

DRAFT DOMESTIC ABUSE SAFE ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY

October 2021



1. Purpose:

- 1.1 The purpose of this strategy is to set the direction of travel to meet the new statutory duties being placed on local authorities in regards to Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021ⁱ.
- 1.2 This strategy specifically focuses on Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021ⁱⁱ around the delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in safe accommodation, and does not set out our full Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence approach for Safer Plymouth. It will sit alongside Plymouth City Councils work plan for the implementation of the Act.
- 1.3 At this stage this is a draft strategy for consultation, with the final strategy to be published 5th January 2022.



2. Background:

- 2.1 The Domestic Abuse Act was passed in April 2021
- 2.2 It will create a statutory definition of domestic abuse and has four key aims:
 - Protect and support victims
 - Transform the justice process
 - Improve performance
 - Promote awareness
- 2.3 It places **statutory duty on tier 1 local authorities** e.g. Plymouth City Council, to:
 - Assess the need for domestic abuse support amongst victims and their children in “relevant accommodation” (to be defined in statutory guidance).
 - Provide accommodation and support to victims and their children.
 - Prepare and publish a strategy for the delivery of the support.
 - Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of this strategy; and
 - Appoint a Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board.

3. Safe accommodation definitions:

Government have provided local authorities with a set of definitions and parameters of what constitutes safe accommodation under the Act.

3.1 Refuge accommodation – a refuge offers accommodation and intensive support which is tied to that accommodation. Victims, including their children, have to be refuge residents to access expert emotional and practical support.

3.2 Specialist safe accommodation– safe accommodation which provides dedicated specialist support to victims with relevant protected characteristics and/or complex needs (also known as ‘by and for’), such as specialist refuges for BAME, LGBT, and disabled victims and their children.

3.3 Dispersed accommodation–

- Safe (secure and dedicated to supporting victims of domestic abuse), self-contained accommodation with the same level of specialist domestic abuse support as provided within a refuge but which may be more suitable for victims who are unable to stay in a refuge with communal spaces due to complex support needs or for families with teenage sons for example.
- Safe (secure and dedicated to supporting victims of domestic abuse), self-contained ‘semi-independent’ accommodation which is not within a refuge but with support for victims who may not require the intensive support offered through refuge, but are still at risk of abuse from their perpetrator/s.

3.4 Sanctuary Schemes – properties with local authority installed Sanctuary Schemes or other similar schemes which provide enhanced physical security measures within a home. A Sanctuary Scheme is a survivor centred which aims to make it possible for victims of domestic abuse to remain in their own homes, where safe for them to do so, where it is their choice, and where the perpetrator does not live in the accommodation.

3.5 Move-on and / or second stage accommodation – interchangeable terms for temporarily accommodating victims, including families who no longer need the intensive level of support provided in a refuge, but would still benefit from a lower level of domestic abuse specific support before they move to fully independent and permanent accommodation.

3.6 Other forms of domestic abuse emergency accommodation – i.e. a safe place with support. To give victims an opportunity to spend a temporary period of time to make decisions in an environment which is self-contained and safe. This would include access to support and specialist support for victims with complex needs (including mental health needs and substance misuse). An example would be the ‘Whole Housing Approach’.

3.7 Accommodation such as generic Bed and Breakfast accommodation and homeless hostels – in that they are not solely dedicated to providing a safe place to stay for victims of domestic abuse, including expert support (see section A4) – are **not**

considered relevant safe accommodation, and as such, local authorities cannot commission support within these types under this duty.

3.8 Commissioning authorities e.g. Plymouth City Council, will need to ensure that accommodation covered under other Acts, such as temporary accommodation provided under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, are not utilised in fulfilling the requirements of this duty.

3.9 Local Authorities must adhere to the Regulations and the above description of accommodation when fulfilling their duty. All support provided under their duty must be provided to victims of domestic abuse, or their children, who reside in relevant accommodation as set out above and should meet the MHCLG Quality Standardsⁱⁱⁱ, Women's Aid National Quality Standards^{iv} and / or Imkaan Accredited Quality Standards^v.

4. The Plymouth Approach and Local Response:

4.1 Our overarching approach is based on:

- Strong system leadership – we have received facilitated support from the Leadership Centre. We have seen a shift from single agency responses to a collective understanding and shared language, values and approach.
- Ensuring the voice of lived experience is a central feature to our understanding and response.
- Trauma informed lens – strong representation from, and with, the Trauma Informed Plymouth Network and embedding of the Plymouth approach document.
- Public health approach to prevention and reducing violence.

4.2 People in Plymouth with lived experience of domestic abuse told us:

People told us they didn't feel listened to or believed. They were afraid to tell their friends and family and then when they had contact with services they didn't feel heard.

"It was hard to be believed as I didn't have scars and bruises"

People told us they were frightened. Frightened that professionals would take their children, that they would lose their homes, frightened that their family and friends would reject them. Ultimately they were afraid that their partner would kill them.

"I am terrified just walking around the Mall, looking over my shoulder even though I know he is in prison"

People told us they felt isolated. They had often lost contact with their family and friends. Their support networks had been stripped away.

"I had lost all my friends and had no confidence before engaging with services"

4.3 Staff working with people in Plymouth told us:

Staff told us that they were fearful in their work around domestic abuse and feel like they are operating in a blame culture. That the system does not always work in a collaborative way, leaving them feeling isolated and unsupported.

"We are driven by managing risk – we don't want to do anything wrong"

"Doesn't feel like we are on the same side"

Staff told us that the system does not always allow them to work in the best interests of the people they are trying to help.

“I feel frustrated. I am shaped by policies, procedures and protocols – not the needs of the person”

4.4 The Plymouth Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence partnership has developed a system wide action plan for all aspects of the Act and going forward will operate as the statutory Local Partnership Board as required by the Act.

4.5 We are collaborating with our peninsula colleagues and have created a shared role to improve cross authority working.

5. Needs Assessment:

5.1 In June 2021 Plymouth City Council commissioned RRR Consultancy Ltd to undertake a domestic abuse accommodation needs assessment. The main aim of the assessment was to determine the needs of survivors residing in safe accommodation as defined by the Act 2021.

5.2 The needs assessment included analysis of existing data and domestic abuse survivor case studies, an online survey of key stakeholders and semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders;

5.3 Needs Assessment key findings:

- 49 stakeholders contributed to the needs assessment which reflects the strong partnership working in the city. However, this did highlight the lack of consistency around data collection, cohesive case management systems and use of language.
- It was reported that there are increases in:
 - Domestic Abuse reports to the Police
 - Referrals for specialist accommodation
 - Perception of stakeholders that there is increase in demand for safe accommodation and support for people experiencing domestic abuse
- The Plymouth Domestic Abuse Services^{vi}:
 - Provides 28 units of accommodations which is slightly above the Council of Europe recommendations
 - 45% of people referred to the specialist accommodation don't meet current criteria (this compares to 64% nationally)
 - On average 40% of people in the specialist accommodation are from out of area.
- Outside of our specialist domestic abuse service many more people are being supported and in some cases provided with accommodation, for example in Quarter 1 2021 Bournemouth Churches Housing Association (as part of the Plymouth Alliance^{vii}) recorded 68 people using their services who had experienced domestic abuse.
- Calculations using data from various sources suggests that 385 units of safe accommodation are needed each year in Plymouth.
- The responses to the survey indicated that there needs to be a shared understanding of what constitutes safe accommodation and support as described in the Act.

- Respondents reported barriers for some people to accessing safe accommodation and receiving the right support, these include:
 - Lack of male accommodation
 - Black and minority ethnic people including those with no resource to public funds
 - People with either a physical or learning disability
 - Accommodation isn't always age appropriate
 - People who are LGBTQ were also identified as experiencing barriers to finding the right accommodation and support

- The survey provided examples of inconsistency with the standard of accommodation in particular with our temporary accommodation offer.

6. Recommendations

The needs assessment suggested a number of recommendations and the following provides an update on progress and proposed activities to address.

Recommendation	Actions/ Activities and progress
For the local authority and partner agencies to work together to consider how the number of safe accommodation units in Plymouth can best be increased.	Need to work together to understand total number of accommodation that meets criteria-link definition in with WFD
For the local authority and partner agencies to consider adopting the <i>Whole Housing Approach</i> to providing safe accommodation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe Accommodation Group created • DaHa Application processed • Budget Identified to support
For the local authority and partner agencies to agree a domestic abuse data collection template to ensure consistency of data across agencies and organisations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding secured to implement case management system for specialist service. Work being undertaking under Changing Futures umbrella to implement, IT lead role.
Agencies dealing with survivors of domestic abuse to better share information and data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changing Futures • IT lead role including; MARAC and review of information sharing & governance
Training to help local agencies and organisations better understand the barriers to safe accommodation of minority groups e.g. BAME and LGBTQ communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 days of actions • Training/ WFD • Support and capacity building for 'for and by' services • Joint commissioning - ambition
Improved public information including a greater social media presence and leaflets at e.g. foodbanks regarding how domestic abuse survivors can access safe accommodation and support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website & downloadable materials • Joint commissioning • Awareness raising • Webinars for professionals (16 days of action)

Consideration of how survivors with hearing impairments or visual disability can access information and services regarding safe accommodation.	Revisit needs assessment raw data to understand context and implement as part of a wider accessibility requirements. Include in future design of service specification Quality Assurance to include an EI statement
The development of 'Focus Teams' consisting of social workers, family social workers, youth workers, housing, and the police to consider the needs of each household affected by domestic abuse.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further work to explore and define in strategy (appreciative enquiry) • Mechanism strategy • Team around professional
Also, ensuring that survivors are provided with a key worker from PDAS or similar agency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Codesign with safe accommodation group to agree appropriate levels of support • Where they are in safe accommodation/ support
Improved 'out-of-hours' options for survivors needing to access safe accommodation.	Connected to wider conversation around out of hours options i.e. Alliance and support
Ensuring that temporary accommodation in Plymouth meets minimum standards and is safe, accessible and provides at least basic facilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DaHa • Changing Futures QA post (PATH to recruit) • QA post to include ensuring that we meet safe accommodation requirements related to DA (issue re wider system and rogue landlords)
Ensuring that referrals to safe accommodation units are swift processed.	Audit around timeframes and quality standards e.g. MHCLG Quality Standards, Women's Aid and Imkaan
For agencies and organisations to consider that self-referring survivors may find it difficult to express their needs for support and safe accommodation.	n/a Practice issue to feed into WFD plan around domestic abuse and trauma informed practice.

7. Next steps

- Draft strategy to be ready to share with stakeholders and partners by end of October
- Collation of draft strategy feedback from consultation including review of recommendations
- Publish final strategy by 5th January 2022
- A Peninsula needs assessment overview is being prepared which will enable commissioners to explore joint commissioning opportunities

We would appreciate if you could take the time to complete the following short feedback survey to help inform this strategy and to make sure it supports our vision:

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/2B3KD8V>

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

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

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

^{iv} <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/national-quality-standards/>

^v https://1q7dqy2unor827bqjls0c4rn-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/4_-_Successful_Commissioning_lmkaan_Standards_Summary.pdf

^{vi} The current commissioned Plymouth Domestic Abuse Services is delivered by Sanctuary Housing and comprises:

- an accommodation based support in a refuge (11 units) and dispersed units (17 units);
- Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) service;
- 1:1 support;
- Domestic Abuse Stalking and Harassment training;
- Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference co-ordination;
- Freedom and CAST Programme
- Sanctuary scheme provision

^{vii} The Plymouth Alliance delivers a broad range of accommodation across their partnership. Prior to the COVID 19 pandemic, the existing stock profile of 599 units was as follows:

Supported Accommodation/hostels (onsite support)	Number of units
George house	46
Devonport house	60
Foyer (young people)	31
Newstart (young people)	6
Advantage point (young people)	6
Phoenix/Melbourne/King street	13
Grand parade	12

Mental health supported accommodation	22
Safe space to stay	11
Supported Lodgings (young people)	22
Safesleep	10
WARN beds	2
Winter provision	12
Total	253

Shared accommodation (no support on site)	
Plymouth temporary accommodation	53
Move On (single homeless)	41
MARS (Multi-agency rough sleeper house)	6
Resettlement properties (leased / owned)	88
Mental health properties (with Floating Support)	25
MEARS Single units	15
MEARS Family units	53
Total	281

Self contained accommodation	
Zion House	12
Raglan Court (families)	13
MEARS Single units	3
MEARS Family units	37
Total	65

Additional units acquired during COVID	
Supported Accommodation/hostels (onsite support)	Number of units
Rough sleeper houses	26
16/17 year old houses (2 properties)	8
Shared accommodation (no support on site)	
Resettlement properties	44
Self contained accommodation	
Self-contained flats	6
One bed rooms (with ensuite bathrooms)	4
Total additional units	88