

## Briefing 3: Long-term housing

**Objective: Clear, fair and consistent pathways into long-term housing across all London boroughs for survivors of violence against women and girls (VAWG). Pathways need to be developed both for those moving-on from crisis accommodation and for those who need to directly access long term housing (when safe and appropriate).**

In 2017 the London VAWG & Housing Group was established to promote access to safe and settled housing for those who need to move as a result of VAWG, through cross-sector and cross-organisational collaboration. This briefing outlines the issues and key asks raised on the theme of **long-term housing** from the Operational and Strategic meetings held on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2018 and sets out recommendations for best practice.

**Key ask 1: A variety of long-term housing options should be offered to survivors of VAWG including housing first, social and private rented sectors, reciprocal moves and sanctuary schemes**

**Key ask 2: Access to affordable long-term accommodation that is safe, secure and to an acceptable standard**

**Key ask 3: Smooth and timely move-on from refuge and other crisis accommodation to appropriate accommodation**

The importance of long-term secure housing for women and families to recover from the trauma of domestic abuse and other forms of violence cannot be underestimated. This paper complements the previous briefings on homelessness prevention and crisis response<sup>1</sup>.

**Key ask 1: A variety of long-term housing options should be offered to survivors of VAWG including housing first, social and private rented sectors, reciprocal moves and sanctuary schemes.**

There is no 'one size fits all' to enable all survivors to successfully leave abusive relationships and recover from trauma. One of the common issues raised by front-line workers is the failure to consider the long-term picture when providing crisis accommodation such as refuge space. The London VAWG and Housing group calls for **local authorities to offer a full suite of housing options that can address all the different housing needs survivors may present with at each stage of their journey to recovery.** Inter-agency collaboration and coordination is needed to achieve this. **All agencies involved in supporting survivors and multi-agency forums such as MARAC need to be aware of and advocate for a variety of long term housing options. Local authorities should incorporate this into their implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act (2018), and in planning their responses to survivors of abuse.**

A range of long-term housing options need to be considered, including transitional accommodation types such as second stage supported accommodation. Some survivors will need long-term supported accommodation, or adjustments to their existing housing situation such as protection in their own home

or floating support. Options need to address specific needs of rough sleeping women, as well as women coming out of prison or trying to exit the sex industry. One model developed to promote the variety of options is 'The whole housing approach' developed by DAHA, which includes all housing support types, from emergency accommodation to settled housing:



Whole housing approach to domestic abuse, developed by the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance

The whole housing approach requires an organisational understanding and response to VAWG to be embedded across all levels. **All members of staff should receive recurrent training (every 6 months) on VAWG and the range of housing options which may be appropriate.** Training should be trauma-informed and tailored dependent on roles of staff.

<sup>1</sup> Briefing 1 and 2 on Homelessness Prevention and Crisis Response available from: <https://saferlondon.org.uk/services/housing-policy/>

## **Key ask 2: Access to affordable long-term accommodation that is safe, secure and to an acceptable standard**

### **Early intervention**

The failure in considering the long-term picture when providing crisis accommodation such as refuge space results in too many survivors staying in multiple types of temporary accommodation before accessing settled housing. Survivors often have to evidence the abuse and repeat their story at each stage, which very often is re-traumatising. Early intervention is a key element of the 'whole housing approach' to reduce the number of temporary placements survivors' access. **Local authorities need to accurately record VAWG on their homelessness database, so staff can respond appropriately and women do not need to re-tell their story. A woman's stay in a refuge should be enough to evidence her experience of VAWG.**

### **Social Housing**

Due to the current housing crisis private rented accommodation is too expensive for people on a low or medium income and the social housing provision in London does not match demand. The result for people eligible for social housing is remaining on waiting list for years. The whole housing approach to VAWG therefore needs to be supported by a significant increase of genuinely affordable housing supply across London. The lifting of the Housing Revenue Account, borrowing cap is a step in the right direction and **local authorities should use this to increase their supply of social housing. A publicised and accessible public record is needed of Local authorities' progress to deliver their share of affordable properties as outlined in the Mayor of London's London Plan, therefore those who are not meeting the targets are held to account by the GLA and the public.**

**Housing providers also should work towards the minimum industry standards detailed in the DAHA accreditation.**

### **Management transfers and reciprocal agreements**

Survivors with a social tenancy at the time of fleeing abuse should maintain their housing status after fleeing, even if they stay in a refuge first. Dual housing benefit can be claimed while they keep hold of their tenancy and apply to the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal. Solace Women's Aid research into the housing status of women leaving refuge showed that only 38% of those who had a social tenancy when going to a refuge still had it when leaving.<sup>2</sup> This

penalises women for safeguarding themselves and their children. It also means that survivors stay in the property where they are at risk to avoid losing their secure tenure. **All social landlords in London should offer management transfers when possible and actively engage with the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal scheme to enable their tenants to move to a place of safety without losing their housing rights in the process.**

### **Private Rented Sector (PRS)**

**Every local authority needs to have a rent deposit scheme accessible for all survivors of domestic abuse and VAWG to help them, when appropriate, to move into privately rented accommodation.**

Currently local authorities can discharge their housing duty to individuals or households in priority need by offering them a 12 months private tenancy. **This should be extended to a minimum of two years for individuals or households who are fleeing domestic abuse/VAWG.** Local authorities should record the length of tenancy they offer survivors of VAWG.

The Local Housing Allowance rule for single people under 35 only gives them access to a room in shared accommodation and this can be unsafe or re-traumatising for young women who have experienced VAWG. **Young women who have experienced VAWG need to be exempt from the shared room rate (not just those leaving refuge/hostels)**

### **Accessible accommodation**

Social housing providers have a duty to comply with the Equality Act 2010 and should carry out equality impact assessments to ensure that no one is discriminated against because of a protected characteristic. The lack of accessible properties in London is a major barrier to supporting survivors with mobility needs. This disproportionately impacts survivors with a disability who we know are more likely to experience domestic abuse. The standards on the minimum percentage of wheelchair accessible social housing properties and the percentage of wheelchair accessible properties in new private developments set out in the London Plan are not implemented in practice across London. **MOPAC needs to restart the London Accessible Housing Register to evidence the lack of wheelchair accessible properties and ensure local authorities enforce the standards set in legislation. The GLA should also create a central pot of accessible properties, some of which should be made available to applicants moving through the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal.**

<sup>2</sup> Solace, 2016, The Price of Safety, [https://www.solacewomensaid.org/sites/default/files/2018-](https://www.solacewomensaid.org/sites/default/files/2018-05/Solace%20Women%27s%20Aid%20housing%20report_The%20price%20of%20safety_Mar16.pdf)

[05/Solace%20Women%27s%20Aid%20housing%20report\\_The%20price%20of%20safety\\_Mar16.pdf](https://www.solacewomensaid.org/sites/default/files/2018-05/Solace%20Women%27s%20Aid%20housing%20report_The%20price%20of%20safety_Mar16.pdf)

### Multiple disadvantage and housing needs

Many survivors of VAWG experience multiple disadvantage such as mental health needs, substance misuse, offending history or homelessness that are often intertwined with their experience of abuse. **Agencies need to recognise and address the complexity of support needs and consider Housing First pilots as a long term housing pathway for survivors facing multiple disadvantage.** Support workers have reported that mental health needs or learning difficulties/disabilities are not always taken seriously by local authorities when assessing a survivor's housing needs. For example a survivor experiencing panic attacks might not be able to take a lift, or a survivor dependent on their support network in London for their care would not be able to relocate far away. There is also a lack of understanding by housing staff confronted with cases of cuckooing (individuals taking over the home of a vulnerable person, usually to use it for drug dealing). These cases often include elements of domestic abuse/VAWG, and tenants can be penalised for letting people into their home and anti-social behaviour, often leading to eviction. **There needs to be more training and awareness in local authorities and housing providers on mental health and learning difficulty/disability and the intersection with VAWG and housing needs.**

### Key ask 3: Smooth and timely move on from refuge and other crisis accommodation to appropriate accommodation

The lack of move-on options is a London-wide issue and results in survivors staying longer than necessary in refuge. Not only does this delay the recovery process, it results in an ineffective and expensive use of resources. Refuge spaces are an essential resource that are meant to be short-term crisis accommodation. Women remaining in refuge when they are ready to move on prevent other survivors in need of emergency accommodation from accessing refuge, putting their lives at risk. Currently there is inconsistency in the move-on options provided in London. **Each local authority needs to set up clear move-on housing pathways for VAWG survivors staying in refuges or other emergency/temporary housing placements.**

The Homelessness Code of Guidance clearly states that refuge accommodation is not a substitute for other forms of accommodation<sup>3</sup>. Currently many Local Authorities unfairly request refuges to issue a 'notice

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities/chapter-21-domestic-abuse>

to quit' before accepting a women's homelessness application. In line with the Homelessness Reduction Act, **local authorities need to recognise women living in refuge as homeless and work with the refuge provider to provide appropriate move on accommodation.** There should be a designated, **specialist VAWG point of contact for each local authority housing department who will work closely with refuges to enable a smooth pathway into long term accommodation. This work should start when a survivor arrives at a refuge.** In Tower Hamlets for example local Pathway Managers support residents to move on from supported accommodation.

**Local authorities should give women in refuge priority status to access social housing,** as per recent Government Guidance<sup>4</sup>. As is proposed by the GLA, **the MHCLG should ring-fence at least 20% of the move-on budget allocated through the rough sleeping strategy to move on from refuges and other gender and trauma informed responses to women experiencing homelessness.**

### Resettlement and floating support

Front-line VAWG staff report that the lack of appropriate support when women are trying to access long-term housing is resulting in some women having to go back to emergency housing, or return to the an unsafe property. Moving to an unknown area can be daunting for anyone, let alone for someone trying to recover from the trauma of domestic abuse or other forms of VAWG.

Cuts to refuge budgets have resulted in staff being stretched and holding high caseloads. This has consequently impacted the resettlement support available when leaving refuge, such as accompanying women to property viewings. **Refuges need to be sufficiently funded to enable staff to provide resettlement support. Local authorities and other commissioners should incorporate and accurately cost resettlement support when commissioning refuge provision.**

Some survivors will need ongoing support after leaving the refuge, and some may have accessed alternative emergency accommodation. As such **floating support should be available for survivors after they move to a new area, in the same way as individuals leaving shelters/hostels receive via the Clearing House.** Floating Support workers should be trained in VAWG and trauma-informed care so they are able to give appropriate support.

### Financial move on support

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-access-to-social-housing-for-victims-of-domestic-abuse>

Another barrier to successful move-on front-line workers report is the lack of financial support available for survivors who cannot afford the costs of moving. Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) provided by local authorities are limited and not always available, and information on how to apply for them is often difficult to find. **DHP should be used to support survivors of VAWG to move to a new property. There needs to be improved accessibility of these and other resident support schemes. Local authorities should commit to making these schemes more accessible to survivors in their local VAWG and housing/homelessness strategies.** Support in accessing such schemes could be provided by the specialist VAWG point of contact detailed above.

**Second-stage accommodation**

Refuge accommodation is designed to be short term crisis accommodation to reduce survivors’ risk. For longer-term support such as court proceedings, immigration applications, or any other longer-term support needs, second stage accommodation is required, where survivors can stay two or three years. For survivors of trafficking for instance there needs to be more, longer term suitable options to take account of the trauma they have experienced and the lengthy recovery process. **Longer-term accommodation options need to include second stage supported accommodation for survivors who are not ready to live independently.**

**Recommendations Summary**

- Local authorities should provide a variety of housing pathways for survivors of VAWG, as developed in DAHA’s whole housing approach
- Each local authority Housing department should have a designated, specialist VAWG point of contact
- All social landlords in London should join the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal scheme
- Offers of accommodation in the PRS should be extended to a minimum of two years
- Young survivors of VAWG need to be exempt from the shared accommodation LHA rate
- Local authorities need to set up clear move-on pathways from refuge and other crisis accommodation, including giving priority status to access social housing
- VAWG should be recorded in homelessness datasets and a women’s stay in a refuge should be enough to evidence her experience of VAWG

- Floating support should be available for survivors who don’t need intensive support and/or after they move to a new area
- More funding is needed for refuge staff to provide resettlement support
- There need to be more accessible properties for survivors with mobility needs, both for short and long term housing
- There needs to be second stage supported accommodation for VAWG survivors

**Appendix: Practice Examples**

**Camden’s pathway service-** Hostels and supported accommodation for homeless people in Camden have joined together to offer a ‘Pathway’ towards independent living. This initiative aims to support service users to move to the most appropriate service as their needs change over time. The model includes four stages including assessment, specialist support, progress and move through.

**Camden, Islington and Greenwich - Refuge Resettlement**  
 - Camden, Islington and Greenwich are all using the HRA to proactively assist women in refuge to move on. e.g. Greenwich have a designated resettlement worker who works with women in refuge to explain the different pathways they can access.

**Rent Deposit Scheme – ELHP** The East London Housing Partnership runs a rent deposit scheme for women who don’t meet the Local Authority duty for housing support. The project offers resettlement support when relevant to help women access support services in their area.

**Rhea Project – Solace, Commonweal and Southwark Housing Solutions** -Rhea Project is a partnership between Solace, Commonweal Housing and Southwark Council, providing good quality, self-contained temporary accommodation, with support, to homeless women and their children, fleeing abuse in Southwark. Accepted applicants receive priority band 2 to enable them to be resettled from the Project successfully.

**Amari Project – Solace and Commonweal** - Amari is a partnership between Solace and Commonweal Housing providing 2<sup>nd</sup> stage self-contained accommodation with floating support for women who have been sexually exploited through trafficking or prostitution. The project provides vital long term support to help women cope, recover and move towards independence

**Southwark VAWG & Housing Model** - Southwark Housing Solutions (SHS) and Solace have created an excellent response to working with women feeling VAWG, including funding for a co-located advocate in SHS; a Housing First role working with women leaving prison; the Rhea Project (see above) and assisting all women who approach due to VAWG, including housing single women in PRS, even where there isn’t a full homeless duty.