. The Duty has brought with it significant investment, increased accountability and governance at the local level.

5. Prior to the Duty, funding for support in safe accommodation wasn't consistently available in all parts of England and came from various sources. Local commissioners reported to the Domestic Abuse Commissioner in her mapping exercise that £31 million was spent on safe accommodation services in the year

ending March 2021. As a result of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, DLUHC distributed £125 million to all English local authorities in the following year.

6. In a survey of local authorities prior to the Duty, 85% reported they were co-operating with local partners, for example through a domestic abuse partnership board, and 66% said they were maintaining domestic abuse strategy documents. Whereas since the Duty came into force, all Tier 1 local authorities have now published domestic abuse safe accommodation strategy documents, including a current needs assessment and all councils have a domestic abuse local partnership board to provide support and advise them.

7. Prior to April 2021, 63% of local authorities said they were commissioning domestic abuse support based on a strategy and around half (52%) were monitoring the results of that. Since the introduction of the Duty, all local authorities must monitor the results of their work in this area, and report on delivery to central government.

Government planned action

8. DLUHC has commissioned a full evaluation to understand how well the duties are working. The evaluation, which will be carried out by Ipsos Mori, will include working closely with local authorities and domestic abuse service providers in many different parts of the country to collect data and information, including hearing from survivors about their experiences of support services. The evaluation represents the first of its kind for DLUHC in terms of understanding the scale and quality of domestic abuse accommodation-based support services across England. It will include input from external experts to ensure the research is conducted safely and ethically with a trauma-informed approach.

9. DLUHC will be keeping an eye on the impact that the Duty is having on community-based domestic abuse services through regular conversations with local authorities. To date we have not received any information to suggest these duties are having a negative impact on domestic abuse community-based services: on the contrary many local authorities are working with their domestic abuse local partnership board to set out a holistic domestic abuse or wider Violence Against Women and Girls strategy for their area. It is important to note that local authorities have received funding from DLUHC to meet the assessed unmet need for support in safe accommodation and have committed to use DLUHC funding for that purpose. DLUHC funding should not be used to fund wider VAWG support or perpetrator services, as this would mean vital support in safe accommodation is not fully funded.

10. DLUHC has now announced a further 2 years of government funding – £127.3 million and £129.7 million for the delivery of these duties in 2023/24 and 2024/25. This will enable local authorities to make longer term commissioning decisions and give certainty to local providers such as specialist domestic abuse refuges.

Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation National Expert Steering Group

11. Chaired by the Minister for Housing and Homelessness, the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation National Expert Steering Group comprises of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner (co-chair), a representative from the Police Crime Commissioners, the Children's Commissioner, Sector Experts, National Housing Federation, and the Local Government Association. The steering group has been set up to oversee implementation of the Duty across England and provide expert advice, data and evidence to the DLUHC minister to enable well-informed decisions in relation to the new Duty. The group brings powerful expertise and insight, their role is

to ensure the Duty is implemented as robustly as possible, they act collectively and proactively to solve problems in relation to the new Domestic Abuse Support in Safe Accommodation Duty, as set out in Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

12. The group has provided expert insight on the importance of commissioning specialist services to support local authorities as they implement the new duties. The group has committed to publish an annual report summarising progress across the country and sharing best practice: this is the first of those reports. The report will highlight key metrics from the first year's statutory data on the Duty, examine what challenges have been exposed in the first year, showcase some local authorities demonstrating best practice and outline what DLUHC and the NESG have done and plan to do to continue to support the delivery of the Duty.

Local authority context

13. As of June 2022, all local authorities had carried out their needs assessments and completed and published their strategies. This is positive progress, although it must be acknowledged that publication is not of itself an indication of the quality of these products. The commissioning of new services is expected to take some time, this can be expected as quality commissioning takes time and local authority procurement processes needed to be followed.

14. It is also worth noting that the local authorities delivering this ongoing Statutory Duty came from different starting points, and differing levels of progress reflect that. Some have had long-standing partnerships with local organisations and strategies in place to provide domestic abuse services, whereas others will have started from scratch. For this reason, the first year of this Duty is an unusual year: some local authorities were ready to commission new services almost immediately, while others had to spend time to develop needs assessments, strategies and partnership boards. DLUHC provided capacity building funding, needs assessment templates and ran workshops to help local authorities plan and prepare for the new duties before they started. Local authorities also indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic may have impacted the provision of support - some explained they started building new capacity in response to the crisis, including delaying move-on from refuge due to illness, and impacting the availability of housing.

15. Below is a case study of a local authority who followed the Duty statutory guidance and went one step further.

Case study – Wokingham Borough Council

Wokingham Borough Council took the opportunity to revitalise their partnership working arrangements. This involved creating 2 new groups – the Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board and a separate Domestic Abuse Networking Group to focus on wider domestic abuse responses, including support for victim-survivors not living in 'safe accommodation', awareness raising activities and holding perpetrators to account. Both groups report into the Community Safety Partnership, as well as into a newly formed Performance Management Group which oversees performance across the Community Safety Partnership strands.

Identifying a strong Chair with extensive housing knowledge, as well as ensuring the right membership for the Board, proved crucial. Wokingham decided to build on the legal requirement for a representative of victims of domestic abuse, to include a range of victim-survivors who faced additional barriers to accessing support. Members of the Partnership Board were actively recruited to represent the needs of different demographic groups whilst recognising that every victim of domestic abuse has unique

circumstances and needs. This ensures that diverse victim needs are fully included to achieve a good safe accommodation and support offer for everyone.

As well as local 'by and for' services, the Wokingham Borough Council board includes local specialist organisations working with LGBTQ+ victims, those supporting disabled victims and victims from ethnically diverse communities, alongside national specialist organisations Hourglass and Mankind Initiative.

All members of the Partnership Board have an equal voice within meetings and collective decisions are made which support the DA Strategy and Action Plan.

Steps local areas can take to learn from year 1

16. Now the Duty has been in force for a full year, it would be a good point for local authorities to review progress and discuss with their Local Partnership Board what more they need to do.

17. Local authorities should be establishing a clear approach to monitoring and evaluating local delivery against the ambition set out within their local strategies. It is important that there is clear accountability and transparency in the commissioning and delivery of domestic abuse services at both a local and national level. Working with their Local Partnership Boards, councils will want to review the support that has been provided to date, and how local commissioning decisions have impacted victim journeys within their area. This includes progress updates on supporting any hard-to-reach/minoritised groups that have been identified in the needs assessments and strategies.

18. They should consider either a light touch refresh or a more thorough review of their needs assessment to ensure that services are meeting local needs including survivors needing to move into the area to flee domestic abuse. Local authorities should not be setting targets regarding supporting a certain number of survivors who originate from their local area.

19. Local authorities should also ensure they are monitoring the quality of domestic abuse service provision, to ensure it is delivering well against requirements and providing the right support for victims. The statutory guidance is clear that local authorities should commission support under the Duty to meet quality standards and the data monitoring form asked authorities which quality standards they are following. The NESG recommends that local authorities should review data and monitor the quality-of-service provision to meet identified need in discussion with their local partnership board, including hearing from victims/ survivors who have used services, to build a culture of survivor-led continual improvement in domestic abuse services.

Performance of the Duty during 2021/2022 through national data

20. During this first year, councils in England concentrated on both embedding the duties and commissioning according to their strategies. Therefore, data from this year will be treated as a baseline, to be used in years to come as a comparator. Once the Duty is fully embedded and any challenges of underreporting have been worked through, it could be published in more detail.

Data limitations

21. As noted above, this first year is slightly unusual. Inclusion of individual local authority level data in this report would not provide a fair reflection of progress, given that local authorities have all started from different points. Additionally, prior to the Duty, different councils and domestic abuse service providers all collected slightly different information on their provision. Councils were asked to collect the data from their commissioned providers and had only a relatively short amount of time to respond to the first year's full data request from DLUHC. This means that some local authorities were not able to answer every question. Some councils need to do additional work on their data systems, working with providers, now they are clearer on the data to be collected in future. Where particular data is likely to be under-reported, this is indicated below.

22. It is also recognised that the data provided here does not provide insight into the quality of support and the outcomes which were achieved. For instance, in the case of needs assessments, the data returns do not tell us if the right evidence is being used, the right issues being considered or if all groups' needs are being considered. The full evaluation of the Duty will examine the quality of support and measure other outcomes in addition to our monitoring data.

23. Teething issues are to be expected with a new data collection, particularly as local authorities were asked to provide backdated data at the point of this collection. This should improve over time as local authorities understand what will be collected.

24. DLUHC has been working with local authorities to improve this national data set for future. This is an iterative process and workshops have been held with councils to get their specific feedback. This has been used to refine the data form and guidance. As we open the next return, DLUHC will work with local authorities to respond to any questions they have about their return. Following the submission of the next returns in summer 2023, DLUHC will continue to work with local authorities to quality assure responses and improve the quality of the data.

25. This dataset is not comparable to statistics from sector bodies such as Women's Aid. This data includes information on all commissioned support in safe accommodation services, across the full range of safe accommodation types. Sector data may include a range of commissioned and non-commissioned providers, but often focuses on a narrower range of services, such as refuge.

Numbers of individuals supported in safe accommodation

26. Within the Home Office [Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan](#), DLUHC set out 2 key metrics for the Duty, these are 'a decrease in the numbers of victims and survivors turned away from support in safe accommodation in England' and 'an increase in the numbers of victims and survivors supported in safe accommodation in England'. The first year of collected data will form the benchmark for these 2 key indicators.

27. Local authorities reported there were at least 36,545 recorded instances of individuals (adults and children) supported in commissioned safe accommodation services. However, local authorities are highly likely to have underreported their totals. 15% of authorities reported being unable to report data on children and 30% of authorities report only being able to provide partial data on the total number of individuals. Many local authorities reported this was because they were able to extract data from some providers but not others and some services only recorded the primary survivor in a household. It is also recognised that numbers of individuals supported in safe accommodation does not provide insight about the way in which they were supported and the outcomes which were achieved. These questions will

be examined in the planned full evaluation of the Duty.

28. Figure 1 below shows the number of survivors of domestic abuse supported in safe accommodation in England between April 2021 and March 2022, broken down by the [types of safe accommodation](#).

Figure 1: Total instances of individuals supported (Apr 21 – Mar 22)

29. Of those 36,545 individuals recorded, 46% were supported in refuge, 28% in sanctuary schemes, 13% in dispersed accommodation, 5% in specialist accommodation, 1% in second-stage accommodation and 7% in other safe accommodation.

30. Women's Aid provide important statistics on individuals supported in refuge in their Annual Audit. Although not directly comparable, for reference, the [Women's Aid figures for 2020/21](#) show that 10,809 women and 11,890 children were accommodated in refuge services.

31. The sanctuary scheme data is problematic as 13% of authorities reported that their providers were not setup to record data on individuals in sanctuary schemes and others report recording individuals who live in a sanctuary scheme but aren't receiving support. Additionally, some provider data focusses on the physical instalments (e.g., numbers of locks, window reinforcements etc) rather than the support to individuals which is the focus of this Duty. This is a learning point for DLUHC and local authorities. The monitoring form guidance has been strengthened to confirm that the collection is focused on properties where victims are receiving support, and DLUHC have held meetings with local authorities to discuss the guidance.

32. The sex/gender split of recorded adults was 97% female, 2.7% male and 0.3% trans and non-binary people. 37% of instances of support were of children, no gender or age split available.

Figure 2: Identity of individuals supported (Apr 21 - Mar 22)

33. Not all individuals in safe accommodation have their identity recorded, therefore the total of women, children, men and trans people in Figure 2 does not add up to the total in Figure 1.

34. Within the statutory guidance for the Duty, it is made clear that safe accommodation should be single gender or single sex accommodation. The importance of this is reiterated within the sex/gender split found by the data above.

35. Local authorities recorded 15% of all victims supported came from outside the local authority area.

36. The length of stay details in refuge, specialist and dispersed accommodation showed a large variation with some victims staying for a brief period, and some staying up to a year or longer. Of the 12,515 stays for which length was recorded, 19% were less than 1 month, 27% were between 1 and 3 months, 25% were between 3 and 6 months, and 29% were longer than 6 months. The data monitoring form has been amended to separate length of stay data for specialist accommodation from refuge and dispersed for future.

37. As reflected in the statutory guidance, where possible, commissioning should be conducted on a long-term basis to encourage consistency and security for victims including children. Below is an example of the significant impact of a long-term contract in domestic abuse services.

Case study – Warwickshire County Council

While recommissioning its county-wide Warwickshire Domestic Violence and Abuse (WDVA) Service, Warwickshire County Council centred their requirements on the needs of survivors. It was recognised in their needs assessment in 2021 that groups such as LGBTQ+ survivors and those with disabilities were not accessing DVA services at expected levels. The contract period for this work was 5 years, with the opportunity to extend for a further 2 years and the council required bidders to demonstrate how they could meet the needs of these underserved communities.

Since awarding the WDVA Service contract to Refuge, Warwickshire have published their [Warwickshire Safe Accommodation Strategy \(2021-24\)](#) and undertaken a Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment. This model demonstrated good practice as it market tested a new pilot model of 36 dispersed units of safe accommodation, the outcomes of which have informed the shape of the new offer:

- Demonstrating the value of specialist support provision for survivors
- Awarding the additionality to the commissioned specialist provider as a contract variation, enabling the new offer to integrate with the existing

- refuge service provision and allow for coproduction of shaping the model
- Building a 2-year pilot, which allows testing of a best practice model
- Supported the sourcing of 36 additional properties, using existing stock and relationships built with registered providers and housing associations
- Commissioning properties to meet the needs of groups identified locally
- Being adaptable to changes e.g., the 2021 census data (Warwickshire County Council added 2 additional units to the original proposal to match an increase in the population of the County)
- Working closely with commissioned provider to implement new offer
- Phasing the extension across the 2-year pilot, recognising that it takes time to bring new buildings on board and is market dependent

Households unable to be supported in safe accommodation

38. Local authorities reported 20,616 instances where a household was referred to safe accommodation services, but the service did not support the household. Women's Aid data for 2020/21 estimated 17,561 referrals to refuge services were declined. The same caveats mentioned previously should be kept in mind here. However, local authorities have reported that in many cases a referral is only made when it is known that there is a space and capacity to support the survivor.

39. There were 3,329 instances (17%) where the recorded reason was that the service could not meet the needs of the household. There were 7,704 instances (40%) where the service recorded that they did not have capacity. The geographical proximity to the perpetrator was the recorded reason in 5% of cases, and 33% of reasons were recorded as 'Other', which includes the victim declining the support, and the victim already being supported by another service. This data may include repeat referrals in which households have received rejections before going on to receive support at another service.

40. Survivors of domestic abuse with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) are known to face significant barriers accessing safe accommodation, as explored in the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's [Safety Before Status report](#) (PDF, 14.6MB). Within this data there were 808 instances where households or individuals were unable to be supported due to the victim having NRPF, this constitutes 4% of the reasons given for victims not being able to be supported.

41. In April 2021 the Home Office launched the Support for Migrant Victims Scheme to support migrant victims of domestic abuse who have NRPF in a 12-month pilot. This pilot, supported by £1.4 million of government funding, has been delivered by Southall Black Sisters and their delivery partners and has provided wraparound support services for migrant victims of domestic abuse, including accommodation, subsistence, and counselling. During the pilot the scheme supported 425 migrant victims. The pilot, and independent evaluation by Behavioural Insights Limited, aims to ensure they further understand the circumstances and experiences of migrant victims who fall outside of the current provisions under the Immigration Rules and what further support they require during their time within the scheme. The evaluation will be producing a final report later in the year. In the interim, Home Office are providing £1.4 million in 2022-23 to continue to fund support for migrant victims of domestic abuse, whilst they take on board vital lessons learned from the pilot.

Reasons why households were unable to be supported

% of reasons provided

Service did not have capacity	7,704 (40%)
Service was not able to meet the needs of the household	3,229 (17%)
Geographical proximity to perpetrator	1,003 (5%)
The household had no recourse to public funds	808 (4%)
Other	6,546 (33%)

42. Figure 3 below visually represents the reasons councils reported why a household was unable to be supported. It shows the prevalence of certain reasons relative to others. The data behind this visual is mental health (34 councils), alcohol (31 councils), drugs (31 councils), disability (24 councils) a large family (8 councils) and problems with children (4 councils).

43. This breakdown of reasons households were unable to be supported is lower than the total number of households who were unable to be supported, as not all local authorities recorded this information. We have increased the list of possible reasons in the data collection form so we can improve this data in future collections.

Figure 3: Total instances of households unable to be supported (Apr 21 - Mar 22)

44. 19% of local authorities reported that the reasons why a household was unable to be supported is not always recorded. As a result, this is expected to be an under-reporting of the true total.

45. In addition, Women's Aid have reported that many services do not accept referrals when they are full so some households in need may not have been offered a referral at all. The ManKind Initiative also report that it is rare that there are vacancies at a national level in any refuges/specialist accommodation for men.

46. It is clear that regardless of the above caveats there are still far too many people being turned away or who are unable to access the service they need when they need it. It is essential that this number goes down and DLUHC and the NESG will be

closely monitoring this. DLUHC will be introducing a voluntary quarterly collection so local authorities can submit data more regularly to enable DLUHC to monitor this in more real time.

Specialist ‘by and for’ services

47. The [statutory guidance](#) places emphasis on commissioning specialist services and ‘by and for’ services which support those with particular protected characteristics, in order to build a support base which reflects the particular needs of all victims in the area. The support within safe accommodation should be delivered by knowledgeable and/or experienced specialist providers, charities, and other voluntary organisations whose purpose is to provide support to victims of domestic abuse.

48. The data monitoring form covered specialist services for black and minoritised victims, disabled victims, LGBTQ+ victims, male victims, victims requiring mental health support, or drug and alcohol support.

49. Twenty-seven local authorities reported commissioning specialist ‘by and for’ services for either BAME, LGBTQ+ or disabled victims. Twenty-four of them have BAME services, 5 have services for disabled victims, and 11 have services for LGBTQ+ victims.

50. Since the introduction of the new duties, some potential challenges with commissioning specialist services have been brought to the forefront through discussion with the sector and local authorities. A lack of provision for black and minoritised victims or areas where specialist services is a challenge which has been raised by the sector. The data within this report reinforces this. Specialist domestic abuse services are highly effective: in the [Domestic Abuse Commissioner’s mapping exercise](#) (PDF, 680KB) it was found that specialist ‘by and for’ services offered particular benefits to victims and survivors from minoritised or marginalised communities who face the greatest barriers to support .

51. However, it is recognised that in some places there is a dearth of by and for organisations, which could be due to small numbers of victims from a protected group in the area or low numbers of those with ability and finances to set up a domestic abuse service.

How the challenge will be addressed

52. DLUHC will respond to any reports of a local authority consistently not providing support to meet the needs of a cohort of their domestic abuse victim community with discussions and support to plug that gap. The NESG members will seek to challenge areas where this gap exists and provide suggestions of organisations who they could work with.

53. Below is a case study about an area with a robust approach to ensuring black and minoritised victims needs are met:

Case study – Greater London Authority & Mayors Office for Policing and Crime (GLA & MOPAC)

In implementing the new duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, the Mayor of London has adopted an innovative approach to ensuring that survivors and their children are able to access safe accommodation-based services across the capital.

Commissioning the right services, tailored to the needs of survivors, is key to this approach. Underpinned by the London Domestic Abuse Safe

Accommodation Strategy, which was informed by an independent needs assessment, the GLA & MOPAC have set up a framework of service providers. Call-offs via this framework are used to commission services at a pan-London, multi-borough and borough level. Setting up this commissioning framework has created a pool of expert service providers, ensuring that services are delivered by providers with the appropriate skills and experience. The framework also establishes a pan-London approach and delivery model which will contribute to address disparities in service provision across the capital.

The framework places an emphasis on inclusivity and has enabled smaller and specialist by and for organisations to deliver services, either in partnership, or in their own right. One of the 3 'lots' in the procurement was specifically assigned for specialist grassroots organisations, resulting in funding of £3.6 million being awarded for services dedicated to supporting black and minoritised survivors.

The Mayor's work to implement the new Duty is supported by London's multi-agency Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Partnership Board, which brings together partners key to improving outcomes for survivors and their children. The Board has 4 Implementation Groups, each taking forward some of the specific proposals in London's Strategy. These are focusing on funding, evidence and data, pathways, and preventing homelessness. The Partnership Board and its Implementation Groups are enabling vital work to be undertaken, to ensure that London's commissioning approach is robust and is informed by data, evidence, and expert understanding of current and emerging need.

54. Additionally, local authorities have reported the lack of 'by and for'/specialist domestic abuse safe accommodation support outside large metropolitan areas and the [Domestic Abuse Commissioner's mapping of services](#) show that by and for services are 5 times less likely to be in receipt of statutory funding .

55. This issue has been discussed at the Domestic Abuse National Expert Steering Group and is covered in the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's mapping of services across England and Wales.

56. Below is an example of an area where specialist services are being coordinated across neighbouring authorities:

Case study – Southwest Peninsula

Domestic abuse commissioners across the Southwest Peninsula from Cornwall Council, Plymouth City Council, Torbay Council, Devon County Council, and NHS Devon work together to create a system wide response to domestic abuse which reduces harm and improves outcomes for people affected. The Safe Accommodation Needs Assessments in the Southwest Peninsula highlighted a need for specialist services so that LGBTQ+ victims/survivors of domestic abuse could feel confident their needs would be understood and supported appropriately. The Southwest Peninsula worked with [Galop](#) to determine a more inclusive commissioning approach.

LGBTQ+ people need tailored support and LGBTQ+ organisations offer this through services run by and for communities they seek to serve. LGBTQ+ people can be sure of a shared understanding when accessing these services, removing the need to explain their identity. Low rates of the LGBTQ+ community accessing DASV services, shows the wariness that many LGBTQ+ people have of accessing non-specialist services.

The Southwest Peninsula Safer Rainbow project is a specialist service provided in partnership with a local LGBT+ support charity, [Intercom Trust](#). It provides an accessible front door to LGBT+ domestic abuse and sexual violence victims. Our LGBT+ Domestic Abuse workers in Devon and Cornwall both provide 1-1- IDVA support and support services across the Peninsula to better identify and respond to domestic abuse and sexual violence within LGBT+ communities. Utilising a combination of co-location, collaborative working, and awareness raising, this project is both providing specialist LGBT+ IDVA service and improving general practice and referral pathways across the region.

How the challenge will be addressed

57. It is vital that local authorities consider working with specialist 'by and for' organisations in other parts of England that already support hard-to-reach minoritised groups for ideas, research and information to address. Bearing in mind that the capacity of smaller specialist organisations may have limits, local authorities may need to consider providing funding for their services. DLUHC and the NESG members actively encourage local authorities working collaboratively between neighbouring authorities to agree a joint approach, for example by pooling funding to commission support services which cover a wider geographic print than a single Tier 1 authority area. This could be in the form of reciprocal agreements, cross-boundary domestic abuse working groups and pooling safe accommodation provision. The latter is important if there is some demand from some hard-to reach/minoritised groups, but it is not constant as this approach could avoid specialist accommodation properties having voids. NESG members can provide expertise in areas where there are service gaps and provide best practice examples. Of course, in line with normal best practice, any jointly commissioned service must be evaluated properly to ensure they meets the needs of the group it set out to provide for.

Other challenges facing 'by and for' services

58. National Expert Steering Group members have highlighted that small, grassroots services such as 'by and for' services are also facing challenges in navigating commissioning processes in some areas. For example, organisations may not have expertise or confidence in bid-writing, and short timescales can add to the challenge for such services. In addition, specialist services supporting particular groups of victims will be ruled out of bidding for tenders which require one provider to provide support for all victims. Smaller revenue and reserves levels may mean organisations are not accepted onto frameworks, and payment in arrears can also be an issue.

59. National Expert Steering Group members would like to encourage local authorities to review their commissioning processes to ensure a level playing field for smaller, but often unique services with great expertise built up through extensive experience, for example by providing for development of partnerships, alliances or consortia to preserve diversity, expertise and specialisms.

Individuals supported with protected characteristics

60. The Act states that victims with each relevant protected characteristics, as per the Equality Act 2010, must be able to access the support that they need. Individuals can be the victims of multiple different abusive behaviours because of different characteristics – such as immigration status, sex, race, ethnicity, age, religion or belief, socio-economic position, disability, gender identity and sexual orientation – which may intersect and overlap. This can create barriers to accessing services and

support if they are not adequately designed to meet their needs. Tier 1 authorities should consider intersectionality when developing and giving effect to strategies.

61. The specialist groups included in the data monitoring form were disabled victims, victims identifying as LGBTQ+, black and minoritised status victims, victims who are ex-offenders, victims with mental health support needs, victims with a drug or alcohol support need, victims aged 16-25 and victims aged 65+.

62. Tier 1 local authorities reported 11,742 instances of individuals supported with at least one specialist characteristic. The most common specialist characteristics were mental health difficulties (6,089 victims), drug (1,519) or alcohol support need (1,469), black and minoritised status (5,466), disabled victims (2,792), and victims aged 16-25 (2,879). However, 44% of local authorities reported having partial or no data so the total number of individuals with specialist characteristics and the prevalence of each characteristic in the population are significantly likely to be underreported. This is a point of learning for the local authorities and providers: the rate of reporting should improve as local authorities get used to the reporting mechanism. DLUHC will continue to work with local authorities to emphasise the important of accurate data and answer any questions.

Figure 4: Number of individuals with specialist characteristics supported (Apr 21 - Mar 22)

63. The categories discussed here are not exclusive: an individual could fall into more than one category and for this reason the percentages should not be totalled in any way.

64. The data shows a challenge with those victims with additional support needs, in that there are still a substantial number of people being turned away. Local authorities will want to discuss locally and use their Local Partnership Board members' considerable expertise to understand if under-represented groups are receiving the right support. It should be noted, some local authorities expressed that since the pandemic there has been an increase in referrals from survivors with high level support needs. This could be the [consequences of living through lockdown with a perpetrator](#). Understanding the best models of support for such victims and survivors is not always straightforward. For example, a traditional 'shared house' refuge model may not be the right option for victims with serious mental health or addiction

problems. However, placing extremely vulnerable victims in dispersed properties without staff on site every day, may not be the right approach. DLUHC are supporting 12 councils to commission specialist support for victims of domestic abuse and other forms of sexual violence who are sleeping rough (or at risk of) through the Respite Rooms pilot, a model which we want to encourage to be rolled out more widely. In this model, victims receive specialist trauma informed support alongside support to meet other additional support needs. Below is a case study of an area running a Respite Rooms programme:

Case study – Liverpool City Council

Liverpool City Council was 1 of 12 local authorities selected to undertake the pilot provision of Respite Rooms. YMCA Together are their Respite Rooms delivery partner, complementing the support which YMCA Together already deliver in the city to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping, including 2 refuges, temporary accommodation and substance misuse rehabilitation services. The pathways between these established services and the pilot respite room have been very helpful.

The Respite Room Pilot, funded by DLUHC since October 2021, has led to the creation of 6 units of accommodation for women and 2 for men, based in different areas of the city. The high-quality safe accommodation includes specialist trauma informed support 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Support is based on the Empowerment Star outcome tool, helping to identify the appropriate next steps for those who access the service. Referrals come via the local authorities housing options team as well as a commissioned rough sleepers outreach team, IDVA's and temporary accommodation providers.

YMCA Together consulted local organisations and providers, used previous learning to inform and target information sharing. The integrated and effective pathways between YMCA Together services have, on many occasions, been used to both send referrals and/or plan a move on out of the respite service. The pathways offer several options for further support or increased independence, with seamless support.

The pilot has now supported over 100 survivors and although at times it can still be challenging to find suitable move-on options from the service, improvements are always being considered. Recently the respite room's service has become involved with the city-wide complex lives multiple disadvantage team which is an important platform to highlight concerns, work collaboratively with professionals to overcome barriers and safeguard individuals whilst working to achieve positive outcomes. This multi-disciplinary way of working allows a joint approach to share good practice.

65. Another challenge or potential gap exposed by the new duties are the barriers felt by disabled victims and the lack of provision for this group nationally. [Disabled people are more likely to experience domestic abuse](#) and the Domestic Abuse Commissioner found that victims reported finding it 'hard' or 'very hard' to access help in her [mapping of services](#) (PDF, 680KB).

How the challenge will be addressed

66. DLUHC will continue to share specialist organisations which local authorities could work with to support this cohort. Workshops will be held featuring organisations who specialise in support for disabled victims, for local authorities to understand how they must approach this challenge and ask questions from their local area. DLUHC will work with the Local Government Association to encourage local authorities to share best practice so that they can learn from other each other. Local authorities will

be encouraged to enable co-production with disabled victims at this point, to take account of their views on what type of support services work best for them.

67. Below is an example of a service providing accommodation-based support to disabled victims:

Service highlight – SignHealth

SignHealth is a charity providing a unique Deaf-led service for Deaf people who have or are experiencing domestic abuse. Currently this service is provided in London and the South East with some remote support taking place across England. The service recognises the need to expand their services further.

The SignHealth team of Deaf Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) and Young People's Violence Advisors (YPVAs) help bring Deaf people and their children to safety and empower them to build new lives free of fear.

From the initial contact, the SignHealth team creates a support plan and develops coping strategies until the client feels ready to move on with their life independently. They will provide this support while the victim is living in safe accommodation and continue supporting until they are able to move on. Throughout this process, we ensure our clients are able to navigate statutory services such as immigration, the police and courts, housing, and social services.

- Allocation of qualified Deaf IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advisor)
- Allocation of a Deaf YPVA (Young People's Violence Advisor)
- Working with women's refuges to provide support to Deaf women
- Referral when necessary to SignHealth's one-to-one psychological therapy in British Sign Language
- Freedom Programme for Deaf women
- Working in partnership with key national and local agencies to develop guidelines for best practice
- Guidance on laws, policy and practice to ensure the needs of Deaf people at risk of domestic abuse are recognised and fully met

Move-on destination

68. Of those households who left safe accommodation in 2021-2022, 36% moved into social housing, 10% into accommodation in the private rented sector, 8% into non-domestic abuse supported accommodation, 15% of households had an unknown move on location recorded and 6% of victims returned to the perpetrator. 24% of households had their destination recorded as 'Other'. This includes moving in with friends/family, moving to another safe accommodation service, returning to own home as owner/occupier and moving into Temporary Accommodation.

69. When a local authority is involved in securing move on accommodation, the authority should ensure the accommodation is in a secure location, is suitable and appropriate. It should be noted that, even when ready to move on to independent living, the effects of domestic abuse may continue to impact survivors in different ways. It is good practice for any local authorities in commissioning safe accommodation services to ensure victims moving on are aware of the community-

based support services which are available to them in their new area.

Figure 5: Move-on destinations for households leaving safe accommodation (Apr 21 - Mar 22)

Other commissioning challenges

70. A number of other potential commissioning challenges have been raised by members of the NESG. As stated earlier in the report, DLUHC is working with local authorities to improve the national data set for future. This data will then enable better understanding of these issues.

In-house services

71. The Domestic Abuse Commissioner's [Patchwork of Provision report](#) (PDF, 3.44MB), highlights that local authorities should be cautious about bringing domestic abuse services in-house. The Domestic Abuse Commissioner found that confidentiality and independence of services were of critical importance in her survey of victims and survivors. There were particular concerns from victims and survivors around potential for sharing information with social services and the Family Court, with victims and survivors fearing that their children would be removed if they sought help for domestic abuse. This was particularly important for victims and survivors from minoritised communities.

72. Independence from statutory agencies represents a major mechanism for building trust, and so the report recommends local commissioners should only bring services in-house in exceptional circumstances and should inform DLUHC when they do so. Therefore, DLUHC's annual data collection to monitor the domestic abuse support in safe accommodation duties will include a question to ask local authorities whether they have any services in-house, or plan to bring them in-house.

Local residency requirements

73. The Domestic Abuse Commissioner's report also found that residency requirements were attached to accommodation-based services in 30% of services she surveyed. This is concerning. The statutory guidance is clear that needs assessments should consider the number and needs level of victims who need to flee out of the local authority area to access relevant safe accommodation within a different area.

Importance of tailored services for all victims

74. This report has highlighted that while a good start has been made, there is still much more to do to meet the needs of all victims who need safe accommodation. The issues highlighted throughout this report underline the importance of tailored support services. The Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation statutory guidance states clearly that a 'one size fits all' provision available through e.g., offering a single contract for all victim support services across the authority is unlikely to be the right approach. It is critical that authorities continue to consider the needs of all victims, including male victims, female victims, and those from minoritised groups (including because of race, disability, sexual orientation, transgender identity, or other experience of disadvantage). The need for tailored services supporting children should be emphasised and is a point DLUHC are keeping a close eye on. The improved national data will enable better understanding of these needs. Local authorities should ensure their commissioning approach does not exclude smaller voluntary organisations, including 'by and for' services, women-led services, or male-led services.

How the NESG will support local authorities to deliver the Duty

75. The NESG has discussed and agreed a menu of actions which can be taken to support and encourage local authorities to deliver these duties.

76. The DLUHC holds regular conversations with local authorities where they are encouraged to bring with them any practical barriers they are facing. The Department also runs targeted workshops for councils and circulates good practice guides. The Domestic Abuse Commissioner has a Practice and Partnership Team, geographically spread across the country, providing support to local authorities. Sector partners will provide best practice examples for councils to learn from and the Local Government Association have a network of principal advisers who hold conversations with local authorities to provide support.

77. If there is concern that a council may be struggling to deliver their Part 4 duties and may need more intensive support. DLUHC will hold informal conversations with the local authority with the aim to offer guidance and support. Further options of support could include a critical friend in the form of a specialist sector organisation, a buddying scheme with another local authority or the LGA's peer support offer. The Domestic Abuse Commissioner has a range of powers to work with local authorities, and where all possible escalation has taken place one option open to her would be to carry out a deep dive in a local area.

78. Once the above steps have been exhausted, the Minister for Housing and Homelessness would want to speak to any local authority which is significantly failing to comply with the Part 4 Duty.

79. In the situation of a systemic issue with the Duty, the NESG will discuss the best way to address the issue. Possible actions include holding tailored workshops or creating specific materials or in the case of a significant systemic issue, the statutory guidance may need to be reviewed.

80. If an individual feels they have been failed by a council, they have several ways to hold that local authority accountable. They could follow the complaints procedure or escalate the issue to the Ombudsman.

Next steps

81. As discussed in this report, with the introduction of the support in safe accommodation Duties within the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 considerable progress has been achieved by local authorities across the country during the first year. However, there is work still to be done. The challenges laid out in this report will be closely monitored by both the NESG and DLUHC, with discussions held during meetings when necessary.

82. Additionally, as addressed in the report, this year's data comes with caveats. DLUHC will be improving the data monitoring form and working with local authorities to clarify wording of some questions and accompanying guidance, to ensure the most complete and robust set of data possible, to accurately capture all the work completed under the Duty.

83. The full evaluation of this Duty commenced in late 2022 and will seek to understand how the duties are being implemented and approaches that local authorities are taking to address unmet need. Findings from this evaluation will inform future policy development and key learning will be disseminated to local authorities and discussed by the National Experts Steering Group.

84. On 12 December 2022 DLUHC announced a further 2 years of government funding – £127.3 million and £129.7 million for the delivery of these duties in 2023/24 and 2024/25.

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