



Unlocking Doors

A Professionals Toolkit for Establishing Managed Housing Reciprocals

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Our sincere gratitude goes to the Pan London Housing Reciprocal team, as well as the partners and agencies involved in the scheme’s operations.

Safer London is grateful to the Mayor of London’s Office for Policing and Crime for its commitment to the scheme and funding. Without this support to develop and deliver the Pan London Housing Reciprocal, the scheme would not have been able to develop and deliver life changing outcomes for many individuals and families.

We’d also like to thank Laura McDonagh for their role in the development and production of this toolkit.

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SECTION 1

What is a managed housing reciprocal?



What is a managed housing reciprocal?

A managed housing reciprocal is a voluntary multi-agency approach, which helps social tenants fleeing risk of abuse or violence to find safe accommodation they can afford. It means families and individuals can move to safe properties in another locality, whilst maintaining their social tenancy.

It also supports those who a local authority or housing association has accepted a duty to accommodate e.g. care leavers.

The key partners involved are:

- A nominating officer can be any professional from a supporting agency (for example, a support worker) who makes referrals to the scheme
- An independent coordinator who processes the referrals and monitors partners' activity
- A named lead from a housing provider (local authority or housing association) who approves referrals, makes property offers and reciprocates properties to the scheme
- A risk assessor needs to be involved for referrals which involve risk relating to serious violence.

Within the PLHR, applications are handled anonymously on behalf of the applicant(s) at risk. The coordinator will provide a reference number to use in place of any personal or identifying information. There are both pros and cons to this approach.



If you can get the relationships right, a managed housing reciprocal is a no-brainer. It's a really empowering pathway for those fleeing risk. Every local authority should have one.



Against the Odds – Centre for Mental Health
Khan, Saini, Augustine, Palmer, Donald 2017

INSIGHT

How the PLHR works – in simple terms

“Reciprocal moves...allow the person's home borough to ask another council for an alternative home...

..for example, if Camden gets a property from Islington, the council will owe a property to the London pot – instead of owing one to Islington, which was the previous arrangement.

This provides more housing choices because the [applicant's] home borough can reach out to any of the local authorities signed up to the scheme.”

Inside Housing article on the Pan London Housing Reciprocal, 2018



WHO DOES IT HELP?

The scheme can be adapted and employed to support individuals or families who are at risk. This could include those affected by:

- Domestic violence and abuse
- Sexual violence and abuse
- Sex trafficking, sexual exploitation and modern slavery
- So-called honour-based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage
- Stalking
- Hate crime
- Young people affected by violence and exploitation

To qualify, individuals must have a social housing tenancy, or be owed one (e.g. as a care leaver).

RECOMMENDATION
Publish Criteria

We advise that housing reciprocals compile and publish the criteria for their scheme, which will inevitably be based on their local profile, e.g. particular local risks, available housing stock etc.. We'll cover criteria later in the toolkit.



WHAT THOSE INVOLVED IN THE PLHR SAY



It's important to understand what it is and what it isn't. It's not a statutory service, it's all voluntary and it's reliant on the goodwill of all of the organisations taking part. Yes, it has its limitations. But it also has lots of potential applications, and can lead to much better medium and long-term outcomes for people fleeing dangerous situations.

– Local Authority Housing Officer



It's so vital to have a safe and stable base. You can't move your life forward without it.

– Clinical Psychologist



It gives tenants the opportunity of keeping their secure tenancy status, avoiding further victimisation and reducing stress relating to moving homes.

– Domestic Abuse Support Worker



With a managed housing reciprocal, everyone has a stake in it, and that collective investment is really powerful. For us, it's a really helpful tool to have in our arsenal when we need to move someone due to hate crime.

– Charity Case Worker



If i have problems trying to house tenants, other local authorities or housing associations are going to be having the same problems. A managed housing reciprocal means we can try to solve them together.

– Housing Association



A reciprocal scheme can minimise the time people spend in expensive and disruptive temporary accommodation. It makes financial sense – and, more importantly, leads to better outcomes in every sense.

– London Housing Officer





INSIGHT

The role of housing in fleeing risk

“Data revealed by Freedom of Information requests shows 26,500 people approached local authorities for support because the threat of violence from criminal gangs or involvement in serious organised crime risked leaving them homeless.”

Guardian article, October 2021

“Housing concerns represent a significant barrier to leaving an abusive partner...of those 38 respondents who were still in a relationship with an abusive partner, 68.4% indicated that concerns around future housing were a barrier to leaving, highlighting challenges that included: a lack of access to money to cover the costs of a new home (including paying the rent, upfront deposit and necessary bills)...; fears of homelessness and being forced to live in unsuitable or unsafe housing; being denied help from their local housing team...”

The Domestic Abuse Report, 2020

“People who are fleeing risks like domestic violence, sexual abuse, serious violence or hate crime have already suffered. If they lose their social housing Tenancy, they’re going to suffer more. We’re trying to avoid people feeling like they have to stay in an unsafe situation by giving them a means of moving while keeping their tenancy and the stability and benefits associated with it.”

London housing expert



WHAT IT IS

In order for a managed housing reciprocal to work smoothly, it is vital that everyone involved in the process is very clear about what it is, what it isn't and the breadth of its remit.

A REMINDER

A managed housing reciprocal is a voluntary multi-agency approach helping individuals or families who have a social tenancy (or who a local authority or housing association has accepted a duty to accommodate e.g. care leavers) fleeing risk of abuse or violence to find safe accommodation while maintaining their social tenancy.

It isn't an emergency pathway and each reciprocal sets its own remit and who and what it can be used for.

WHAT IT ISN'T

It's vital to understand what a managed housing reciprocal is not.

- A managed housing reciprocal is not an emergency pathway – instead, it should be deployed alongside other tools as part of a whole housing strategy
- A managed housing reciprocal is not a housing provider – however, it works with housing providers
- A managed housing reciprocal is not a supportive agency – however, it works with supportive agencies
- A managed housing reciprocal is not a statutory process – it is voluntary, and reliant on the goodwill of everyone involved
- It's not (necessarily) a quick process – however, we have some suggestions as to how it can run as smoothly and successfully as possible





Roles and relationships

There are three parties involved beyond the applicant(s):

NOMINATING OFFICER

The nominating officer is responsible for: making the referral; exploring alternative housing routes in addition to the managed housing reciprocal option; relaying any communications from the reciprocal to the applicant and providing documentation etc. on the applicant's behalf; managing risk; and providing resettlement support.

It's important to note that the nominating officer is responsible for all safeguarding responsibilities in line with their own organisational policy. They operate throughout in a supportive capacity.

The nominating officer – who has to be a professional, for example, a support worker – is the only person who holds any personal details relating to the applicant(s) in line with GDPR legislation and to avoid safeguarding or discrimination concerns. At the PLHR, we don't ask for proof of violence or abuse e.g. police reports etc.. We know there are multiple issues with this approach: cultural issues with the police, fear of retaliation etc..

THE COORDINATOR

The reciprocal coordinator carries out an independent 'broker' function. They receive and process applications from nominating officers. Then they notify and seek approval from the applicant's current housing provider. Once they have this approval and have checked they have all the required information, they circulate it to the areas indicated as 'safe' by the nominating officer and applicant and request property offers.

They then manage the partners' activity, and link professionals to arrange viewings of potential properties and ensure risk assessments are undertaken where necessary.

The coordinator also monitors the number of properties owed by the partners, enforcing caps where necessary as well as corresponding with partners and stakeholders, building and maintaining professional relationships, analysing data, monitoring and evaluating – and more.

The coordinator processes all applications anonymously – we recommend providing a reference number – to ensure applicant(s) safety and equitable treatment.

NAMED LEAD

Named leads are notified by the coordinator of referrals which relate to their tenants, and then approve them so that they can be processed. They receive new approved referrals to the scheme and are invited to offer properties if they have one available in an area considered safe for the applicant(s).

If they house an applicant or family in one of their properties, they are owed a property by the scheme for one of their applicants fleeing risk; if an applicant living in one of their properties is rehomed elsewhere, they owe a property to the scheme.

In London, we stipulate that this has to be a 'like for like' exchange, e.g. a three-bed property for a three-bed property, but this was agreed locally and may not be necessary in other areas.

Other parties

APPLICANT

The individual fleeing risk. Other family members may be included on their application, for example siblings or dependent children. The nominating officer is the only person who holds any identifying information about the applicant(s). At every part of the process, their application is anonymised for the purposes of safety and to ensure fair treatment.

RISK ASSESSOR

In cases where it is deemed necessary, e.g. where an applicant is fleeing serious violence, a risk assessor is also involved. The risk assessor ensures, as best they can, that the particular risk that has led to the reciprocal referral does not exist in the area where a property offered via the scheme is situated.



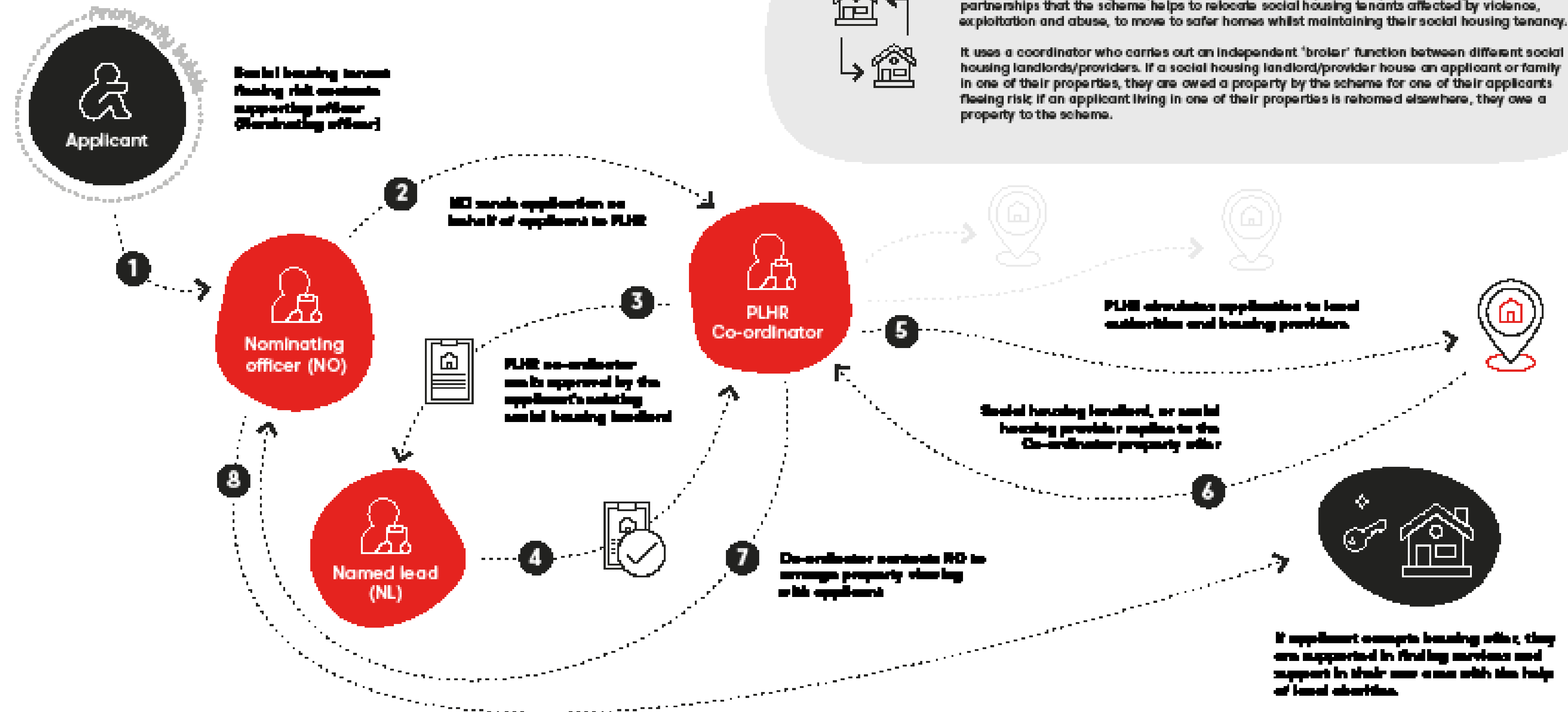
It's important that everyone – both reciprocal partners and applicants – has a consistent understanding of the reciprocal, its function, its processes and its limitations. It takes robust processes and communication, but it's so important. Where we've had concerns about the managed housing reciprocal, they've often stemmed from a lack of understanding about our purpose or our powers.



Safer London
Managed housing reciprocal coordinator



PAN LONDON HOUSING RECIPROCAL RELATIONS





INSIGHT

How those roles and responsibilities look in practice

Scenario one

A domestic violence caseworker employed by the charity Solace (nominating officer) receives a call from a woman with two young children who is experiencing domestic violence (applicant).

He (the nominating officer) makes an application to the PLHR on the woman's behalf. The coordinator receives the application and all of the details. As the woman (applicant) lives in Haringey, she (the coordinator) contacts a Housing Officer (named lead) at Haringey to seek approval for the application. Then, once approval is received, the coordinator circulates it to all of the local authorities and housing providers (named leads) the DV caseworker (nominating officer) has identified by speaking to his client (applicant).

A Housing Officer from Camden (named lead) replies to the coordinator with a property offer. At this point, the coordinator puts the DV caseworker (nominating officer) and Camden housing officer (named lead) in touch to arrange a viewing for the woman and her children (applicant). The woman is happy with the property and ready to move, so provides the relevant paperwork and ID to Camden with the help of her DV caseworker.

Afterwards, she is supported by the DV caseworker in finding support services in her new area and furnishing her flat with the help of local charities.



Scenario two

A clinical psychologist working on a youth outreach team (nominating officer) has a client who has previously been involved in serious violence (applicant). The young man is at risk of retaliation from his previous associates, as they suspect him of providing information to the police.

The clinical psychologist (nominating officer) makes an application to the PLHR on the man's behalf. As in scenario one, the coordinator contacts a housing officer at OneHousing (named lead), through which the young man's family has a social tenancy, for their approval. Once the coordinator receives this, she sends all of the relevant information out to the local authorities and housing providers to ask for suitable property offers.

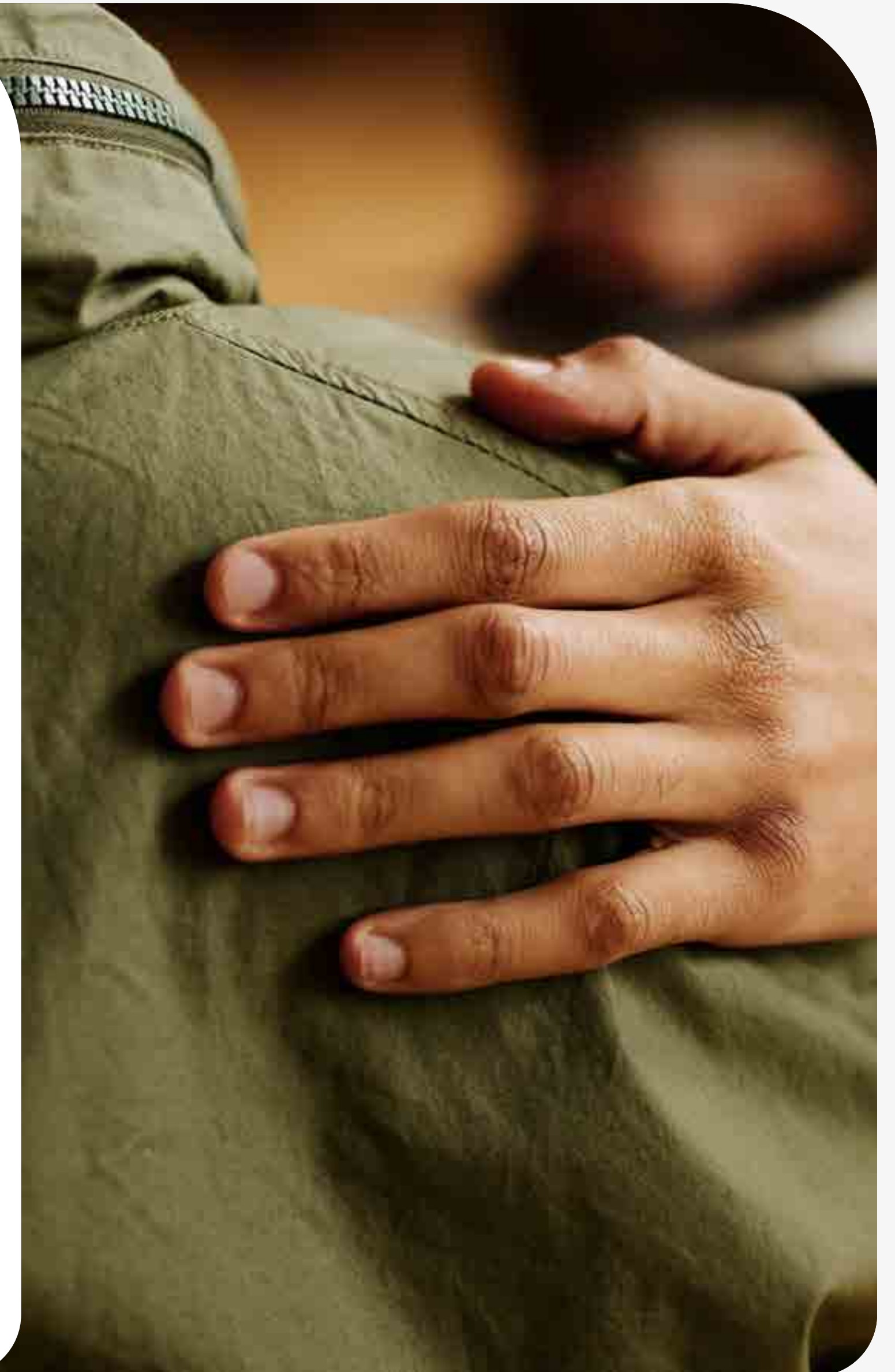
A number of property offers are received. After sending these to the clinical psychologist (nominating officer) to review with her client (applicant), she asks the coordinator to put her in touch with a housing officer at Barnet (named lead) who has submitted a potential property so that they can set up a viewing.

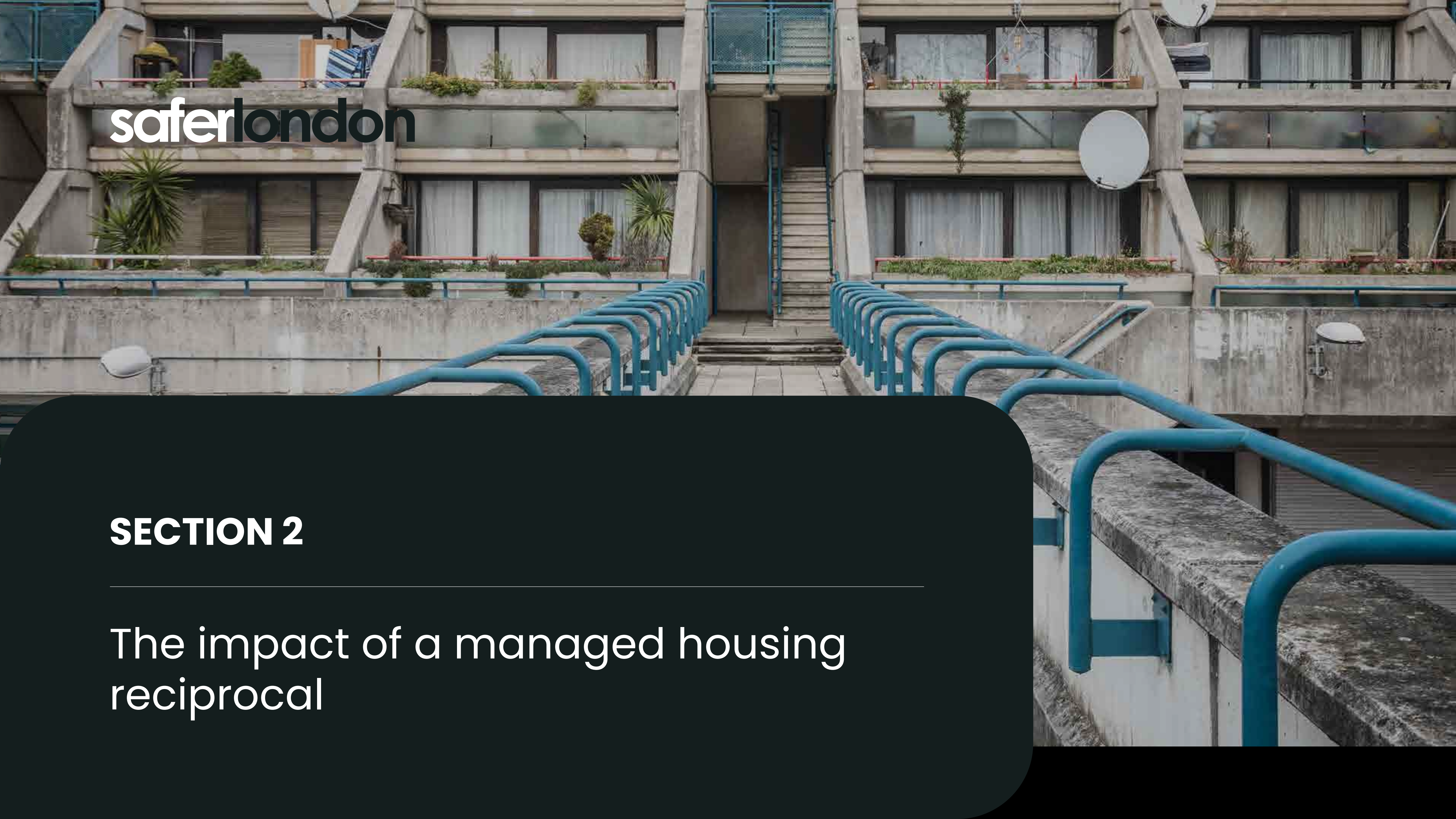
However, before the applicant can accept the property, a risk assessment must be carried out, so the clinical psychologist (nominating officer) arranges this with the police. The officer who carries out the risk assessment (risk assessor) doesn't identify a specific risk to the young man (applicant).

After viewing, the young man accepts the property and the clinical psychologist helps him to submit his ID and other required paperwork. The clinical psychologist and other members of the youth outreach team support the man to access new local support services and a youth group.

INSIGHTS

Being culturally competent was central to the development and delivery of this project. Here, Project lead Desmond, talks about what cultural competence is and what we did to ensure it was weaved throughout this project.

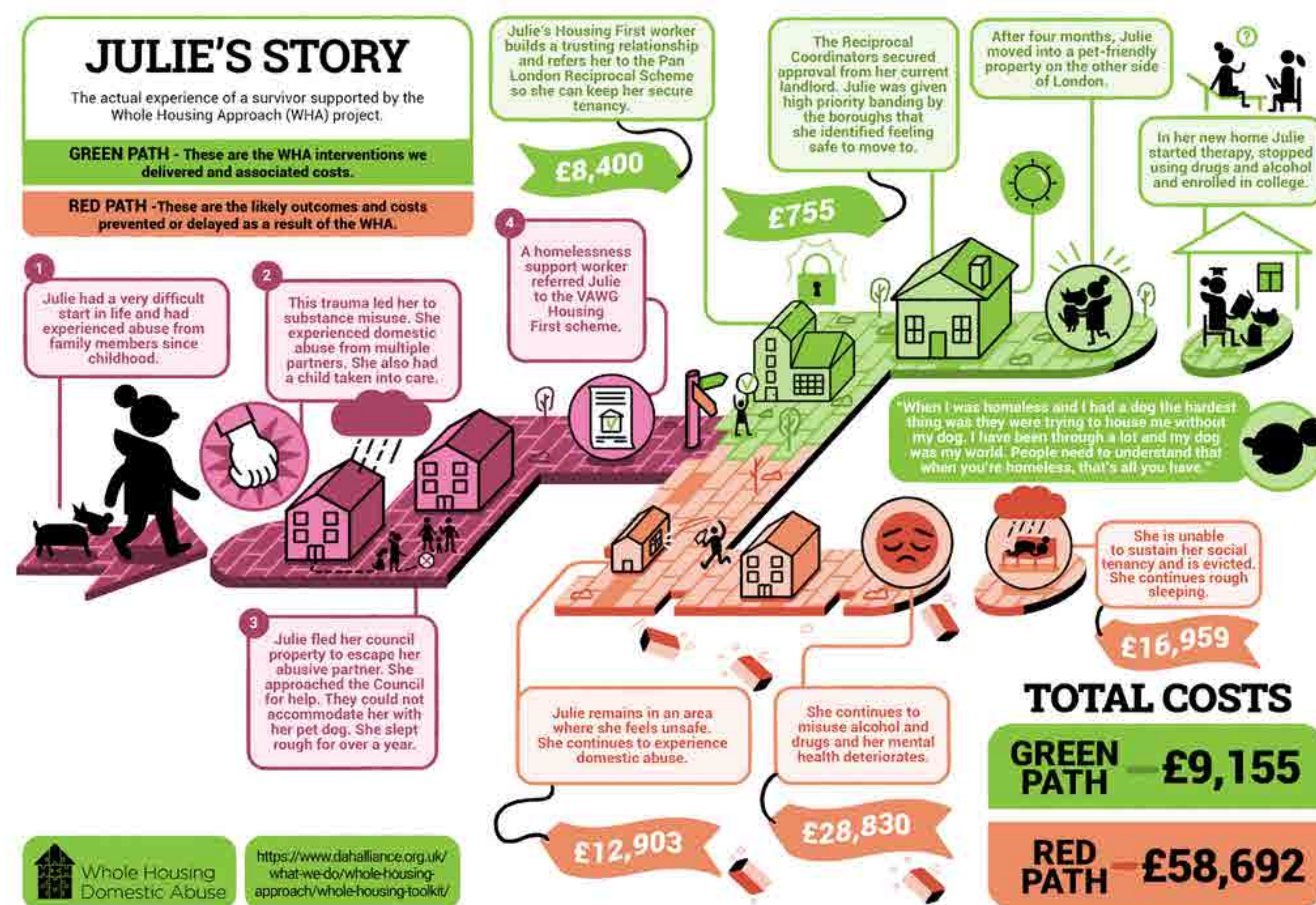




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SECTION 2

The impact of a managed housing
reciprocal



The impact of a managed housing reciprocal

THE COST BENEFITS

You can't put a price on safety. However, there are significant costs benefits to establishing a managed housing reciprocal.

This compelling case study represents the actual experiences of a survivor. The outcomes prevented were identified by survivors themselves and the domestic abuse advocates/workers supporting them.

RESOURCE

Cost Benefit Analysis Tools Look

A cost-benefit analysis can be a powerful tool in engaging partners and stakeholders.

Learn more about how to produce them with the [DAHA Whole Housing Approach Cost Benefit Analysis Explained](#)

**INSIGHT****Perspective of PLHR Coordinator Look**

“One case we dealt with involved a woman living in Southwark with two children. She was fleeing domestic violence, and had been physically abused by her partner on and off for many years. On numerous occasions, the police had been involved.

When we received the application, we acted immediately. Firstly, we sought approval for a move from Southwark and, once granted, we made a request for properties to our housing partners. However, because the applicant was a victim of domestic violence and had a social tenancy, she was also eligible for a prioritised Housing Moves application. We made sure she had a log-in and guidance for bidding on properties, which we passed on through the resettlement officer.

There was another option available to this particular applicant: a direct arrangement with another partner. We’d identified another applicant to the PLHR in Brent with similar needs who was fleeing risk in 28 London boroughs. This wouldn’t be a direct swap – we make sure applicants who swap boroughs are housed in new properties to avoid the risk of perpetrators harassing new tenants. However, it would potentially allow our applicants to move to a new safe area and Southwark and Brent to fulfill their obligation to rehouse their tenants fleeing risk.

Throughout this process, we managed professionals’ and the applicants’ expectations, were transparent, and communicated effectively and in a timely manner. Then the day arrived – our Southwark applicant was offered a property through Housing Moves!

Safer London Managed Housing Reciprocal Coordinator

**INSIGHT****Perspective of Nominating Officers**

Here two nominating officers talk through their roles within the Pan London Housing Reciprocal, the challenges they face and the impact the scheme has on lives.

**INSIGHT****Perspective of a Named Lead****What is your job title?**

I'm a Housing Needs Officer – under the Pan London Housing Reciprocal (PLHR), I am one of two Named Leads for the local authority I am employed by. I authorise applications from tenants from our local authority, so they can be accepted into the scheme and I decide whether to accept referrals from other local authorities/housing associations seeking housing in our borough.

What are the challenges and the rewards of your role?

The challenges can be difficulties in communication with other agencies and ensuring that the expectations of tenants are properly managed by their housing officers, social workers and supporting professionals. In terms of rewards, it's satisfying to know that I'm playing a role in helping people access safe accommodation.

How does the PLHR help you as a professional?

It improves leadership, networking and communications skills.

How have you seen the PLHR help a tenant(s)?

I've seen tenants from our borough who were in unsafe situations manage to get safe new accommodation in a safe borough and retain their secure tenancy.

Can you talk us (briefly) through a successful move with the PLHR?

This is more difficult for me, as I only liaise with other professionals not the tenants directly. Once a property is provided, the tenant and the professionals directly supporting them will supply the relevant documentation and will then usually view the property and proceed to sign up.

What advice would you give someone who has just become a named lead?

All local authorities and housing associations under the scheme have to provide a named lead. It's a voluntary role so my advice would be to ensure you're able to manage the commitments of the role alongside your primary job role.

Why would you encourage others in your position to get involved with a managed housing reciprocal?

It can improve networking both within your own organisation and with other organisations. It also gives you increased responsibilities and you do play a role in supporting tenants at risk of violence/abuse to obtain safe accommodation.

Why is a project like this so important?

It can enable tenants to retain their secure tenancy in another borough. It provides an avenue to support people at risk.

The background image shows a multi-story brick building with a light-colored brick facade and red brick window frames. A flag with a red cross on a white background is hanging from one of the windows. In the foreground, there is a blue metal fence. The sky is clear and blue.

SECTION 3

Setting up a managed housing reciprocal



The importance of local knowledge

For a managed housing reciprocal to work, it needs to meet the needs of the area and the people who live there.

INSIGHT

Data Mapping Tools

For the PLHR, we use data.london.gov.uk to map local risks.

MOPAC also hosts a [Domestic and Sexual Abuse Dashboard](#) to illustrate volumes and rates of crime and rolling trends, as well as helps map incidents of domestic and sexual violence in London.

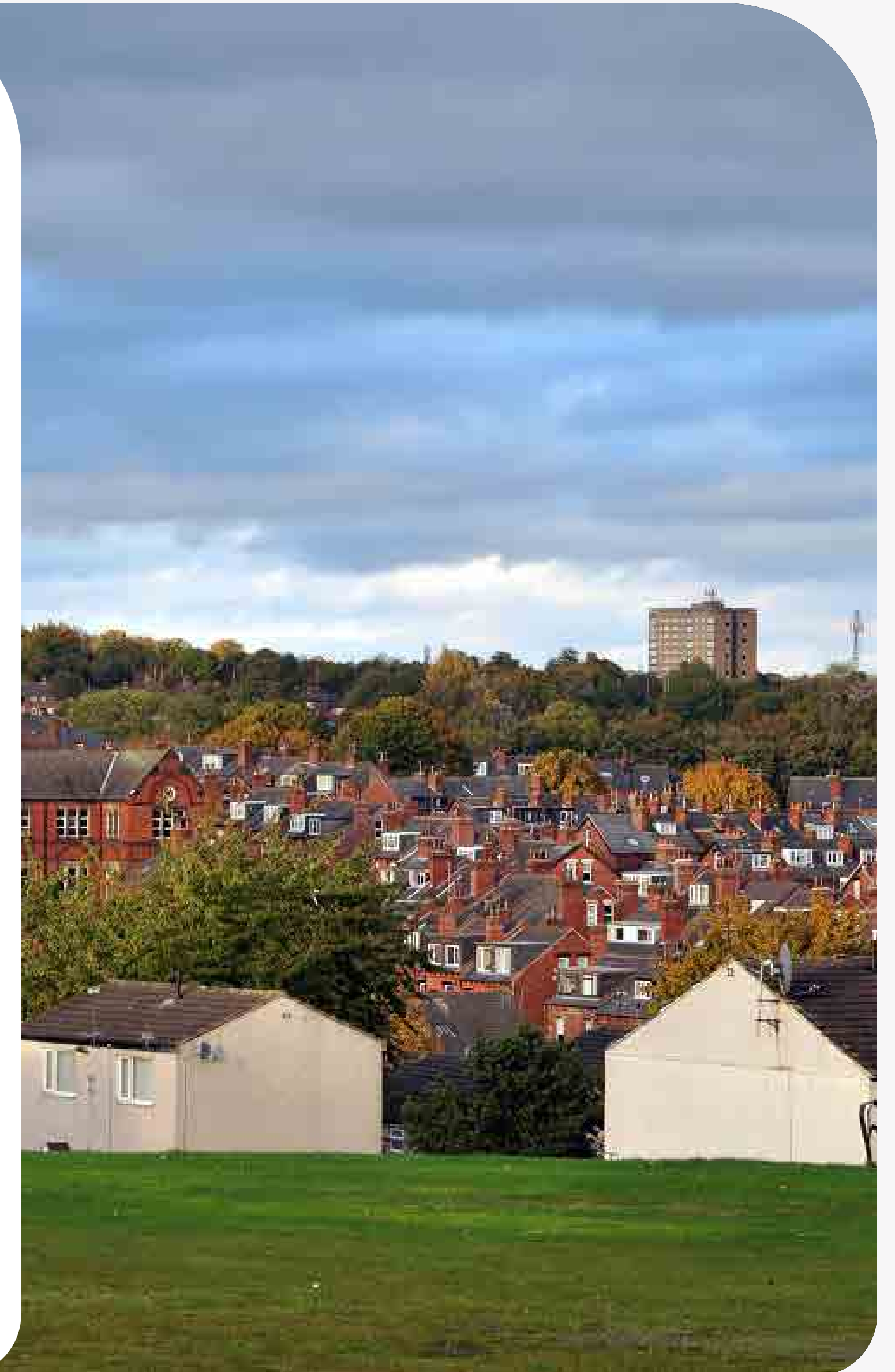
What equivalent tool or service is available in your area?

Take a look at these examples from [Liverpool](#) and [Greater Manchester](#).

INVESTIGATE

Mapping Local Risk

- What are the local risks which can lead to social tenants becoming homeless or homeless at home?
- Is it serious violence? Domestic abuse? Hate crime? Do you have a high number of care leavers who need to move due to risk of exploitation?
- Where are the local pressure points in terms of social housing?
- Is there a shortage of larger properties? Are there issues with desirable and less desirable areas?
- How could you learn more about local risks and social housing pressures?
- What information do you already have, and where are the gaps? How might you engage with social tenants and other agencies to uncover the hidden picture?
- Who could be your potential partners in creating a managed housing reciprocal?
- Councils? Landlords/housing associations? Statutory and non-statutory organisations, e.g. the police, charities etc.? Are these relationships already well established? Do they need developing?
- What data is available to you to support your argument that a managed housing reciprocal would be a valuable addition to your area?





WHERE A MANAGED HOUSING RECIPROCAL SITS WITHIN THE BIGGER HOUSING PICTURE

A managed housing reciprocal is just one useful tool for individuals and families whose lives have been impacted by violence or abuse to secure safe and stable housing.

It can – and it should – be used alongside other housing pathways. A managed housing reciprocal is not a housing provider and cannot provide emergency housing. As a potentially lengthy process, nominating officers should be prepared to support applicants to find emergency or temporary housing where required, and to explore other avenues to safe and secure housing, e.g. a shelter, staying with a family member etc..

RESOURCE

The Whole Housing Approach

“The Whole Housing Approach (WHA) was first conceptualised in 2018 by the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) in collaboration with the National Housing and Domestic Abuse Policy and Practice Group. Whole Housing Approach Aims:

- Enable earlier identification and intervention of domestic abuse
- Reduce the number of people rendered homeless because of domestic abuse
- Enable survivors to remain safely in their homes where it is their choice to do so, or to keep their tenancy status if they relocate

[Standing Together, Whole Housing](#)



A word on funding

AN ETHICAL, PERSON-CENTRED APPROACH

For all funding scenarios, it's important to decide on key data and measure this from the start of a managed housing reciprocal scheme. As well as data, you may want to gather further information on individual cases, e.g. in the form of individual or composite case studies.

However, it's also vital to be aware of confidentiality, proportionality, and power dynamics. The priority should always be maintaining the rights and safety of individuals, and guarding against potential exploitation.

Asking people to relive difficult experiences – even if it's for the purpose of gathering information to secure future funding – can be retraumatising. Individual mental well-being always comes first. Consider different ways of gathering insights – for example, speaking to reciprocal staff and other professionals to share their stories and outcomes.

INVESTIGATE

Funding Opportunities

Scenario

You might already have funding, or you might be a decision maker who can allocate funds to establishing a managed housing reciprocal.

Ask yourself

What outcomes and data will your funder be interested in, and how will you track this? If your funding is time-limited, what outcomes will you need to demonstrate to your funding body at the end of the funding period? It will also be worth considering what outcomes will help you secure ongoing financial support once the initial funding has finished.

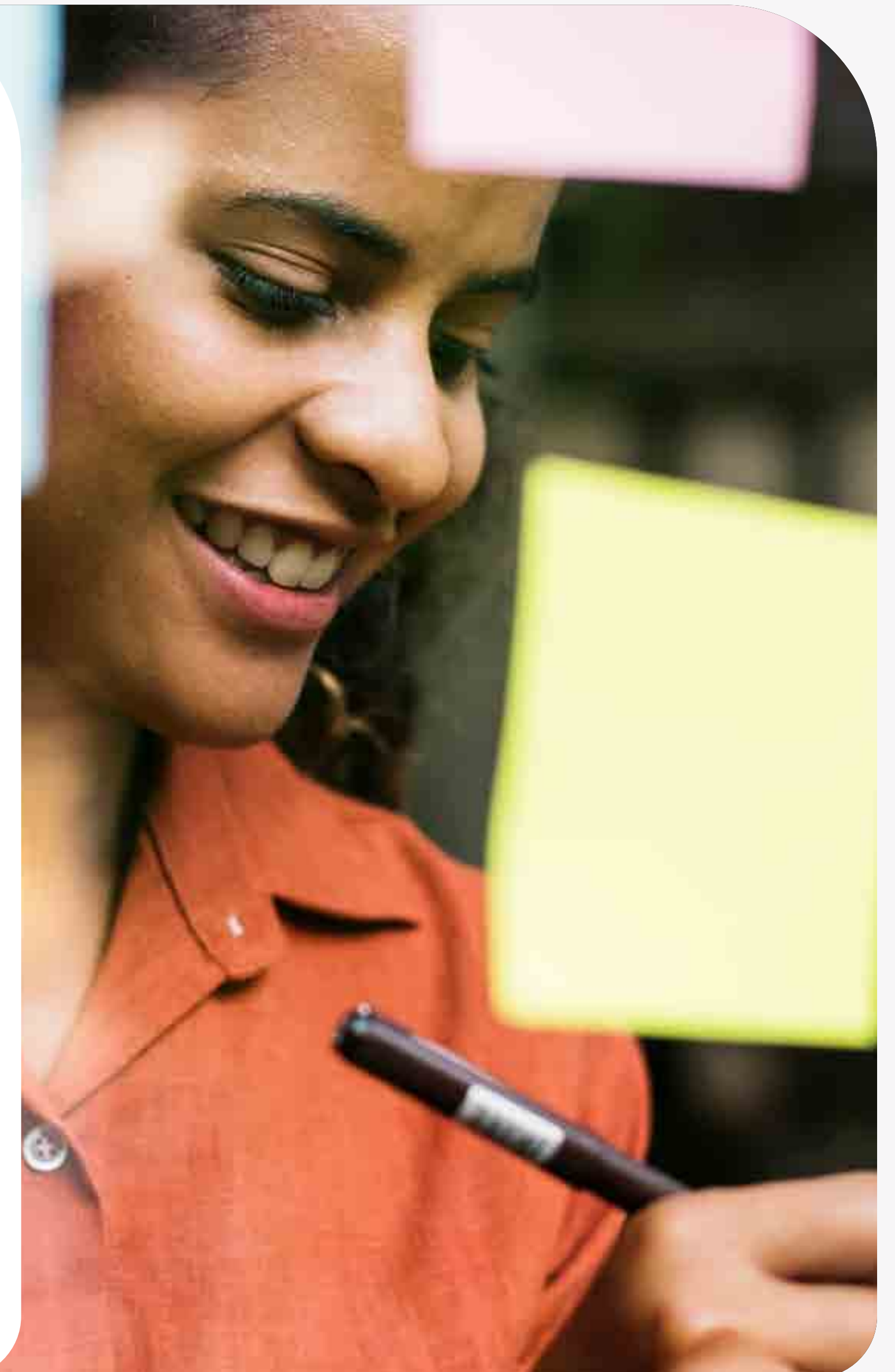
Scenario

You might need to apply for funding, or to persuade budget holders that a managed housing reciprocal is a worthy investment.

Ask yourself

How could a managed housing reciprocal solve a problem or meet a key objective for potential funders?

For example, consider the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and the introduction of a new duty on Tier 1 local authorities in England to provide support for victims and their children within safe accommodation, and for tier 2 councils to cooperate with the lead authority to achieve this – see more here.



The background image shows a multi-story building with a light-colored, textured facade. A series of satellite dishes are mounted on the side of the building. In the foreground, there is a black metal fence with a chain-link section. A tree with bright yellow-green foliage is visible on the right side of the image. A dark, semi-transparent overlay covers the bottom half of the image, containing the text.

SECTION 4

Relationships and Governance



“

Getting a reciprocal off the ground relies on relationships. Speak to key decision makers: local authority Chief Executives, the local Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) or Mayor, for example.

Then encourage decision makers to mobilise their key contacts: Heads of Housing, the Chief Constable, Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), as well as local specialist statutory and non-statutory agencies: everyone from adult and children's social care to charities.

Get everybody involved in an agenda that everyone's invested in, work out who can do what and then move towards taking action.

”

Sherry Peck*Chief Executive Safer London*



Identifying and engaging stakeholders and partners

A managed housing reciprocal is a multi-agency approach. As Safer London CEO Sherry Peck says, “getting the relationships right” is important for a successful and sustainable managed housing reciprocal.”

To be considering a managed housing reciprocal, there must be some recognition of local need. The first stage of the process is to ensure that other high-level decision makers:

- Acknowledge and understand this need
- Recognise the potential impact of a managed housing reciprocal
- Are motivated to join forces around a shared agenda and explore the possibility of establishing a managed housing reciprocal

RESOURCE

Working Together Agreement

Although a Managed Housing Reciprocal is essentially a good faith partnership, a Working Together Agreement helps get everyone on the same page, reassures participants and creates a sense of commitment.

This [Working Together Agreement](#) template could help you draft your own version.

RECOMMENDATION

Good governance and making it ‘official’

When partners come on board with your reciprocal, make it official with a Working Together Agreement.

This is an agreement between the central coordinating function of the reciprocal and a housing provider (Local Authority or Registered Provider) outlining the essential roles and responsibilities of both parties.

While a Working Together Agreement isn’t technically binding, it makes sure that the signatories strive to carry out their roles and deliver their responsibilities to the best of their ability.

It helps build confidence within the scheme that partners are committed and won’t walk away owing properties. It’s also a helpful reference point for parties to refer back to at key points, e.g. when personnel change.

INSIGHT

Getting partners on board – costing exercise

It’s well-documented that temporary housing is an expensive and short-term solution for housing providers.

It’s also hugely disruptive to individuals and families, and that disruption has significant and far-reaching consequences.

When Safer London was commissioned by the Mayor’s Office of Policing and Crime to get the PLHR off the ground, the start-up team heard about the pressures housing teams were facing to get an individual or family away from risk and into temporary accommodation as quickly as possible. Focus was understandably on the short-term, with less emphasis on the medium or long term situation.

In the case of the PLHR, Safer London got partners on board with a costing exercise, showing them the difference between the costs of the reciprocal route – personal, as well as economic and social – and the comparative costs when someone is housed in temporary accommodation.



SECTION 5

Recruitment and Resource



FINDING THE RIGHT PEOPLE AND PROCESSES

What constitutes ‘the right people’ (or person) will depend very much on context. Similarly, processes will depend on the size and nature of your scheme.

We won’t make suggestions about the number of FTEs required or specific data management systems you should use. Instead, we’ll share a number of insights and broad recommendations that will be useful in a range of scenarios based on our learnings from the PLHR.

RESOURCE

PLHR Coordinator – Person Specification

There are a number of technical and interpersonal skills required for the coordinator role.

This skillset could be found in two (or more) candidates, or you could look to employ one person with the full range of skills.

Knowledge, understanding and technical skills	Interpersonal Skills/Qualities
Strong background in data management and highly skilled in using a data management system such as Excel. Understanding of best practice and good quality case recording as well as a clear understanding of safeguarding	A strong interest in supporting households at risk from violence, abuse and homelessness
An adaptable learner who is process-driven. Will potentially need to pick up new processes and systems as the project continues and evolves	Commitment to diversity and equity, with experience of applying these principles in the workplace
Strong administrative skills. Will be dealing with case administration such as data inputting, dealing with enquiries, managing a busy inbox, circulating requests, matching offers, arranging meetings etc.	Clear, confident communicator and ‘people person’, with experience of building and maintaining professional relationships with a wide range of partners
Demonstrable knowledge and understanding of the link between violence, abuse, exploitation and homelessness and a willingness to develop this knowledge and understanding further	Self-motivated, proactive, trustworthy, resilient, able to prioritise and have a sensitive, supportive approach to work



Creating a robust recording system

Managed housing reciprocals might use a widely available programme like Excel or opt for customised software – again, your choice depends on a number of factors including funding and your team’s skillset.

However, all managed housing reciprocals will need a robust recording system to record the considerable amount of data connected with each application.

Remember, before an application can be communicated to housing providers and risk assessors, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) information needs to be removed in order to ensure fairness and safety.

RECOMMENDATION

PLHR Referral Form

The PLHR referral form can give you an idea of what data you can or should be recording.

The PLHR referral form includes data headings such as consent, eligibility, requested property details, current property situation, safe and unsafe areas, dependants, pets, reason for reciprocal request and more.

Any identifying data is removed before sending a property request to housing providers. Accurate recording of data is important to the smooth running of the reciprocal process, but will also be important for communicating impact to partners, stakeholders and funders (in line with GDPR/data collection laws, as above).

We use a case management case recording system called Apricot. However, you may choose to use a Word or Google document, and then an Excel document or similar using the same headings.





“

At the PLHR, each application is given an anonymous number for recording and tracking purposes.

The applicant's personal details are only used by the nominating officers and they are the only partner who has direct contact with the applicant(s).

This is absolutely integral to the process: it keeps applicants safe while ensuring that they avoid unfair treatment or unconscious bias.

”

Safer London

Managed Housing Reciprocal Coordinator



RESOURCE

PLHR Application Information Requirements

The criteria you put together for your managed housing reciprocal will prove to be your most important resource as time goes on. Take a look at this table which highlights the information we need to process an application through the PLHR depending on the risk faced by the applicant(s). Could you explore which criteria are relevant to your context and which would need adapting/removing?

RISK	Domestic violence and abuse	Sexual violence and abuse	Sex trafficking, sexual exploitation and modern slavery	So-called honour based violence, FGM and forced marriage	Stalking	Hate crime	Serious violence
Indicate boroughs of risk	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Indicate safe boroughs	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Nominating officer and supportive measures in place, such as securing a Resettlement officer when required	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Risk assessor required*							X
Select FIVE boroughs	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Suitable property offer capped at ONE per applicant	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Ensuring nominating officers are fulfilling their obligation to provide relevant support and aftercare	X	X	X	X	X	X	X



Establishing your reciprocal criteria and conditions

In order to be fit for purpose and help people in a meaningful way, your reciprocal criteria and conditions need to address a local need or issue. For example, this could be a high percentage of domestic abuse cases or concentrated levels of serious youth violence in particular areas.

It also needs to be:

- Written in a clear and unambiguous manner
- Easy for a large number of disparate professionals to locate and refer to
- Regularly revisited and communicated to key partners, as staff turnover and changes to responsibilities can have a significant impact

INVESTIGATE

Successful Communication

How to clearly and continually remind partners about your reciprocal criteria and conditions

- Could emails to partners contain a link to the managed housing reciprocal criteria and conditions e.g. in an email signature?
- Could you track queries from nominating officers and named leads to identify any repeated questions?
- Could you make use of virtual forums or Q&A sessions to address these quickly and conveniently as they arise?





INSIGHT

Changing Criteria

“We’ve changed our reciprocal criteria at the PLHR as time has gone on. We looked at what was working and what wasn’t.

Previously, applicants could turn down a property and go back onto the reciprocal list. Under the new criteria, however, an application will be withdrawn from the scheme if the applicant turns down a property deemed safe and appropriate. A property can only be refused on the basis of risk, i.e. if the application declares a particular risk or a risk is later identified by the risk assessment, or if the applicant has a physical, medical or mental/emotional well-being need which cannot be accommodated by the property.

We also won’t accept an application unless an applicant can name at least five safe boroughs – apart from in cases where applicants are fleeing serious violence. Previously, we had applicants naming only one borough, and it just wasn’t possible to place them with such restricted criteria.

Evaluation and reviewing is a really important part of the process.”

Managed Housing Reciprocal Coordinator



SECTION 6

Day-to-Day Operations



Process driven operations

The day-to-day running of a managed housing reciprocal is driven by a large range of processes and procedures.

It requires high-level administrative and data management skills, as well as clear and professional communication.

RESOURCE

PLHR Property Offer Process

To ensure the scheme is fair for all applicants, we follow a strict process flowchart when offering properties.

At the PLHR we have a process flowchart for applicants affected by domestic violence, sexual abuse, hate crime and other forms of community risks, and a separate process flowchart for young Londoners affected by violence who have applied to move through the scheme.

These process flowcharts help guide us through each application and ensure those fleeing risks are offered suitable properties based on their needs.

[PLHR property offer process flowcharts](#)





INSIGHT

A day in the Pan London Housing Reciprocal – the Coordinator’s perspective

‘My day begins with checking for new referrals to the PLHR scheme. I need to assess any applications to make sure we have all the information we need – does the applicant have a social tenancy, or are they owed one? Do they have any medical needs? Have they named five safe areas or have they named risk areas? In cases of serious youth violence, has the nominating officer named a risk assessor? Have safeguarding measures been put in place by the nominating officer?’

Once I’ve received and recorded the application, I ask for approval from the named lead. Once approved, we circulate new referrals to our partners in batches – without any identifying information, of course. Then we’re busy answering enquiries on other applications, completing follow-ups and processing property offers. We receive automatic reminders from our case management system – ‘What was the outcome of this viewing?’, for example – but if you don’t have an automated system, you’d need a way of triggering these reminders.

Applicants to the PLHR receive priority on Housing Moves, which is the standard scheme for social housing tenants looking to move within the capital. So we also verify those applications, inform applicants of their log-in details and guide the nominating officers through the property bidding process.

Later, we might be busy with administrative tasks not directly related to individual applications, but nevertheless vitally important to the smooth running of the PLHR.

We send out details of the properties owed to the scheme – we email each partner every month to say how many applicants referred from that housing provider have been rehoused elsewhere, the number of applicants on the list who want to move to their area, as well as the number of applications on hold if the partner owes properties to the scheme.”



INSIGHT

Top tips from the PLHR team

“Have a shared or central inbox, with email categories and categories for individual team members. If you have more than one member of staff or a job share situation, these are so helpful. You can file everything, find it easily when a query or a follow-up is needed and can assign different tasks or cases to different team members. Colour-coding also helps if you have that functionality.

“Create a bank of email templates. At the PLHR, the team has created a frequent messaging document compiled of the kind of emails we have to send regularly. They include an introductory explanation of the scheme and its processes, a circulation email to local authorities and registered providers, application inactivity and many more. Obviously they have to be adapted for each case, but nevertheless they save us a lot of time.

“Track everything from day one, even if you’re using the simplest of Excel documents. Don’t worry too much about waiting for the funder or anyone else to state their wants – once you’ve created a set of criteria and a referral form, you’ve already got a set of data you can begin to record and track. You can always go back and make additions or remove categories if you need to.

“Regular meetings with partners is a really helpful idea. Give them an opportunity to ask questions, talk about the challenges and how to improve the scheme. They’re the

people using it day in, day out, and if you don’t have a forum in place, you won’t benefit from their insight.

“Develop FAQ documents for professionals and tenants. These should be organic and adapted based on the queries that come in. Having these documents can help in the long run for smooth running.

RESOURCE

PLHR Guides and Templates

Safer London has created a number of documents that are mentioned in the ‘top tips’.

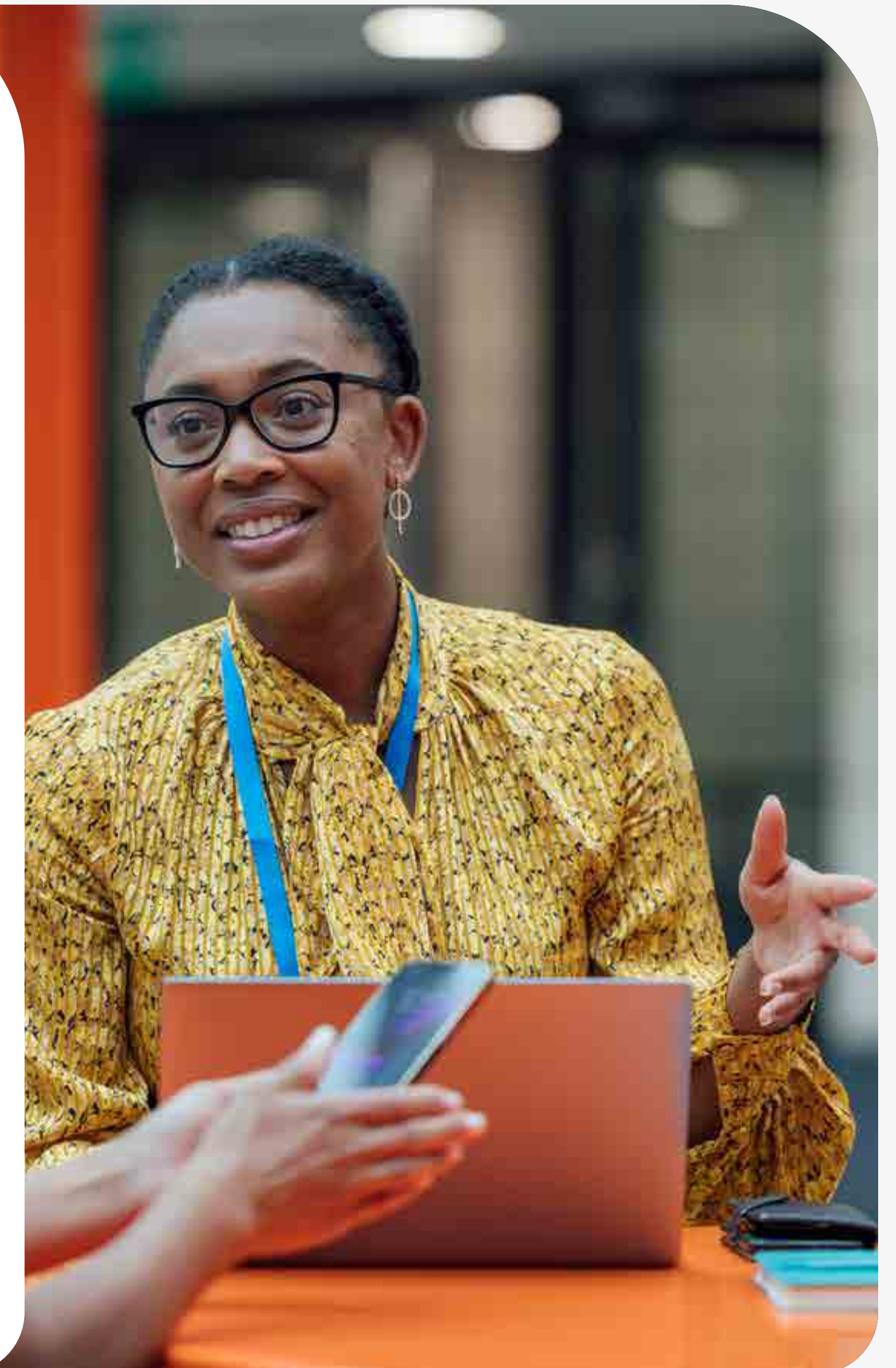
These documents could guide or inspire your own.

[Frequently used communications](#)

[PLHR tenant’s guide](#)

[PLHR professionals guide](#)

[Frequently Asked Questions](#)





SECTION 7

Being Sustainable



Monitoring and reviewing outcomes and processes

Gathering feedback from all touch points across the reciprocal journey – applicants, nominating officers, named leads etc. – is important to help understand your impact.

It helps you see what's working well and what needs to be improved. It also allows you to prove outcomes and impact to funders, and keep partners and stakeholders informed of your progress and keep them invested in the scheme.

From 2017 to June 2022...

476 Adults and children have moved to safe, secure homes

210 Were facilitated by the PLHR

1012 Property request were made

2066 Referral enquiries were received

576 Property offers have been made

51% of applications have been from individuals/families fleeing domestic abuse. **71%** of referrals have been from lone female parents

191 Applicants identified as having a disability

INVESTIGATE

Successful Communication

How to clearly and continually remind partners about your reciprocal criteria and conditions

- Could emails to partners contain a link to the managed housing reciprocal criteria and conditions e.g. in an email signature?
- Could you track queries from nominating officers and named leads to identify any repeated questions?
- Could you make use of virtual forums or Q&A sessions to address these quickly and conveniently as they arise?



INSIGHT

PLHR criteria before and after

In section five, we talked about how the PLHR criteria had to change when it became apparent certain aspects – allowing applicants to turn down a property, for example, or make an application without naming at least five safe areas– were making positive outcomes less likely.

In part, this was informed by monitoring data. At the time – December 2020 – some applicants had already moved but their application was still with the PLHR as we hadn't been made aware. In other cases, the nominating officer contact had changed and some applicants' risk had changed.

The PLHR team had also realised that, without a cap, housing providers could end up significantly 'in debt' to the system – so changes were also made to the criteria the named leads had to fulfil. We also consulted with commissioners to ensure we were fulfilling contractual obligations.

Take a look at the some examples of the PLHR criteria changes, for an insight into how monitoring data can inform positive changes.

After reviewing data:

- Applicants affected by domestic and/or sexual violence, VAWG, hate crime and other community safety risks had to select a **minimum of five London boroughs**.
- Property offers were **capped at one offer per application**.
- Floor requirements were accommodated for those with **evidenced medical needs only**.





Partner engagement and communication

Once up and running, effective engagement and communication will be a helpful tool to keep partners invested and informed about your reciprocal.

However, like so much, the exact nature of it will be informed by your context.

INVESTIGATE

Engaging partners and stakeholders

Questions to ask on how to engage partners and stakeholders:

- **What kind of engagement are you going to use?**
What would your partners and stakeholders benefit from? How regularly?
- **What format?**
Face-to-face, online or hybrid? What structure? Who will schedule, set the agenda and chair them to ensure that they're purposeful and productive?
- **Have you asked your partners and stakeholders for their view?** If yes, have you asked them again recently?

- **What about other types of communication?**

Emails, newsletters, social media etc.? In this case, you're the one with access to all the information and data, so it may be a case of coming up with a format and a schedule and then building in a mechanism for regular feedback.

- **How could you make communication an active, collaborative dialogue for partners and stakeholders?**

A managed housing reciprocal is a multi-agency, partnership initiative. How could you encourage partners and stakeholders to be an active part of it? Could you ask different people to chair meetings? Could more experienced nominating officers and named leads lead a Q&A session along with the coordinator, for example?



Setting up an Operational Guide

To guard against issues arising from staff absence, changes to staffing, funding etc., it is best practice to have an operational guide in place so that the future of your managed housing reciprocal is assured.

We hope that this toolkit is a great start, but you'll need to build on it. An operational guide will include sufficient detail to guide individual staff, some of whom may be new to the reciprocal and expected to support its smooth running.

As well as providing an overview to the background of the project, it also offers an operational structure and delivery. The idea is to produce a handbook which relevant personnel and/or stakeholders can pick up at any point and use to understand how your managed housing reciprocal works and is delivered on a daily basis.





Steering groups

Steering groups are advisory bodies that are made up of senior stakeholders or experts that provide guidance on a lot of different issues – for example, funding, financial management, safeguarding and social housing.

Rather than being involved in the operational day-to-day of a managed housing reciprocal, they ‘steer’ the project strategically to ensure that it remains true to its core aims and is fit for purpose.

INVESTIGATE

Making steering groups fit for purpose

Questions you might ask yourself when establishing a steering group for your managed housing reciprocal:

- Is your group representative of the people you wish to serve?
- Do you have a diverse range of people with relevant skills and experience, including lived experience of fleeing risk?
- How will you ensure the group works together to make balanced, collective decisions?
- What training and support can you provide steering group members to help them in their role?
- How will you gather and present information to your steering group?
- How will they interact and relate to the managed housing reciprocal team?
- What will you do to resolve problems within your steering group?



Adapting and going beyond reciprocals

Once you have a group of partners working together on a project and have established a managed housing reciprocal, it can be natural to think ‘what next?’

You’ve got a group who share a purpose and a goal together – how else could this be utilised?

INSIGHT

Utilising partnerships and knowledge

Domestic homicides more than doubled in the first three weeks of the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown.

However, the PLHR partnerships were well established at this time, and helped support the development of an emergency housing pathway.

This helped victims of domestic abuse who found that their situation became more acute and dangerous during lockdown find safe short-term accommodation.

[You can read more about this work here.](#)





THOUGHTS FROM NOMINATING OFFICERS AND NAMED LEADS

Asking partners for their views – both positive and negative – and their advice on how to improve things, is a big part of keeping them engaged in the work of your managed housing reciprocal.

In producing this toolkit, we asked our partners for their thoughts on the reciprocal's impact and what they'd want people to know about their role. We've shared some of their thoughts here.



For a client affected by hate crime, the emphasis on anonymity is so important and helpful. It's an absolute fundamental for a managed housing reciprocal.

Nominating officer



The scale is helpful. There's power in numbers and partnership working, and the PLHR is something everyone has a stake in. It gives me more clout when I'm looking to rehouse a client.

Nominating officer



Be aware that properties are often let unfurnished, and often without carpets. Prepare clients for this from the start of the process and do your research. Are there charities or funds that your client can access?

Named lead



Be aware that exploring lots of different avenues for a house move can lead to lots of 'no's – that is, until the right solution comes along. Those denials can be very wearying, though, for a person or family in a tough situation. You'll need to be ready to support them.

Named Lead





THOUGHTS FROM NAMED LEADS AND NOMINATING OFFICERS



Aftercare is really important. An applicant who's been through a successful move may well have lost access to their usual support services. Not all organisations can provide this to the same degree, but it would be useful to know how long they can support clients for after a move and standardise it a little bit so that everyone has a chance of settling and integrating successfully into their new area.

Nominating officer



You get what you give - it's on you to be organised with reference numbers and making sure that you're fulfilling the criteria. You've got to play the game too.

Nominating officer



There's a misconception that homeless means living on the streets. In reality, many victims of domestic abuse and other risks are effectively 'homeless at home', but too scared to leave because of the trauma and insecurity that's caused by leaving a long-term home. This is especially true in London, where there's such shortage of social housing.

Named Lead



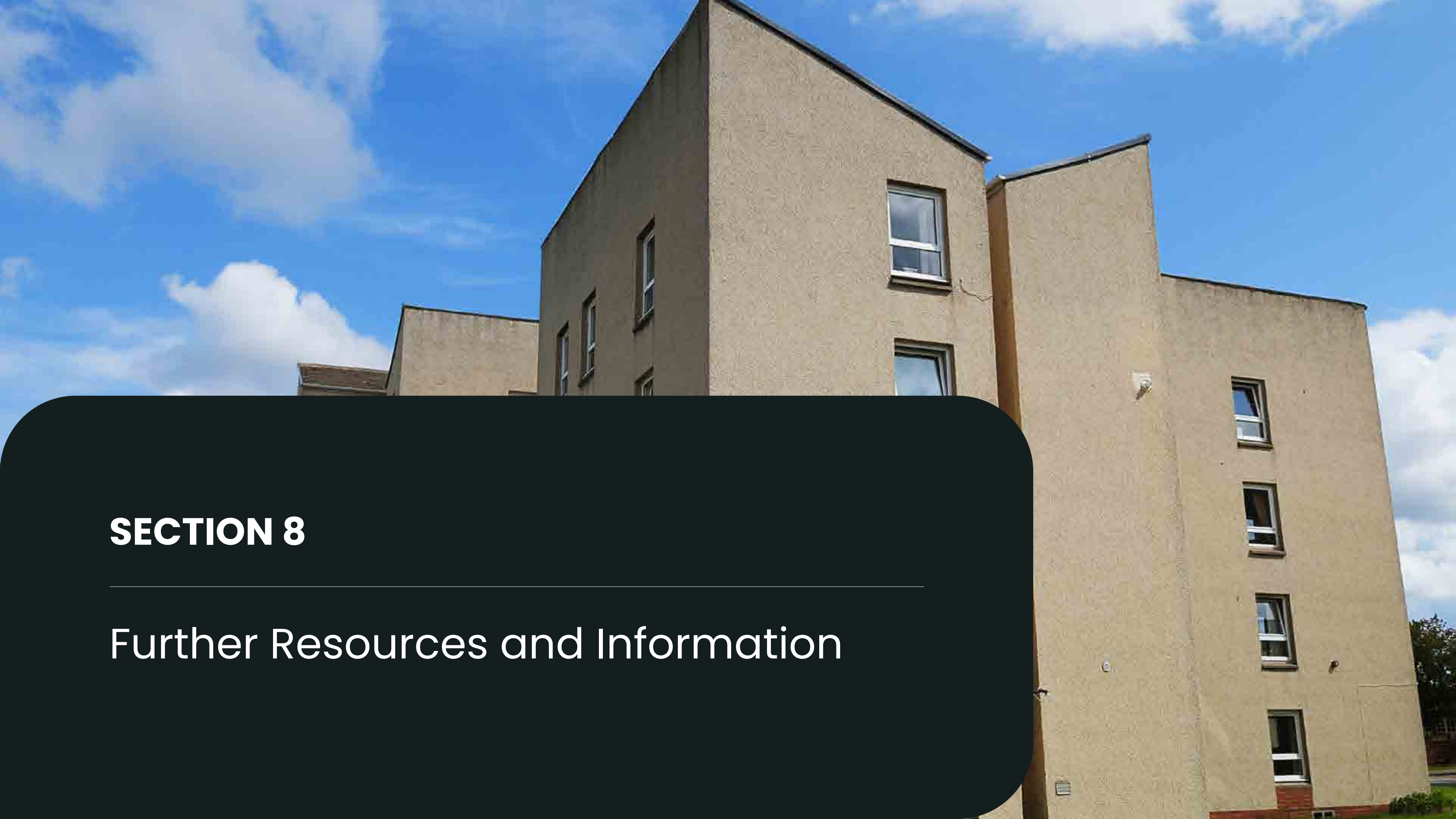
Generally, all housing providers want the same things for a move: id for all household members, the last three months bank statements (these need to be full statements), proof of work and/or benefits and a current photo of the tenant. Obviously it won't always be possible to provide all of these, but communicating this need to tenants and starting the process of tracking paperwork down early can really help the process run more smoothly.

Named Lead



We have to manage clients' expectations as well. A reciprocal is a tool, and it should be one of several things that you're prepared to try in order to escape a situation. Don't have the attitude that if you've submitted an application to a managed housing reciprocal that your job is done - it isn't. What else can you do? What other options are available to you?

Nominating officer



SECTION 8

Further Resources and Information



Further support

We hope that you’ve found this toolkit helpful.

If you have any further questions, we’re open to having conversations and assisting where we can. You can get in touch with the team via email at bd@saferlondon.org.uk.

USEFUL RESOURCES

[Safer London Pan London Housing Reciprocal Three Years On Report](#)

[Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance](#)

[Solace Women’s Aid](#)

[Standing Together](#)

[Galop – Hate Crime and Housing](#)

[Cambridgeshire Reciprocal Housing Scheme](#)

[Safe Lives: Safe at Home report](#)

REFERENCES

[Inside Housing \(2018\) How social landlords can help people leave gangs](#)

[The Guardian \(2021\) Councils face call to prioritise gang victims for rehousing](#)

[Women’s Aid \(2020\) The Domestic Abuse Report 2020](#)

[DAHA Alliance Whole Housing Approach Cost Benefit Analysis](#)

[Gov.uk \(2020\) The Domestic Abuse Bill Factsheet](#)



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