



PAN LONDON HOUSING RECIPROCAL

THREE YEARS ON

saferlondon

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Safer London is a registered charity [charity Number: 1109444] and a limited company [company Registration Number 5190766]

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The past three years



January 2017
Launch of the Pan London Housing Reciprocal

June 2017
PLHR recognised as good practice in APPG for Ending Homelessness and national rollout recommended

March 2018
100 people moved through the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal

100

June 2018
Started developing reciprocal accessibility including for survivors leaving care or prison



October 2018
Pan-London Housing Reciprocal is a prize winner at the London Homelessness Awards

May 2019
Safer London supports Cambridgeshire to start their own county-wide reciprocal scheme

October 2019
Reciprocal applicants can start bidding on properties advertised on Housing Moves with additional priority



February 2020
First move via Housing Moves for a reciprocal applicant

March 2017
First move through the Pan London Housing Reciprocal



February 2018
Started London VAWG and Housing Operational and Strategic Groups with Solace Women's Aid

May 2018
Commitment to support the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal in Mayor of London's Housing Strategy and VAWG Strategy

June 2019
Year one report published



April 2019
All 33 London local authorities are now signed up to the reciprocal agreement, and 45 housing associations

June 2019
Year two report published



November 2019
250 people moved through the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal

250

March 2020
Whole Housing Toolkit published including chapter on managed reciprocals

Executive Summary

Key learnings from three years coordinating the Pan London Housing Reciprocal

Since its launch in January 2017, the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal has been helping people at risk of violence or abuse in London to move to a safe place and keep their social tenancy.

The scheme aims to prevent homelessness, support people to access safety and to sustain their tenancy rights.

It is funded by the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime and is coordinated by Safer London.

“ I truly believe the reciprocal is a valuable tool in supporting survivors of domestic abuse. It gives tenants the opportunity of keeping their secure tenancy status, preventing further victimisation and reducing stress relating to moving homes. ”

Domestic Abuse Support Worker

Activity

83

Social housing landlords

There are now 83 social landlords signed up to the scheme including all the London local authorities. Over the past three years, Safer London has processed over 700 property requests.

700

Reciprocal move requests

Almost two-thirds (62%) were for council tenants and one third for housing associations tenants. As of end of March 2020, a total of 278 adults and children had been able to move via the reciprocal into long-term affordable housing in a safe borough.

278

Adults & children moved to safety

Over the past three years, we have had reciprocal moves involving all London boroughs, with a majority of activity taking place in boroughs that have a large stock of social housing. The five boroughs with the highest number of moves are Southwark, Lambeth, Haringey, Islington and Hackney.

Applicants

Almost two thirds (63%) of property requests we circulated were for applicants fleeing a form of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), a majority of them referred due to domestic abuse (58%). Year on year, we have seen an increase in referrals due to serious youth violence, with these now accounting for over a quarter of all referrals (26%). One in five applicants (21%) were fleeing more than one form of violence, with a recurring overlap between serious youth violence,

Child Sexual Exploitation and domestic abuse. Almost 9 out of ten referrals we received have been for female lead applicants (72% for lone mothers and 14% single women).



Primary reasons for reciprocal requests since 2017



“ I think there are so many people that are victims of domestic/gang related violence in London and would be relieved to know about the Safer London Housing Reciprocal Scheme... Safer London (Pan London) has the potential to safely rehouse so many people without the risk of losing their tenancy ”

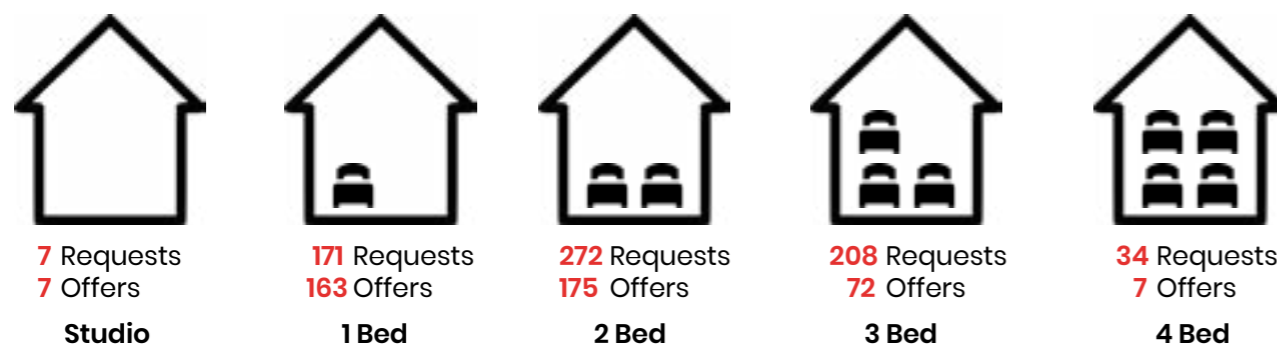
Applicant
Pan London Housing Reciprocal

Properties

Since the beginning of the scheme the majority of properties offered have been for one or two bedroom properties. The lack of large properties is a real barrier for families who have to wait considerably longer, sometimes while staying at risk. Over half of applicants (54%) were still living in their social housing property at point of referral.

Others were in unstable accommodation, in temporary accommodation, hostels or women's refuge, staying with friends, family or sofa surfing, or roughsleeping.

Number of requests and offers by property size since 2017



Overcrowding has been a serious concern since the beginning of the scheme but has increased in the past 12 months, with 54% of non-single applicants being overcrowded at point of referral compared with 40% in the previous two years.

On average just under half of all applicants (44%) received a property offer, but this varies considerably with the type of request. Apart from property size, we found that applicants who have additional requirements such as needing a ground floor, lower floor or a lift due to a physical disability or mobility needs are less likely to receive an offer. Applicants fleeing serious youth violence were also less likely to be offered a property compared with other types of risk.

To encourage property offers, Safer London started to facilitate 'direct reciprocal' arrangements where two landlords commit to rehouse each other's tenants who have a matching need.

Need for a multi-agency approach

Three quarters of referrals have come directly from housing teams. Other referral sources included specialist domestic abuse or VAWG agencies (14%) and other voluntary or statutory services such as social services. Many reciprocal applicants don't only have a housing need and present with additional support needs, calling for a multi-agency approach.

A third of applicants (32%) reported having mental health needs, 15% had a physical disability, and 10% were leaving care.

This year we have continued to work with a range of voluntary sector organisations across London to raise awareness about the scheme and ensure applicants are receiving specialist support throughout the reciprocal process and after the move, to help with resettlement and ensuring the move is sustainable.

In particular, we have worked with leaving care teams to support referrals for care leavers who are at risk of violence in their borough.



Partnership with Housing Moves

Announced last year, our partnership with the Greater London Authority mobility scheme Housing Moves is now operational. Reciprocal applicants fleeing domestic abuse or sexual violence are now able to bid on properties advertised across London, with top priority. Feedback so far has been overwhelmingly positive, highlighting the ability to bid as empowering for applicants.

Managed reciprocals & Whole Housing Approach

This year we have been part of a national ground-breaking project to develop managed reciprocals as an element of a wider system of interventions to support the housing needs of domestic abuse survivors called the [Whole Housing Approach](#).

We supported other areas in the country to set up their own reciprocal schemes, and worked in London to integrate reciprocal moves with other interventions such as sanctuary schemes, flexible funding or mobile advocacy.



The current Covid-19 pandemic brought the issue of safe housing to the forefront. The response to the pandemic also showed that with political will, great progress can be achieved. It is vital that we continue innovating and working in partnership to ensure no one has to choose between becoming homeless or staying at risk of harm.

Next Steps

From this analysis, we have drawn the following plan of action for us as coordinators of the scheme, and recommendations for London-based housing providers and authorities, with the aim to improve access to safety for tenants.

Action Plan

Moving forward Safer London will...



Reinstate the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal Steering Group

We will reinstate the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal Steering Group to create a space for landlords and referring agencies to discuss areas of need and improvements to the scheme, with the aim to find solutions that work for all involved.



Start a conversation on property commitment to the scheme

In consultation with landlords signed up to the scheme, we will start a conversation about commitment to the scheme including suggestions on property targets and potential quotas, to ensure that there are enough properties for everyone who is referred for a reciprocal move.

Our data shows that we process an average of 240 new property requests per year. If each of the 83 landlords signed up to the scheme could offer an average of three properties a year, this would be enough to rehouse everyone who needs it. We appreciate that landlords' housing stock vary considerably and each landlord's commitment would need to be commensurate with their use of the scheme to ensure the system is fair.



Work with each reciprocal partner to recommend property targets

We will work with each landlord signed up to the scheme to assess their use of the scheme based on the past three years of activity, and recommend an individualised yearly target of properties based on the number of referrals made for their tenants.

Recommendations for landlords signed up to the reciprocal

1

Ring-fencing family-size properties and ground-floor properties for people fleeing domestic abuse or other forms of violence.

Our findings have shown that applicants who need a family-size property or ground-floor accessible property due to medical needs are less likely to be rehoused. Landlords need to ring-fence these properties for reciprocal applicants or those fleeing abuse or violence to ensure they are not being penalised.

If a landlord commits to allocate three properties a year to the reciprocal scheme, there should be at least one family size property (three bedrooms or more) and one ground-floor or accessible property.

Working towards DAHA accreditation to achieve minimum standards in your response to domestic abuse.

2

[DAHA accreditation](#) is the UK benchmark for how housing providers respond to domestic abuse, with eight priority areas to address across the organisation. Both local authorities and housing associations can achieve this accreditation which is part of the Whole Housing Approach to domestic abuse model, alongside taking part in managed reciprocal moves.

3

Partnership working with specialist organisations including domestic abuse / VAWG, LGBTQ+ and youth organisations.

No single organisation can safeguard against domestic abuse or other forms of violence. We strongly encourage landlords to refer tenants experiencing domestic abuse or other forms of violence to organisations who have expertise in the type of risk the tenant is experiencing such as Violence Against Women and Girls organisations including specialist support organisations for Black and minoritised women and girls, hate crime and LGBTQ+ organisations, and youth charities. This should be done as soon as finding out about the risk and before considering relocation. Moving is only one part of the journey and might not always be appropriate.

For tenants relocating to a new borough, it is vital to make referrals to resettlement services in the new borough including MARACs for survivors of domestic abuse, social services when relevant and other specialist organisations as mentioned above. This is essential to ensure reciprocal moves are safe and sustainable and to enable tenants to rebuild their lives.

Adopting a trauma-informed approach

4

All applicants referred for a reciprocal move have experienced significant trauma which can impact their behaviour and how they engage with services. We found that a large proportion of reciprocal applicants have additional needs sometimes directly linked with the risk they experienced including mental health needs, disability or access requirements, arrears or ASB.

It is essential for landlords engaging in reciprocal moves to recognise this and adopt a trauma-informed, flexible and sensitive approach to effectively support applicants.

Recommendations for London-wide authorities

1

Commission research to explore the links between overcrowding and the risk of abuse and violence and find solutions.

One of the biggest issue experienced by reciprocal applicants is overcrowding. This has proved to be an issue across London and makes it more difficult for applicants to be rehoused.

We recommend more research to be done to explore this issue and find innovative and bespoke solutions to address this barrier.

Lobby central government to achieve significant investment in social housing in London.

2

The lack of social housing including genuinely affordable social housing is a significant barrier to safeguard tenants experiencing domestic abuse or other forms of violence.

The lack of available properties across London means that reciprocal applicants stay longer at risk or in temporary/emergency accommodation, increasing the financial cost to local authorities and the emotional cost to victims/survivors and their children.

The London private housing market is unaffordable for those who qualify for social housing and London authorities need to lobby central government to achieve significant investment in social housing across the capital.

Real Stories

Hear from some of our partners, whose clients have been able to relocate to safety via the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal.

From being homeless and hopeless; to living in fear of becoming a victim of hate crime; and a mother who desperately wants to protect her children from an abusive and violent ex-partner - these three stories demonstrate the power of the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal.

Through connecting partners across London, these individuals were able to relocate to safe and secure homes that they could afford - and ultimately help enrich their lives for the better.

Press the watch now button to hear these moving stories.

WATCH
NOW



WATCH
NOW



WATCH
NOW

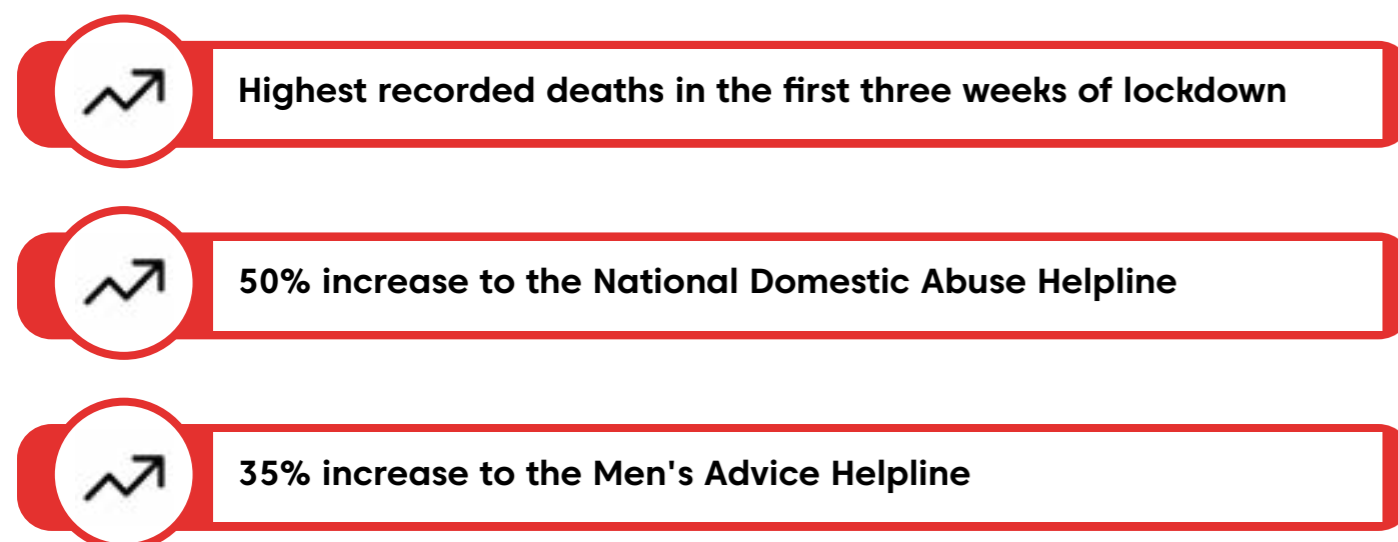


Introduction

As we publish this report, the world has been turned upside down to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic, one of the greatest challenges of our times. As the pandemic continues to unfold, we are just realising the scale of its social consequences. Like in many crises, the most vulnerable in society are the ones paying a higher price.

This crisis has highlighted striking inequalities in people's housing conditions, particularly in London. Stay at home measures have also sparked a worldwide conversation of what it means to be locked down at home, and how dangerous this can be for those trapped with someone who controls or harms them.

Domestic Abuse Statistics - Covid-19 & lockdown



The emergency response to the pandemic has seen tremendous work and efforts in both the homelessness and domestic abuse sectors, with landmark announcements and far-reaching potential. The Domestic Abuse Bill has been amended to grant those fleeing domestic abuse a priority need for emergency housing support. This is an important step in ensuring that no one has to face the choice of staying at risk of abuse, or facing homelessness.

However, we know that emergency housing is not enough on its own, and we need long-term affordable housing as a sustainable solution. This report presenting Safer London's learning from the past three years coordinating the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal (PLHR) is of great relevance today if we want to build an inclusive housing system for all.

We know that domestic abuse survivors still lose their social tenancy when fleeing violence: last year the London-based domestic abuse charity Solace found that 53% of the women they helped lost their social tenancy in their journey to access safety, ending up in temporary accommodation, staying with family and friends, or homeless¹.

For the past three years, Safer London has been working hard to offer an alternative to those in social housing facing risk, abuse or homelessness.

The aim of the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal is to enable people experiencing abuse or violence in London to move to safety while keeping their social tenancy. With 83 social housing landlords involved covering all London boroughs, the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal is the largest partnership of its kind and has a huge potential to respond to the housing needs of people at risk of violence. The scheme is funded by the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime.

Over the three years, Safer London has seen referrals from across all London boroughs. Through partnership working, almost 300 adults and children have now been able to move into long-term safe and affordable housing. The overall need however outweighs the supply, with many more households referred than the number of properties made available to the scheme. Social housing providers have to continue to work together to prioritise rehousing for people at risk of abuse or violence.

Reflecting on the past three years of reciprocal activity allows for a unique insight into the housing and support needs of social tenants experiencing violence or abuse in London. This is crucial to inform social housing policy and practice in London and beyond, and to achieve a sustainable and affordable housing system for all.



This report draws on data captured by Safer London as central coordinator for the reciprocal scheme, mainly via referral forms. It is worth noting that referrals are completed by a wide range of practitioners and with a varying level of detail.

Throughout the report, data relating to 'Scheme to date' corresponds to January 2017 until March 2020, and data relating to 'Year 3' corresponds to the 12 months period from April 2019 to March 2020. Comparisons made with previous years use data from the PLHR Year Two report².

Overview of activity

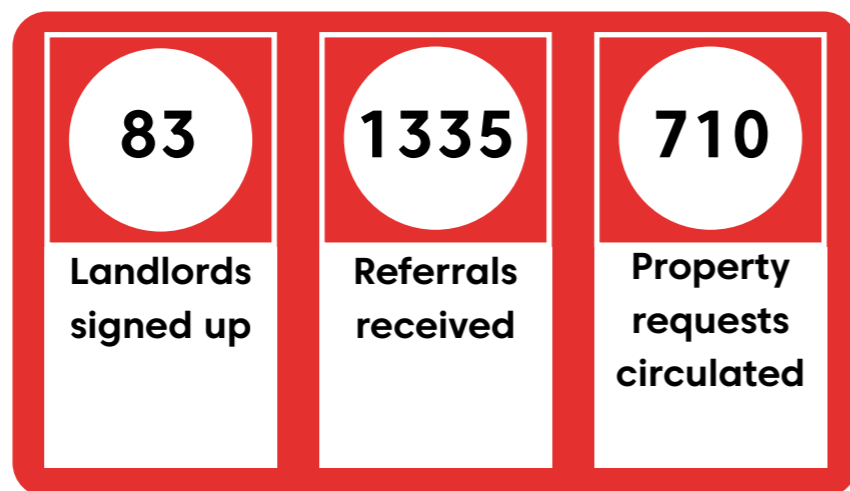
There are now 83 social landlords signed up to the scheme and the team continues to receive referrals on a daily basis.

Since the beginning of the scheme in January 2017, the reciprocal enabled 278 adults and children to move to a safe borough while keeping a social tenancy.

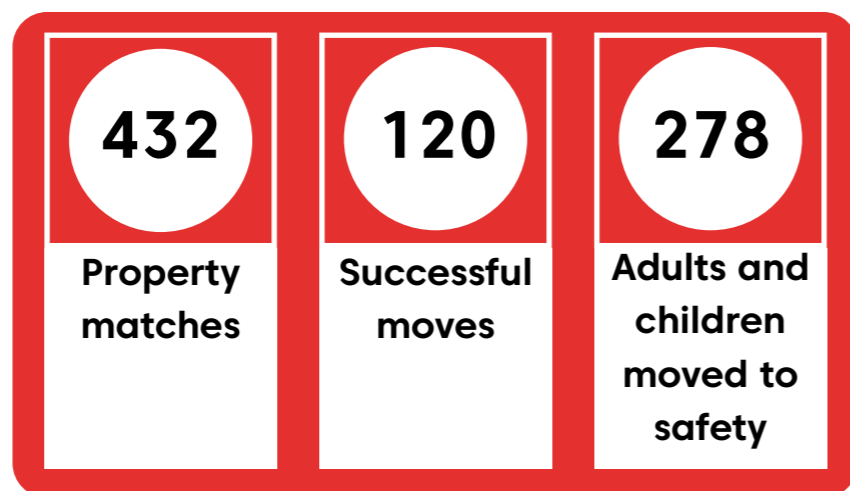
High level of need for cross-borough moves

The sheer number of referrals highlights a continued need for cross-borough moves. Since the launch of the scheme we received 1335 referrals for individuals and families at risk of abuse or violence looking to relocate to another London borough – an average of 34 per month.

Not all referrals are approved by landlords or have the sufficient information to progress through the scheme. Notwithstanding, the total number of requests that have been shared with partners is 710, including 210 in the last year. This reaches an average of 20 property requests circulated each month.



Since the beginning of the scheme we facilitated a total of 432 property offers. Over the past year we matched 139 property offers, this is 10 more than the previous year. We are grateful to all our housing partners who are actively engaged with the reciprocal scheme and offer assistance to tenants who are fleeing risk.



However despite our efforts to keep our waiting list updated and re-circulating pending requests on a monthly basis, as of March 2020 we still have over 200 individuals and families waiting to move.

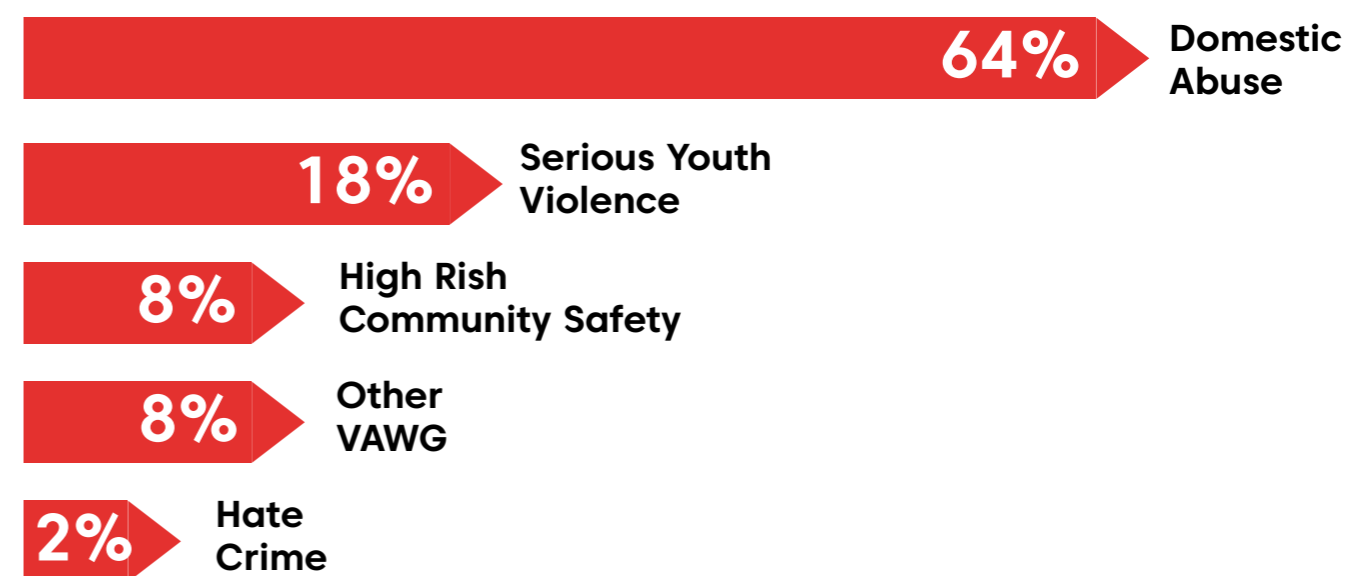
Majority of moves for applicants fleeing domestic abuse

Since the beginning of the scheme there have been 120 successful moves with a total to 278 adults and children able to move to a safe borough. This is an average of three successful moves per month over the past three years, with 28% of applicants referred able to move (excluding withdrawn applications).

Since the beginning of the scheme almost three quarters (72%) of applicants who were able to move were referred due to a form of violence against women and girls (VAWG) with a majority of these applicants fleeing domestic abuse (64%).

In the past year there has been an increase in applicants fleeing serious youth violence being rehoused (32% of moves in the past year compared with 18% since the beginning of the scheme).

Reason for referral for successful moves since 2017

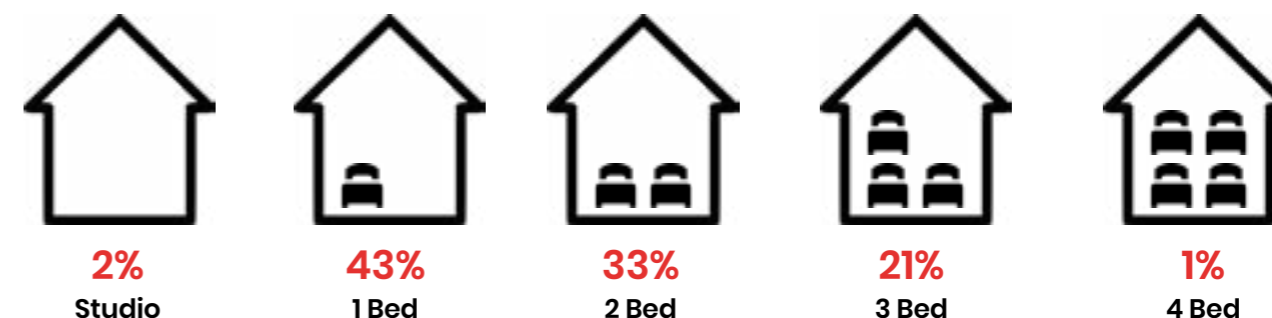


Property size

A need for a family-sized home (3 bedrooms or more) is one of the main factors impacting waiting time for reciprocal moves. Since the beginning of the scheme the majority of properties offered have been for one or two bedroom properties; this has been consistent for the past three years.

In the past year, we noticed a shift with more offers for studios (9% compared with 2% overall) and fewer one bed properties proportionately (32% compared with 43% overall).

Property size for successful moves since 2017



Geographical spread of requests

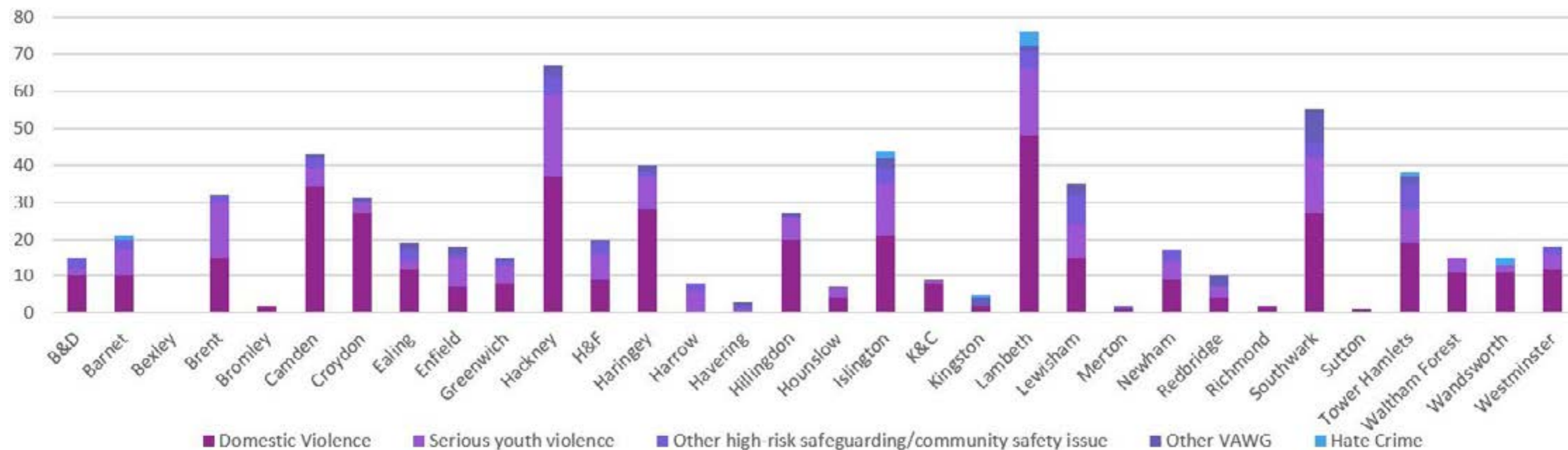
The majority of referrals continues to be for applicants living in inner London boroughs. Lambeth, Hackney and Southwark are the boroughs with the most reciprocal requests, with over 50 requests made for tenants living in each of these boroughs in the past three years (for both council and housing association tenants).

Last year³ it was found that the proportion of reciprocal referrals made in each borough correlates to the proportion of social housing stock in that borough, with inner London boroughs hosting the majority of social housing stock in London.

The majority of requests are for applicants relocating due to domestic abuse, with requests made from 29 different boroughs. The second most common reason for referrals is serious youth violence.

It is worth noting that referrals for applicants fleeing serious youth violence have been made from 26 different boroughs, evidencing that this is a common challenge across London that justifies the need for cross-borough collaborative work. Referrals for applicants fleeing hate crime have been made from six different boroughs.

Number of reciprocal requests made by borough of residence and by primary reason for referral since 2017





29

For applicants fleeing domestic abuse, referrals have been made from 29 different boroughs



26

For applicants fleeing serious youth violence, referrals have been made from 26 different boroughs



6

For applicants fleeing hate crime, referrals have been made from 6 different boroughs

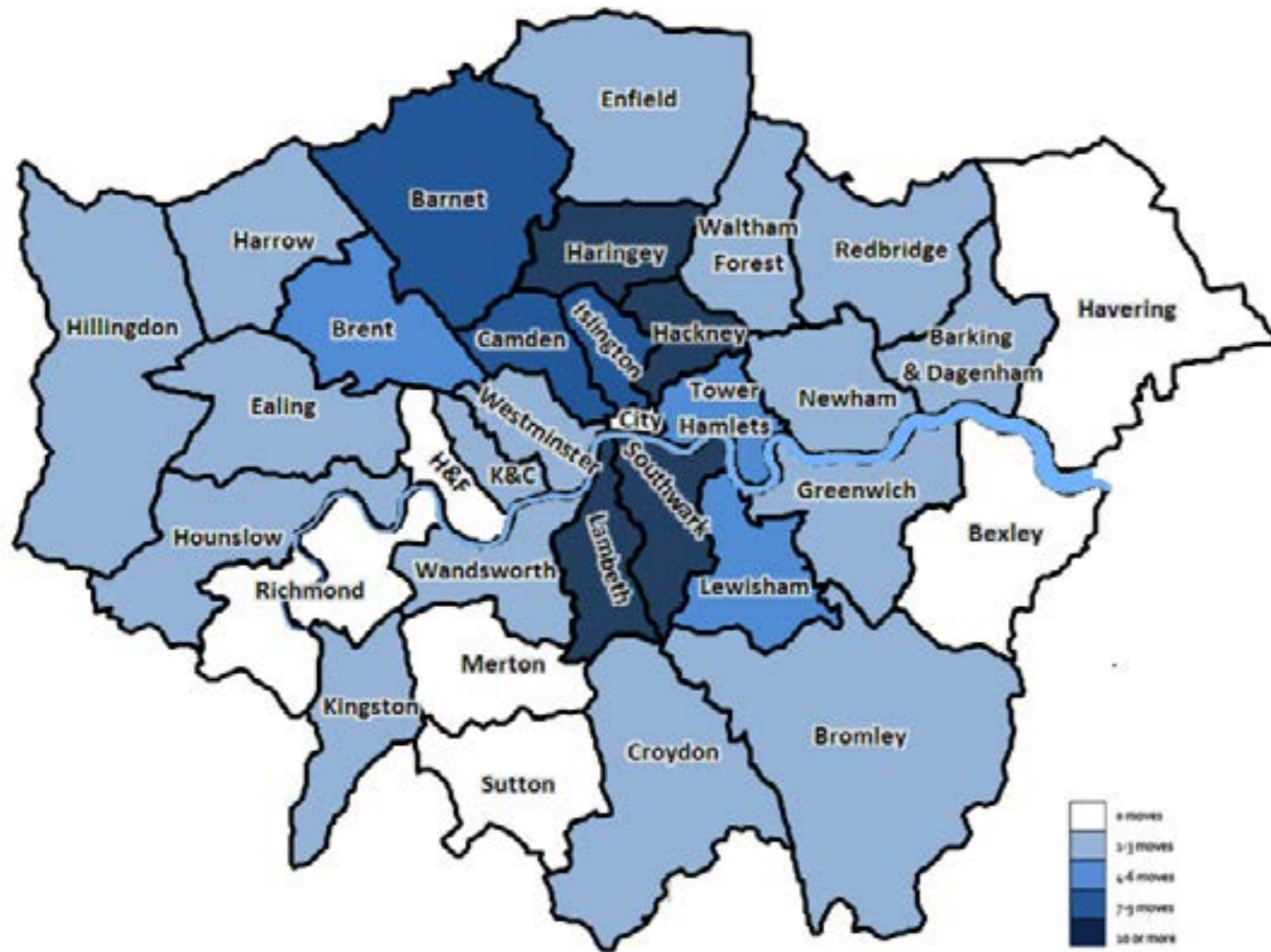
These maps show the boroughs where reciprocal moves have taken place since the beginning of the scheme. The map in blue shows from which boroughs applicants moved, and the map in green the boroughs shows where applicants moved to.

These maps combine both council and housing associations tenants. Three households have been rehoused outside London by housing associations who had properties in neighbouring counties.

In order of highest combined numbers of moves, the first ten boroughs are:

- Southwark (28)
- Lambeth (23)
- Haringey (21)
- Islington (17)
- Hackney (15)
- Camden (14)
- Tower Hamlets (13)
- Brent (12)
- Barnet (12)
- Lewisham (11)

Boroughs where successful applicants have moved from (scheme to date including both Local Authorities and Housing Associations)



Boroughs where successful applicants have moved to



The maps reflect similar trends to previous years, with a majority of moves taking place in inner London boroughs. Out of the ten boroughs with the highest combined numbers of moves in or out: seven are inner London boroughs, and three are outer London boroughs.

As detailed in our Year 2 report, these trends follow the proportion of social housing in London, with inner London boroughs having a larger proportion of social housing stock. These maps also highlight that the same borough can be a place of risk for an applicant but at the same time a place of safety for a different applicant, evidencing the benefits of working together for boroughs to support each other's tenants.

Reciprocal Partners and Stakeholder Engagement

There are now 83 housing partners signed up to the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal including the 33 London Local Authorities and 50 Housing Associations. In the past year we had three new Housing Associations signing up to the scheme.

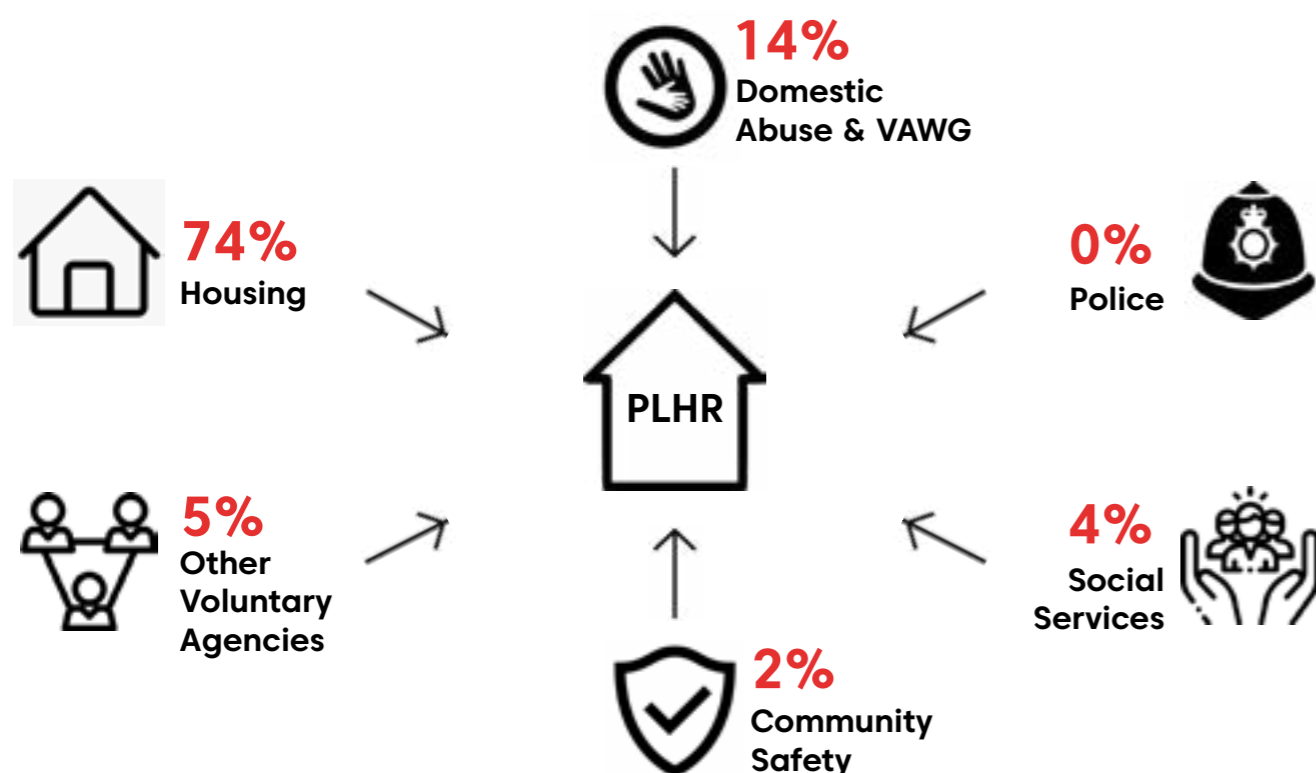
It is worth noting that since the beginning of the scheme, the majority of referrals are for Council tenants (62%) compared with 38% for Housing Association tenants. This could be explained by the fact that many housing associations have stock in more than one borough and therefore are more likely to be able to rehouse their tenants via an internal management transfer. For council tenants, a reciprocal move is often the only option to move out of borough while keeping their social tenancy.

Referring agencies

Over the past three years, we have had a majority of referrals coming directly from housing teams. This accounts for three quarters of all property requests we circulated. The second most common sector referring directly into the reciprocal scheme is the Domestic Abuse / VAWG sector, with 14% of all referrals.

In the past year we've had an increase in referrals coming from the Community Safety sector, with 5% of all referrals in the past 12 months coming from Community Safety teams compared with 2% since the beginning of the scheme. These tend to be for applicants at risk of serious youth violence.

Referring agency by sector for referral since 2017

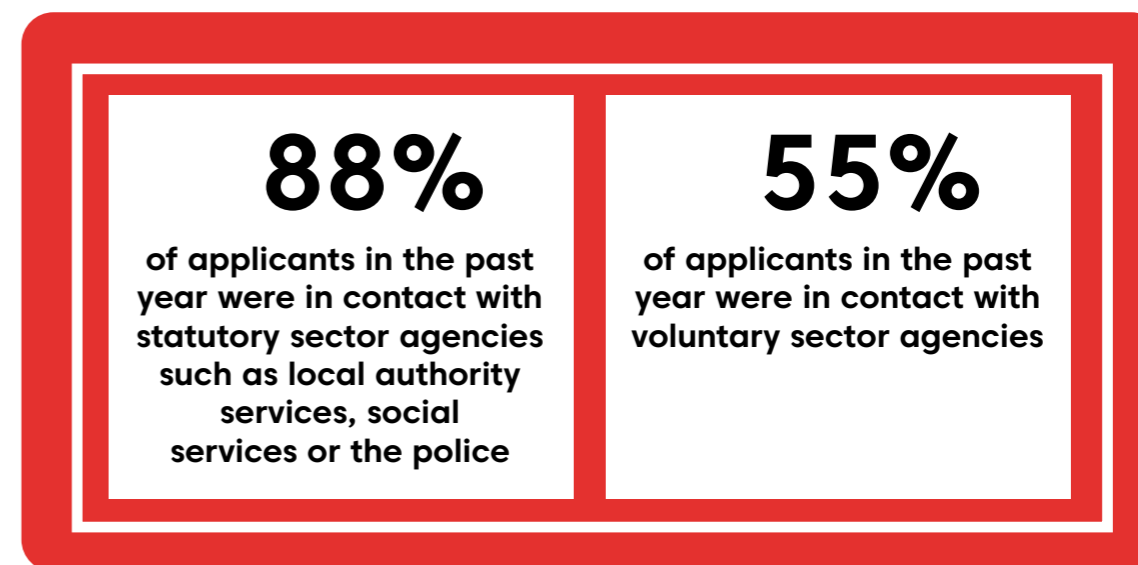


Supporting agencies

Reciprocal applicants are referred for a housing need, however most of them also have additional needs, often linked with the experience of violence or abuse.

This year the reciprocal signposts to support agencies when none are mentioned on the referral forms. This has appeared to be a need in particular for applicants fleeing serious youth violence, where our process requests supporting professionals to carry out risk assessments to ensure that the new area is safe for the applicant.

Our data collected via referral forms show that 88% of applicants in the past year were in contact with statutory sector agencies such as local authority services, social services, or the police, and 55% were in contact with voluntary sector agencies.



Having more than one professional supporting a reciprocal application is also useful for effective and swift communication. This is crucial when a property offer is made and the landlord requires a quick response. High staff turnover in the housing and voluntary sectors can create delays in the offer process, with a negative impact for the applicant.

Going forward we would like to prevent this by having more supporting agencies involved in reciprocal applications so that they can act as point of contact and can support applicants through the move and with resettlement in the new area.

PLHR Steering Group

In the coming year we will be reinstating the PLHR Steering group that was initially convened to support the set-up of the scheme and its implementation in the first few years. We aim to bring together representatives of local authorities and housing associations as well as specialist domestic abuse/VAWG agencies and other voluntary organisations.

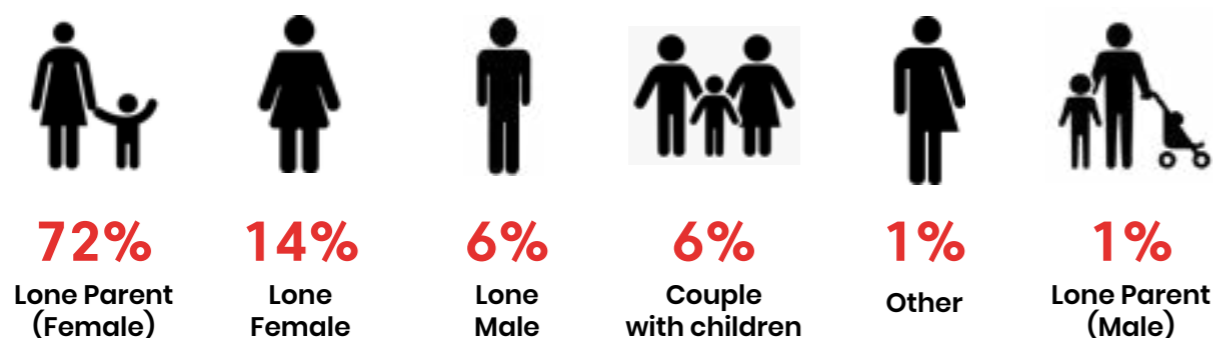
Overview of households referred

Household Type

The overwhelming majority of referrals we received and circulated were for female lead applicants, with a total of 86% (72% for lone mothers and 14% for single women). This compares with 7% of referrals for male lead applicants (6% for single men and 1% for lone fathers).

The 'other' category includes grandparent-led households, households with special guardianship or other relatives. These proportions have been consistent throughout the three years

Household type since 2017

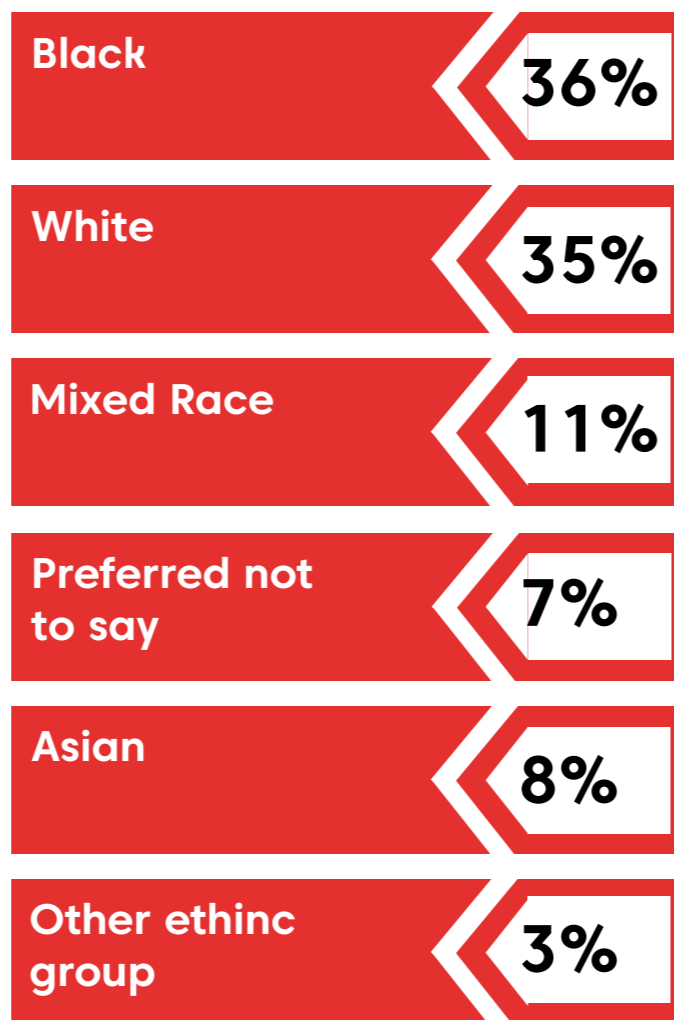


Ethnicity

All applicants are asked to complete diversity forms. However, some categories are more consistently filled out than others.

From the start of the scheme we have seen almost half (47%) of referrals for applicants who identify as BAME (Black, Asian or from another minority ethnic group), a third (35%) of applicants who identify as White, and 11% of applicants who identify as from a mixed heritage.

These proportions have been consistent throughout the three years.



Multiple forms of violence

The majority (63%) of property requests we circulated were for applicants fleeing a form of VAWG (Violence Against Women and Girls), including a large majority referred due to a risk of domestic abuse (58%).

Primary reasons for reciprocal requests since 2017



Other forms of VAWG include so-called honour-based violence, sexual violence, child sexual exploitation. Year on year, we have seen an increase in referrals due to serious youth violence, with these now accounting for just under a third of all referrals (26%).

A significant number of applicants are fleeing multiple forms of violence.

In the past year this has been one in five reciprocal applicants (21%), which is slightly higher than in previous years.

For instance, we have referrals for young women who are at risk of domestic abuse from their partner, but because their partners are involved in serious youth violence this makes them at risk of other individuals as well, through affiliation or retaliation.

We have also seen a strong overlap of Child Sexual Exploitation (that we record in the category 'Other VAWG') and serious youth violence.

1 in 5 reciprocal applicants are fleeing multiple forms of violence

Additional vulnerabilities and needs

Applicants who have been referred to the Pan London Housing Reciprocal have all experienced a form of trauma due to the risk of violence or abuse they are fleeing from.

Year on year we have noticed a continued trend of reciprocal applicants presenting with additional vulnerabilities, sometimes directly linked with the risk of abuse or violence they have been referred for a move.

In Year 3, our additional vulnerabilities data showed that mental health needs continued to be the most common additional vulnerability applicants have. This amounts to 35% of all additional vulnerabilities recorded, and affects almost a third of applicants (69 out of 217 or 32% of applicants this year).

Care Leaver	11%
Frail Eldery	1%
Learning Disability	10%
Mental Health Need	35%
Offenders At Risk	7%
Physical Disability	17%
Pregnancy	3%
Risk of Self Harm	10%
Substance Misue	6%

Care leavers are categorised as an additional vulnerability in order to flag whether planning related to the local authority corporate parenting responsibilities needs to be agreed. Compared with previous years, we have seen an increase in care leavers being referred, following our work opening up the pathway to this group. As detailed in the section on improving access, care leavers are more likely to be experiencing additional vulnerabilities.

Applications for care leavers require additional support in place to ensure sustainment. For data collecting purposes, each additional vulnerability is separated and categorised individually. However, it is worth noting the vast majority of applicants have multiple vulnerabilities. For instance, a single applicant could have a mental health need in addition to also having a learning disability and be at risk of self-harm.

Mental Health needs

In the past year we have analysed in more detail the types of mental health need applicants have specified at point of referral. The majority were experiencing anxiety and depression, with a high number of applicants experiencing both conditions (25). Five applicants stated a personality disorder, with all of them also stating additional mental health needs such as post-traumatic stress disorder, bipolar disorder or anxiety. Our data is aligned with research studies around mental health that indicate people diagnosed with personality disorders are more likely to have additional mental health needs.

We understand some applicants who have mental health needs do not like diagnoses because it makes them feel like they are being labelled, and/or detrimental stereotypes about specific types of mental health needs have impacts on seeking support. Sometimes categorising individuals who have mental health needs overlooks the problems they are facing and does not address the root cause of the mental health need. Environmental factors, adverse childhood experience and trauma are key indicators for an individual to later develop a mental health condition.

1/3
of applicants had mental health needs

Anxiety	33
Bipolar Disorder	3
Depression	36
Unspecified	13
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder	10
Personality Disorder	5
Schizophrenia	2

Type of mental health need for reciprocal applicants in year three

Looking at the link between the experience of violence and mental health needs, we found that in Year 3, 31% of applicants referred due to domestic abuse had mental health needs (39 out of 124), 20% of applicants fleeing serious youth violence had mental health needs (13 out of 63), 55% of applicants fleeing other VAWG had mental health needs (6 out of 11), and 100% of applicants fleeing hate crime had mental health needs (3 out of 3 in Year 3).

Our findings demonstrate that reciprocal applicants often require multiple supporting agencies to respond to varying needs. In our report last year, we found applicants who receive support from a range of services are more likely to successfully move. A multi-agency approach ensures an applicant is being supported in all areas such as housing, mental health and social care.

Professionals can support applicants who have mental health needs with logistical arrangements such as ensuring pre-tenancy assessments are completed and emotional support as moving can cause a lot of stress. Resettlement support for individuals and/or families who have mental health needs is important to ensure access to mental health services and therapeutic treatments in the new borough and increase the move's sustainability.

Case study: Multi-Agency Approach for Mental Health Needs

This year one of our reciprocal applicants with mental health needs who was fleeing from violence from multiple perpetrators was offered a studio property by a local authority.

The applicant's mental health support worker helped advocate on their behalf, communicating with the different housing professionals involved. This involved discussing arrangements for resettlement support to ensure the applicant would remain safe in the new borough. Unfortunately, there was a month delay due to unexpected works to get the property ready.

Considering the client's vulnerability and the detrimental impact this delay would cause on their mental health, the landlord's Reciprocal Named Lead stepped in and requested this case to be prioritised.

Effective joint-working meant the applicant was able to view and sign their new tenancy within a week.

Improving access to the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal

In the past year the team has continued to develop the scheme to make it more accessible to those experiencing barriers in accessing safe housing, focusing on [care leavers](#), [women affected by the criminal justice system](#), and [those who identify as LGBTQ+](#).

We are grateful for match-funding from Pilgrim Trust and Goldsmith's Charity to enable this work.

Young people leaving care

A disproportionate number of young people experience homelessness after leaving care, with research showing that more than one in four care leavers have sofa surfed and 14% have slept rough⁴.

Research has also evidenced that people with Adverse Childhood Experiences such as being in care are more likely to experience violence in adulthood⁵. Last year we extended the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal pathway to enable local authorities to sign off referrals for care leavers who are ready to live independently but don't have a social tenancy yet.



This has been increasingly used in the past year, with 15 enquiries for care leavers in that situation across the past year. Two-third were young men and a third young women. All of the young women but one had children, aged between one month and five years. Three of them were fleeing domestic abuse, one was at risk of serious youth violence, and one was fleeing racially-motivated hate crime. All referrals for young men leaving care were related to serious youth violence, including complex risk such as cuckooing (where drug dealers take over a vulnerable person's home in order to use it as a base for drug trafficking).

All enquiries received for care leavers were for one bedroom properties. Applicants requesting small properties have the highest probability of being rehoused through the scheme and in a shorter period of time, meaning that opportunities for care leavers, who tend to move either alone or with a young child, are potentially greater. However care leavers are often faced with multiple disadvantage and may encounter further challenges to rehousing after receiving a property offer.

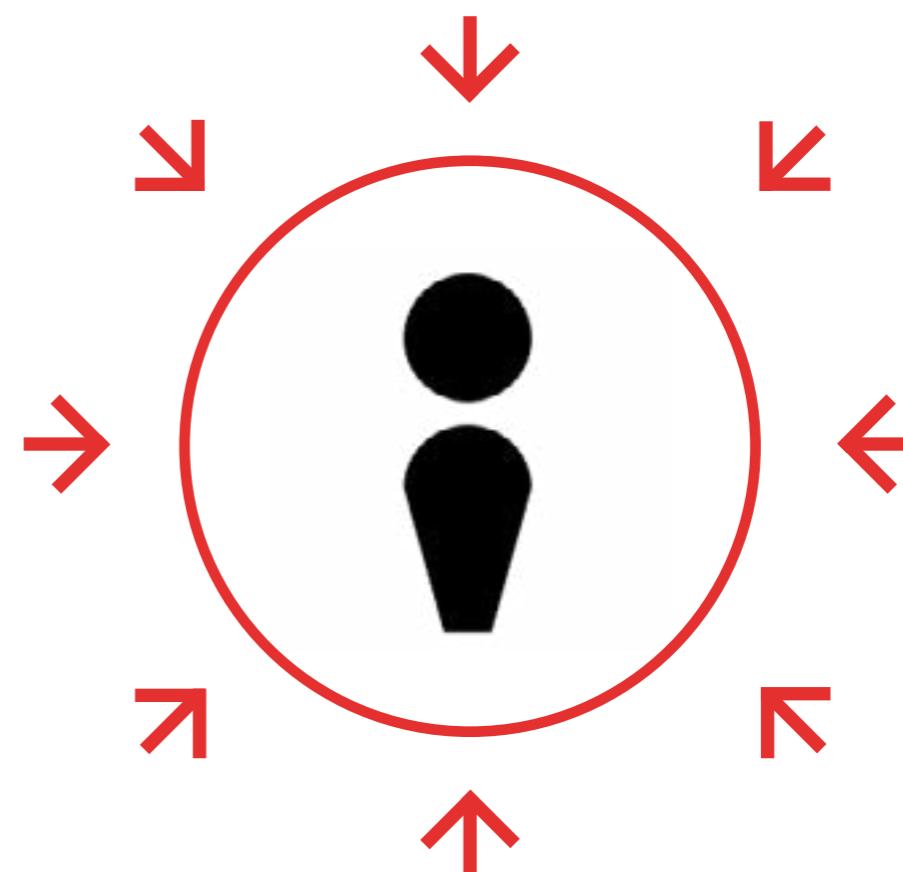
Many care leavers meet financial difficulties securing a property without parents or carers to act as guarantors or to support with deposits. Once securing a property, they may lack the social, emotional and physical support to move successfully. One care leaver referred for a move this year attended a viewing and accepted the property but was then declined on the basis of a failed financial assessment.

Situations like these can see care leavers progress through the process of moving from risk to safety then returning to square one, and returning to a property or area that is unsafe, or a temporary accommodation with no determined end date.

Professionals supporting care leavers play a central role in securing their housing and advocating for them throughout the process. Proactive and responsive support enabled another care leaver referred this year to view and sign a tenancy agreement within days of the property becoming void. Housing professionals themselves may not be used to supporting care leavers with specific needs, or be sensitive to the impacts of certain barriers that are common in this client group, such as lack of family and supportive network. History of different carers and residential care homes can also have long-lasting and destabilising effects.

A multi-agency approach and partnership working are therefore essential to efficiently support this client group. As part of our referral pathway for care leavers, referring agencies have to provide additional information to ensure the care leaver will be supported throughout the move and in the new borough, with the referring Local Authority keeping their duty of care after the move.

Multi-agency approach



Women affected by the criminal justice system

We continued to reach out to agencies supporting women affected by the criminal justice system, recognising that a majority of women with an offending history have experienced violence or abuse and are at risk of homelessness. Statistics show that seven in ten women in prison have experienced domestic abuse, and two in five women leave prison without settled accommodation⁶.

Key agencies we have worked with this year include Women in Prison, the Advance Minerva service, St Mungo's and London Community Rehabilitation Company teams based in women prisons and the National Probation Service's Women Champions.

One of the barriers identified was that women who had a social tenancy were more likely to lose it if they go to prison, often through an eviction process after rent arrears have built up.

In order to address this, we worked with Together for Mental Wellbeing who provide pre-court vulnerabilities assessments, and created a [referral pathway](#) that can be used for pre-court assessments to flag any social tenancy and the risk of homelessness if losing it.

We also took part in the Women Leaving Prison Summit in November 2019, discussing how to make the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal most effective for women coming out of custody.

In the past year we had five new reciprocal referrals to support women affected by the criminal justice system due to an offending behaviour.

The referrals included women being at risk of domestic abuse from a previous partner, a woman at risk from someone in her neighbourhood who knew her from custody, and a young woman and her family at risk from serious youth violence due to the young woman's affiliation to a certain group.

It is worth noting that all these referrals had an additional layer of complexity compared with usual reciprocal referrals. All referrals for women affected by the criminal justice system reported mental health needs (including anxiety, suicidal ideation, or a serious mental health condition).

Other additional needs included overcrowding, rent arrears, child with autism, and leaving care. Some referrals could not proceed as the women reported being at risk in all areas of London.



Five new reciprocal referrals to support women affected by the criminal justice system due to an offending behaviour.

Applicants who identify as LGBTQ+

People who identify as LGBTQ+ are more likely to experience hate crime. One in five LGBT people having experienced a hate crime or incident because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity in the last 12 months in Britain⁷.



1 in 5 LGBT people have experienced a hate crime or incident because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity in the last 12 months.

They can also experience additional barriers in reporting domestic abuse⁸. We have continued to raise awareness about the scheme with specialist LGBTQ+ organisations in London including Galop and Stonewall Housing.

Since the beginning of the scheme we received 13 referrals from LGBTQ+ specialist organisations. Half of them were for applicant identifying as gay/lesbian or bisexual, two identified as transgender, and the others preferred not to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity.

70% of these referrals were for applicants fleeing homophobic hate crime, and the remaining 30% for applicants fleeing domestic abuse. All hate crimes were perpetrated by neighbours, making the applicants unsafe where they lived.



70%
of referrals made by LGBTQ+ specialist organisations were fleeing homophobic hate crime

30%
referrals made by LGBTQ+ specialist organisations were fleeing domestic abuse

Again, it is worth noting the complexity of these referrals and the additional needs applicants present. Mental health issues were flagged for all but two applicants referred by LGBTQ+ organisations, almost 40% had a physical disability and one applicant was leaving care.

Looking at all reciprocal applications received since the beginning of the scheme, we had ten (3%) lead applicants who identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual. This is likely to be an underestimate as many applicants would prefer not to disclose their sexual orientation (7% responded that they preferred not to say and 10% did not provide information).

In particular applicants who approach their landlords directly without support from a specialist LGBT organisation might not want to or feel safe to disclose identifying as LGBTQ+.

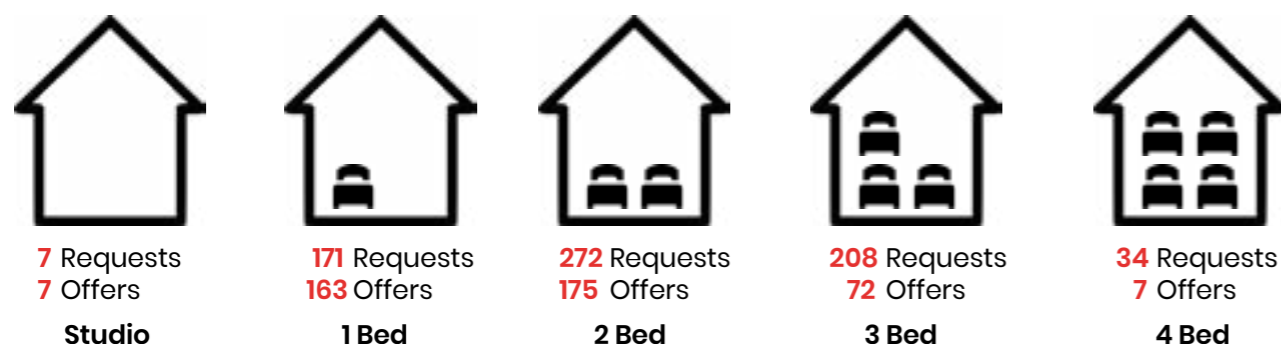
Overview of reciprocal process

Probability of offers and waiting times

The Pan-London Housing Reciprocal has now become an established pathway in London that sometimes is the only option for people in social housing and experiencing violence or abuse to move to a safe borough and keep their social tenancy. Over the past three years, we have observed that some factors influence the likelihood of moving.

Year on year, the most significant barrier we have observed is the lack of family-size properties across London. There has also been a constant lack in accessible ground floor properties. The graph below shows that there are not enough offers to match the need, in particular for families who need a property with two bedrooms or more.

Number of requests and offers by property size since 2017



The table on the next page shows the percentage of applicants who received at least one matching property offer, broken down by a range of factors. We also added a column to show whether there had been a change in the past year. We find that we have a constant overall percentage of 44% of applicants with at least one offer.

The main factor influencing the likelihood of receiving an offer continues to be the property size needed: 63% of applicants needing a one bed property have received an offer, compared with 14% of those needing a 4 bed.

This year we've had slightly more property offers for applicants fleeing serious youth violence, although this continues to be the lowest percentage out of all risk types at 35%. In comparison, 49% of applicants fleeing domestic abuse have received an offer.

This year we had a decrease in offers for applicants fleeing other VAWG or hate crime, although the overall numbers of requests for these groups are small so the probability is less significant.

We had slightly more applicants with a ground floor need receiving an offer this year, but this remains the lowest percentage at 35% compared with 50% for those without a floor requirement.

Percentage of applicants who received at least one offer since 2017

	Total number of property requests	% of requests with at least one offer	Difference with last year
All applications	710	44%	0
Number of bedrooms requested			
Studio	11	73%	-2
1 bed	171	63%	+1
2 bed	279	47%	+2
3 bed	213	29%	-2
4 bed	35	14%	-5
Reason for request			
Domestic Abuse	414	49%	0
Other VAWG	39	38%	-10
Hate crime	11	73%	-15
Serious youth violence	185	35%	+4
Other high-risk community safety need	61	38%	+4
Mobility need/floor requirement			
Ground floor requirement	71	35%	+5
Lower floor / other requirement	241	37%	+5
No requirement	398	50%	-2
Number of boroughs requested			
Up to 5	348	34%	-3
Between 5 and 10	209	44%	+1
Over 10	153	68%	+4

Waiting times

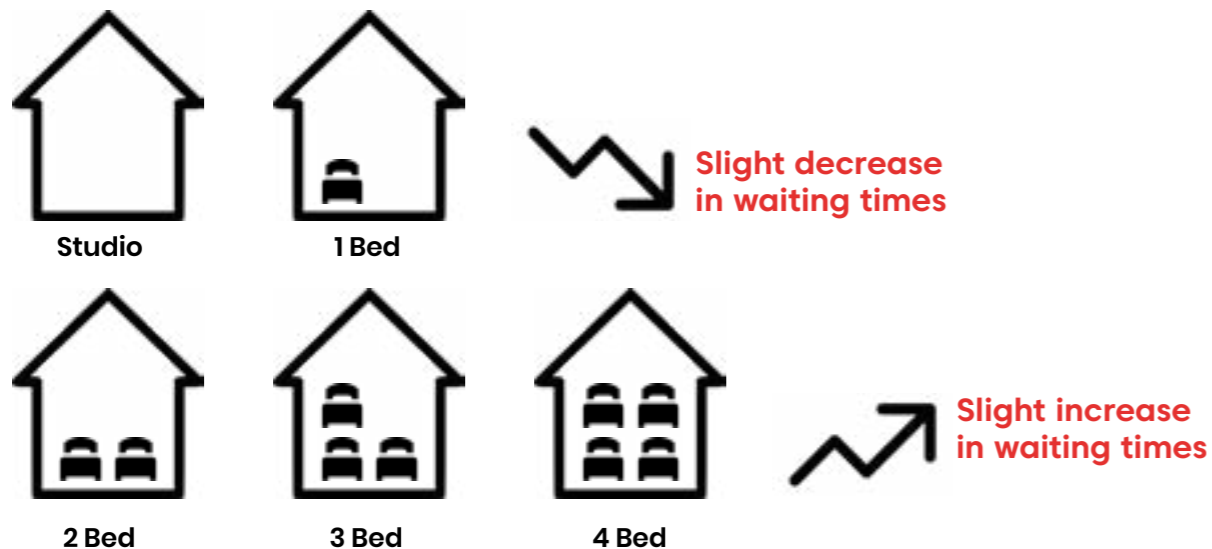
Average waiting times for new social housing in London is usually counted in years. For example, Westminster Council inform that the average waiting time in their borough is seven years, although this goes up to 10 years for a two bed property, 16 years for a three bed property and 34 years for a four bed property⁹.

As a voluntary scheme, we cannot guarantee when and if housing partners will make suitable property offers and we encourage referring agencies to seek emergency housing if needed while waiting for a longer-term reciprocal move.

The table below shows the average waiting time for the applicants on the reciprocal scheme who have received at least one offer (44% of all applicants). While the averages can be useful for comparison, it is important to note that each application is specific and some individuals will experience longer waiting times.

Number of bedrooms requested	Number of requests with at least one offer already	Average waiting time between circulation date and first offer (in month) for those who received an offer
Studio	8	1.2
1 bedroom	107	1.2
2 bedrooms	132	4.8
3 bedrooms	61	4.3
4 bedrooms	5	8.4

Comparing with our findings last year, those who received a studio or one bed property have seen their waiting time slightly reduce this year, while those who received a two bed or larger property have seen their waiting time increase.



Note however that the number of requests for studio and four bed properties are small and therefore less representative.

Additional barriers

Overcrowding, rent arrears and access to emergency accommodation

Overcrowding

Overcrowding is a significant challenge across the social housing sector in London, and in particular for families referred to the reciprocal.

Since the beginning of the scheme, almost half (44%) of non-single applicants were overcrowded at point of referral. This increased in the past 12 months, with 54% of non-single applicants being overcrowded compared with 40% in the previous two years.



Overcrowding creates significant barriers in rehousing. The majority of landlords do not agree to sign off property requests for larger properties, because they know that they won't be able to reciprocate a larger property in the future. On the other hand, landlords often do not accept families that are already overcrowded. As a result, overcrowded families are less likely to move through the scheme.

The successful rate for families that were overcrowded and referred to the same property size was 23%, compared with 31% for applicants who were not overcrowded.

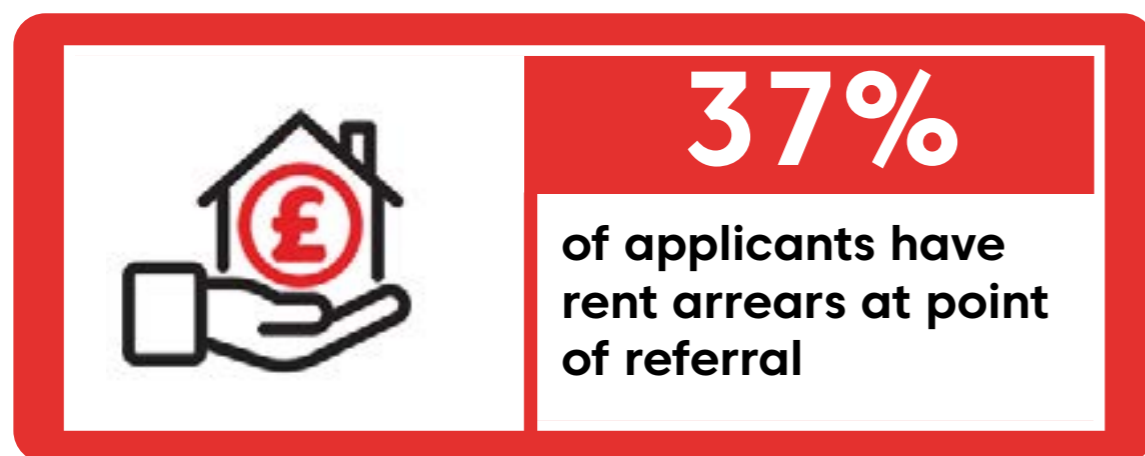


Rent Arrears

Rent arrears can also act as a barrier to accessing safe housing. Overall arrears for reciprocal applicants have continued to be high with 37% of applicants with arrears at point of referral. This is consistent with the previous two years.

The charity Surviving Economic Abuse have reported that rent arrears are a well-known indicator of domestic abuse, in particular when there is an element of economic abuse where the perpetrator use rent arrears to create dependency, or through a loss of income or coerced debts¹⁰.

Many housing mobility schemes request a clear rent account history, which limits the ability of victims and survivors to access safe housing. For reciprocal referrals, we encourage landlords to adopt a case by case approach and consider waving rent arrears if this allows someone to move to safety.



Access to emergency accommodation

In the past year, we have gathered data on the housing situation of applicants at point of referral. This showed that over half of applicants (54%) were still living in their social housing property, where they are at risk of abuse or violence. 18% were in temporary accommodation provided by a local authority, 7% were in a women's refuge, and 18% were staying with friends or family or sofa surfing.

Although we inform referring agencies that reciprocal moves can take time, and advise them to seek emergency accommodation while waiting in the interim, we know that emergency accommodation is not always suitable or accessible for all applicants.

For instance, applicants in work often cannot access refuge or other types of emergency accommodation without giving up their employment, due to having to apply to housing benefits to cover the high cost of emergency accommodation. This type of accommodation is also often not accessible for applicants with additional needs such as high mental health needs or substance misuse. Also many refuges have restrictions on the number or age of children accompanying a woman.

This evidences that affordable social housing is often the only type of suitable accommodation for many people, who end up having to stay in their property where they are at risk of further violence or abuse. This underlines the need for all reciprocal partners to work closely together to try to facilitate reciprocal moves as quickly as possible, to prevent people from having to 'choose' between homelessness and staying at risk of violence.

Property matching

For every property offered through the scheme, Safer London tries to identify as many suitable candidates as possible. Some properties do not result in a successful move for a variety of reasons. This year, we started to collect data on reasons for refusals to analyse trends and improve our matching process where possible.

Safer London does not implement a cap on property offers but we keep a record of the reasons given by applicants for refusing a property offer, and we implement a six months de-prioritisation period after an applicant refuses a property that would match their needs. If a property is refused, we always try to re-match it with another reciprocal applicant, to give all applicants the opportunity to move.

A first glance at our property data shows almost half of negative outcomes around property offers (47%) are due to the housing provider withdrawing the offer. This is often due to providers being under pressure to let properties by certain internal deadlines.

Due to the nature of the risks involved and the need for coordination amongst professionals, there can be delays. For instance staff turnover or carrying out risk assessments can bring delays. This can mean that the time needed to get a get a suitable match can be drawn out, impacting the letting teams requirements to achieve a quick let.

A fourth of negative outcomes (24%) are due to landlords not being able to accept applicants we put forward, for instance if they have policies against pets or against overcrowding and all the applicants we have for this property type have a pet or are overcrowded.

The last fourth of negative outcome relates to applicants refusing properties, which we have analysed in more details and organised into different categories.

Each reason for refusal depends on individual circumstances and has to be considered on a case-by-case basis. A third of offer refusals was motivated by the type of property (33%), most often due to the size of the property or the floor level. This is less than previous years when we had 49% of refusals linked with the property type. A large proportion of reciprocal applicants are overcrowded, making it difficult to accept small properties, for instance when there are single bedrooms.

Property Size	11
Preference	7
Floor level	8
Estate/Flat	8

'Property type' refusals reasons in Year 3

Offer refusal categories	
Location	20%
No longer needs to move	11%
No reason	4%
Rent or tenure	5%
Risk	12%
Risk assessment	8%
Type of property	33%
Couldn't get hold of referring agency/applicant	7%

Apart from size, other reasons for property type refusal include the property being part of an estate or a flat, floor level and personal preference such as wanting a garden and/or not liking the property that was offered.

Addressing the lack of family-size properties

In the past year we have introduced a new process called 'direct reciprocals'. Rather than offering a property to the 'central pot', direct reciprocals allow two landlords to commit to rehouse each other's tenants when there is a matching need.

This system encourages providers to give family-size units, as they know their tenant will be rehoused in the same family-size property.

We encourage providers to source properties from their housing stock rather than applicants swapping properties, which can put them at risk of perpetrators tracing them back through the new tenant. This year we have had several partners engage with direct reciprocals, fostering strong partnership working amongst landlords.



Property types

Taking a random sample of property offers we had this year we analysed the type of property they were. We found that three-quarters were flats, including a third of properties being part of an estate or on a tower block.

These properties tend to be the ones that are most often refused, sometimes due to applicants reporting not feeling safe on estate or tower blocks. We acknowledge that the experience of violence is traumatic and applicants might associate a building type with their experience of violence.

As the scheme aims to support applicants to access safety, we encourage landlords to take a sensitive approach when applicants refuse a property. We also want to ensure applicants have realistic expectations of the types of properties that are offered through the scheme. This year we produced **application packs** to support referring agencies to manage applicant's expectations.

Addressing risk

12% of property refusals were due to risk, most often due to the new property being too close to a risk area or the applicant not feeling safe in the new area. To mitigate against this, Safer London now advises against selecting boroughs neighbouring a risk area or at least ensuring robust resettlement plans are outlined.

Another 8% of property refusals were due to issues with risk assessments. Our standard procedure for households at risk of serious youth violence is to request a property risk assessment to ensure that the move is safe for the family. The referring agencies have to contact the police or gang's unit in both old and new boroughs to check whether there are any known links between the groups that the applicants are fleeing from and any local groups or individuals linked with serious youth violence near the new property.

When professionals are available, the risk assessment outcome can be obtained quickly. However delays due to professionals not responding or further investigations being carried out can lead the housing provider to withdraw the property.

In the past year we have worked closely with referring agencies to ensure there are professionals who can lead on these risk assessments. Where appropriate, we advise to refer young Londoners in the household to Safer London's [one to one support](#). Safer London support workers can support with risk assessing properties, safeguarding concerns and providing resettlement support in the new borough.



Young Londoners at risk of violence in the community can access Safer London one to one support.

Keeping the waiting list updated

Applicants no longer needing to move or who have moved via another route without Safer London being informed has had an impact on the property offer process.

Safer London now implements a bi-annual check requesting landlords' Reciprocal Named Leads to confirm whether their tenants still require a move, to ensure that the waiting list is up to date and delays are minimised.

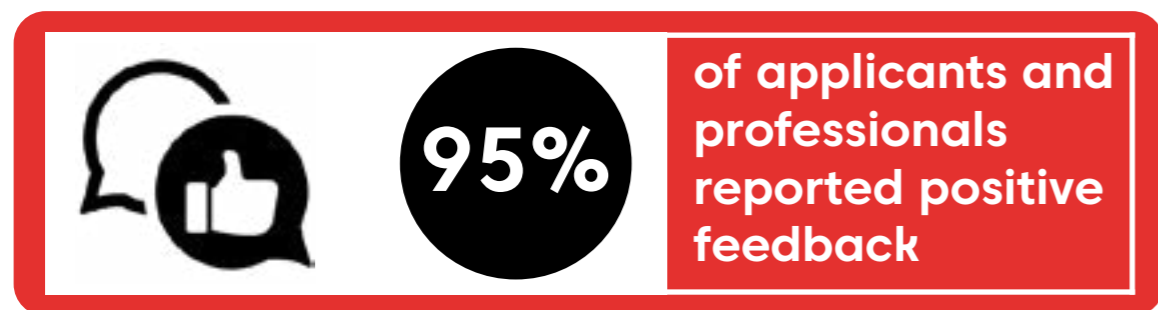
3/4 of properties offered through the scheme were flats

of properties offered were part of an estate or on a tower block **1/3**

Feedback following moves

After a move, Safer London gets in touch with professionals for their feedback on our process. We also seek feedback from the applicant directly, and we check-in with new landlords after six months to assess tenancy sustainment.

This year we received feedback relating to 19 moves, with 6 responses directly from applicants. Most applicants and professionals (95%) reported positive feedback.



All but one applicant stated they felt safer in their new property. This applicant cited issues around the perpetrator still harassing her online. The feedback allowed our team to identify immediate issues and link the new landlord in with a local VAWG service and offer support with another reciprocal application.

Applicants referenced feeling happy and safer as positive parts of the process. Improvement areas included the need for consistent messaging across partners and clear explanations of the scheme, as well as needs around providing a diverse range and availability of properties, decorating and moving in support, and reducing waiting times.

Most professionals mentioned strong communication and coordination from the reciprocal team at Safer London. Professionals noted that clients on other types of tenancies such as starter tenancies had the option of relocating which under their own policies precluded transfers. From those housing providers that responded to our requests on tenancy sustainment, there were no reports of tenancy breakdown.

“ I truly believe the reciprocal is a valuable tool in supporting survivors of domestic abuse. It gives tenants the opportunity of keeping their secure tenancy status, preventing further victimisation and reducing stress relating to moving homes.

Domestic Abuse Support Worker ”

“ I think there are so many people that are victims of domestic/gang related violence in London and would be relieved to know about the Safer London Housing Reciprocal Scheme... Safer London (Pan London) has the potential to safely rehouse so many people without the risk of losing their tenancy.

Feedback from applicant ”

Feedback on Housing Moves pathway

Housing Moves is a new pathway and has already demonstrated its ability to respond to improvement areas related to the Reciprocal, including shortening waiting times, as well as providing opportunities to select and choose properties (see more details in the following section on Housing Moves). We continue to seek feedback as we roll out the pathway to all partners.

“ The Reciprocal is a very useful facility and provides another avenue for rehousing... but there was the understanding that just like any other avenue it could take a long while before a resident could be moved. However, the additional Housing Moves pathway increases the chances for victims of DV in finding a property a lot sooner... I have no complaints so far.

Domestic Abuse Support Worker ”

“ [The Housing Moves pathway] removed a lot of the stress of having to wait for an offer through the homelessness route from the council.. I am really impressed by the speed, efficiency and the quality of the properties available through the scheme.”

Domestic Abuse Support Worker ”

Developing our feedback processes

Our feedback process is under review to ensure we are meeting the needs of survivors. As we do not work directly with applicants, our feedback response rate for professionals is greater, with 57% professionals responding to feedback requests, whereas only 18% of applicants responded.

Part of Safer London's wider strategic aims is to capture, amplify and embed service user voice in our services. This is no different for the Reciprocal, where we are developing a new feedback process that will include consultation with Safer London's newly recruited participation officer, as well as integrating our Reciprocal response across our other teams in Safer London, who primarily work with young Londoners and families affected by exploitation and violence.

Safer London Solutions to Feedback Recommendations

- Exploring information on support services or funds to help with moving costs or resettlement
- Providing biannual updates to referrers on applicants
- Providing clear, consistent information on scheme process and timescales at point of referral
- Liaising with partners to offer a range of properties to the scheme, not only hard-to-let
- Advocating for flexibility around timings for viewings and lets, and signposting to other available housing support where possible
- Develop feedback process as well as materials for applicants and professionals.

Housing Moves partnership

In his latest Housing Strategy, the Mayor of London announced a new priority for victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence in the [Housing Moves](#) scheme. Housing Moves is the Mayor's housing mobility scheme to enable social tenants in London to move across borough, via properties contributed by councils and housing associations throughout the year.

In the past year Safer London worked closely with the Greater London Authority's (GLA) Housing Mobility Team to build a specific portal on Housing Moves website for reciprocal applicants.

The aim is to give applicants who are waiting for a property offer the opportunity to also bid on properties advertised on Housing Moves, with an additional priority. We built the system to ensure that applicants can remain anonymous until a property is offered. Each applicant has a supporting professional involved in the application process in the same way as reciprocal moves.

Safer London started inviting reciprocal applicants to bid on Housing Moves properties in October 2019, after months of trialling the new portal. In the initial three months, the team closely monitored progress and worked with the GLA to address IT setbacks and adjustments.

From January 2020, we rolled out invitations for more reciprocal applicants who were fleeing domestic abuse or sexual violence, sending invitations in phases to prevent backlogs of applicants all bidding on the same properties at once.

By the end of March, we had invited over 85 reciprocal applicants. At the time of writing, we were informed of at least three applicants who had accepted a property via this route. At the end of March, Housing Moves website was suspended until further notice due to Covid-19. The GLA encouraged all providers who wanted to continue letting properties via Housing Moves to instead make direct offers via the reciprocal scheme.

Reciprocal applicants bidding on properties via Housing Moves have an additional priority.



Benefits of choice-based lettings

Feedback from support workers overwhelmingly highlighted the positive impact for applicants to be able to place bids themselves, with top priority awarded.

Domestic abuse often relies on power and control dynamics where the perpetrator prevents their victim from making any decision. Giving back an element of choice and control over their rehousing is therefore incredibly empowering for survivors.

Case study: Housing Moves PLHR pathway

This reciprocal applicant had been referred for a move due to a risk of domestic abuse from her ex-partner.

She was living in overcrowding conditions, with her three children in a one bedroom apartment. Her IDVA and housing officer worked with her to make a reciprocal application, with her landlord signing off a referral for a three bedroom property so that she could move somewhere that suited her and her children's needs.

They were aware that family-size properties might take time to become available via the reciprocal route. When the Housing Moves pathway opened, her housing officer signed her up straight away. The applicant was given a login to place bids on properties she would be interested in.

Being a reciprocal applicant, she was given additional priority and a bid she placed was shortlisted within a week. The viewing was arranged a week later and the applicant gladly accepted the property. Although it was not in a borough initially requested by the applicant, she felt that having a place that is big enough to accommodate her children was more important.

“

I hope the Housing Moves element becomes a permanent feature. The reciprocal really helped us support our resident to move away from her property and away from her perpetrators but also into a property that was big enough for her and her family. The additional Housing Moves pathway increases the chances for victims of domestic abuse in finding a property a lot sooner. The resident's details remained anonymous until the very last moment when the viewing was being arranged.

Applicant's
Housing Officer

”

Whole Housing Approach to Domestic Abuse

In the past year Safer London partnered with a range of organisations to deliver the [Whole Housing Approach](#) (WHA) pilot in three sites across the country. The WHA pioneered a range of interventions to improve the housing options and outcomes for people experiencing domestic abuse so that they can achieve stable housing, live safely and overcome their experiences of abuse.

It is funded by MHCLG and was conceptualised by the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) in collaboration with the National Housing and Domestic Abuse Policy and Practice Group that Safer London is part of.

The project implemented a range of housing options and initiatives to give people experiencing domestic abuse the choice to either relocate or remain in their existing accommodation if deemed safe. Safer London led on the 'managed reciprocals' component as one of the key interventions to support survivors with a social tenancy who need to move away from the risk.

Through this project we drafted the [Whole Housing Toolkit Chapter on Managed Reciprocals](#). This gave us the chance to reflect on the principles of managed reciprocals as a model of intervention that can be replicated beyond the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal. We highlighted some of the principles of managed reciprocals, for instance the aim to prevent homelessness, to sustain tenancy rights, and to work collaboratively across sectors and organisations to achieve long-term safety for the victim/survivor. The toolkit offers practical guidance and resources for other local areas to deliver a consistent WHA to domestic abuse.



Whole Housing Toolkit Partners



Replication outside London

In the past year we supported local domestic abuse services in Cambridgeshire to establish a county-wide reciprocal scheme, which now includes six local authorities and ten housing associations and has seen already 17 referrals and four successful moves.

An innovation in the Cambridgeshire Reciprocal scheme is that this can be used to move perpetrators, when deemed safe to do so and if the victim/survivor wishes to stay in their property. Considering the lack of family-size properties in London, this alternative would be worth exploring in some circumstances.

This reflection helped us to think about integrating reciprocal moves within a range of interventions that can support a survivor in their journey from escaping abuse to recovery.

In London we worked closely with specialist domestic abuse agencies to ensure that reciprocal applicants are supported when moving, and with the local Sanctuary Scheme provider to improve safety for survivors before or after they move.

Conclusion

Access to affordable and long-term stable housing is necessary to overcome the trauma of experiencing violence or abuse.

The past three years have seen the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal going from pilot stage to an established housing pathway for social tenants at risk of harm in London. This report evidences the continued need for a coordinated London-wide partnership in the social housing sector, with over 700 property requests circulated in the past three years for families and individuals at risk of violence or abuse.

This work has been recognised as good practice nationally and other regions where demand for social housing is high have expressed interest in setting up similar reciprocal partnerships. In the past year, we supported Cambridgeshire to set up the first reciprocal scheme outside London as part of the Whole Housing Approach to domestic abuse.

While domestic abuse remains the primary reason for referral in the majority of cases, in London we have seen an increase in families and individuals in need of relocation due to serious youth violence, and a continued need of support for those fleeing other types of violence such as hate crime. Data collected also evidenced the complexity of need for applicants referred including mental health needs or other vulnerabilities such as physical disability. We have seen an increase in additional barriers including high levels of overcrowding and rent arrears, which can restrict access to safe housing.

This report also highlighted common challenges that affect all areas of London such as a severe lack of family-sized properties and accessible ground floor properties. Alongside significant investment in truly affordable social housing, multi-agency and cross-sector partnership working are key to support the different needs of people affected by violence or abuse, and to ensure that moves are sustained.



Three Years of the Pan London Housing Reciprocal

Our new partnership with the Greater London Authority's Housing Moves pathway has shown promising findings and a real potential to increase access to safe housing for those fleeing domestic abuse or sexual violence.

Our involvement with the Whole Housing Approach to domestic abuse has also helped us to position the reciprocal scheme within a coordinated response that is linked with a range of other interventions including sanctuary schemes, flexible funding, co-located or mobile advocacy, Housing First, DAHA accreditation and perpetrator management.

We are proud to be part of these ground-breaking initiatives and we hope to build on these partnerships going forward to improve housing outcomes for victims and survivors of violence and abuse, so that no one has to sacrifice their social tenancy because they have experienced abuse or violence.



Winner at the 2018 London Homelessness Awards

The response to Covid-19 has shown that with political will, great progress can be achieved quickly. In the past few weeks, a wide range of innovation and policy change has been implemented including granting automatic priority need for victims and survivors of domestic abuse presenting as homeless. Our conviction is that through strong commitment and partnership working, we can also address the pandemic that is violence and domestic abuse.

Now more than ever it is vital that we continue bringing together social housing providers and specialist support agencies to ensure that people at risk of harm where they live can access safe, stable and affordable housing, and can recover from the trauma they experienced.

Action Plan and recommendations

The data gathered through referrals received for reciprocal moves in the past three years give us unique evidence on the housing needs of social tenants in London who are at risk of abuse or violence.

From this analysis, we have drawn the following plan of action for us as coordinators of the scheme, and recommendations for London-based housing providers and authorities, with the aim to improve access to safety for tenants.

Action Plan

Moving forward Safer London will...



Reinstate the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal Steering Group

We will reinstate the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal Steering Group to create a space for landlords and referring agencies to discuss areas of need and improvements to the scheme, with the aim to find solutions that work for all involved.



Start a conversation on property commitment to the scheme

In consultation with landlords signed up to the scheme, we will start a conversation about commitment to the scheme including suggestions on property targets and potential quotas, to ensure that there are enough properties for everyone who is referred for a reciprocal move.

Our data shows that we process an average of 240 new property requests per year. If each of the 83 landlords signed up to the scheme could offer an average of three properties a year, this would be enough to rehouse everyone who needs it. We appreciate that landlords' housing stock vary considerably and each landlord's commitment would need to be commensurate with their use of the scheme to ensure the system is fair.



Work with each reciprocal partner to recommend property targets

We will work with each landlord signed up to the scheme to assess their use of the scheme based on the past three years of activity, and recommend an individualised yearly target of properties based on the number of referrals made for their tenants.

Recommendations

Recommendations for landlords signed up to the reciprocal

1

Ring-fencing family-size properties and ground-floor properties for people fleeing domestic abuse or other forms of violence.

Our findings have shown that applicants who need a family-size property or ground-floor accessible property due to medical needs are less likely to be rehoused. Landlords need to ring-fence these properties for reciprocal applicants or those fleeing abuse or violence to ensure they are not being penalised.

If a landlord commits to allocate three properties a year to the reciprocal scheme, there should be at least one family size property (three bedrooms or more) and one ground-floor or accessible property.

Working towards DAHA accreditation to achieve minimum standards in your response to domestic abuse.

2

[DAHA accreditation](#) is the UK benchmark for how housing providers respond to domestic abuse, with eight priority areas to address across the organisation. Both local authorities and housing associations can achieve this accreditation which is part of the Whole Housing Approach to domestic abuse model, alongside taking part in managed reciprocal moves.

3

Partnership working with specialist organisations including domestic abuse / VAWG, LGBTQ+ and youth organisations.

No single organisation can safeguard against domestic abuse or other forms of violence. We strongly encourage landlords to refer tenants experiencing domestic abuse or other forms of violence to organisations who have expertise in the type of risk the tenant is experiencing such as Violence Against Women and Girls organisations including specialist support organisations for Black and minoritised women and girls, hate crime and LGBTQ+ organisations, and youth charities. This should be done as soon as finding out about the risk and before considering relocation. Moving is only one part of the journey and might not always be appropriate.

For tenants relocating to a new borough, it is vital to make referrals to resettlement services in the new borough including MARACs for survivors of domestic abuse, social services when relevant and other specialist organisations as mentioned above. This is essential to ensure reciprocal moves are safe and sustainable and to enable tenants to rebuild their lives.

Adopting a trauma-informed approach

4

All applicants referred for a reciprocal move have experienced significant trauma which can impact their behaviour and how they engage with services. We found that a large proportion of reciprocal applicants have additional needs sometimes directly linked with the risk they experienced including mental health needs, disability or access requirements, arrears or ASB.

It is essential for landlords engaging in reciprocal moves to recognise this and adopt a trauma-informed, flexible and sensitive approach to effectively support applicants.

Recommendations for for London-wide authorities

1

Commission research to explore the links between overcrowding and the risk of abuse and violence and find solutions.

One of the biggest issue experienced by reciprocal applicants is overcrowding. This has proved to be an issue across London and makes it more difficult for applicants to be rehoused.

We recommend more research to be done to explore this issue and find innovative and bespoke solutions to address this barrier.

Lobby central government to achieve significant investment in social housing in London.

2

The lack of social housing including genuinely affordable social housing is a significant barrier to safeguard tenants experiencing domestic abuse or other forms of violence.

The lack of available properties across London means that reciprocal applicants stay longer at risk or in temporary/emergency accommodation, increasing the financial cost to local authorities and the emotional cost to victims/survivors and their children.

The London private housing market is unaffordable for those who qualify for social housing and London authorities need to lobby central government to achieve significant investment in social housing across the capital.

Appendix: List of PLHR partners

Local authorities

- All 32 London Boroughs and the City of London

Housing Associations

- A2Dominion
- Apna Ghar
- Arhag HA
- Bangla Housing Association
- Catalyst
- Clarion Housing Group (formerly Circle Housing and Affinity Sutton)
- EastendHomes
- East Thames (now merged with L&Q)
- Ekaya
- Estuary Housing
- Family Mosaic
- Gateway HA
- Guinness
- Habinteg
- Hendon Christian Housing Association
- Hexagon
- Housing 4 Women
- Hyde Housing
- IDS
- Islington & Shoreditch Housing Association
- L&Q
- Metropolitan
- Moat
- Network Homes
- Newlon
- Notting Hill Genesis (formerly Notting Hill)
- Notting Hill Genesis (formerly Genesis)
- Octavia Housing
- Odu-Dua Housing Association
- One Housing
- Optivo (formerly Amicus Horizon and Viridian)
- Origin Housing
- PA Housing (formerly Paragon and Asra Housing)
- Peabody
- Places for people
- Phoenix Community Housing
- Poplar Harca
- Richmond Housing Partnership
- Riverside
- Saha (Salvation Army Housing Association)
- Sanctuary Housing
- Shian Housing Association
- Soho Housing Association
- Southern Housing Group
- Swan Housing
- SW9 Community Housing
- Tower Hamlets Community Housing
- Wandle
- Westway Housing
- Watmos Community Homes
- Women's Pioneer Housing

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the team at Safer London who runs and coordinates the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal, and who authored this report: Octavia, Shaki, Rachael and Clementine.

Thank you to MOPAC for funding the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal, as well as the Pilgrim Trust, the Goldsmith Company and MHCLG for supporting our development work.

Finally, thank you to our 83 housing partners and the GLA for supporting access to affordable properties, and thank you to all professionals across London who are supporting applicants on a daily basis.