

# Call to Action for social housing providers to prioritise victims and survivors of domestic abuse during Covid-19

## Call to Action

We are calling for councils and housing associations to prioritise people fleeing domestic abuse during the Covid-19 outbreak. The lockdown measures have resulted in a significant increase in physical and emotional harm to women and children experiencing domestic abuse, with domestic abuse charities reporting a surge in calls to helplines and online services and early reports of [domestic homicides more than doubling](#) since the beginning of the lockdown. Home is not safe for everyone. Now more than ever it is vital for the housing sector to address domestic abuse as their number one priority, ensuring every survivor can access the emergency accommodation and long-term affordable housing they need. We therefore strongly encourage local authorities and housing associations to consider the actions below.

### Prioritising domestic abuse in new lettings and transfers

In April MHCLG issued new guidance asking councils and housing associations to [continue essential moves for vulnerable people](#), in particular those at risk of domestic abuse or other forms of violence. Government also made clear that [isolation guidelines do not apply for those fleeing domestic abuse](#). Support services for victims and survivors are essential and need to continue. Specialist emergency accommodation such as refuge services can't respond to the increase in need alone. We need to work with them to find suitable and safe placements for survivors who need to escape their home. Innovative examples of crisis response are being implemented including [one in London](#) led by specialist Violence Against Women and Girls agencies, however these initiatives need to be supported by longer-term sustainable and affordable housing options.

Social housing providers have a key role to play to help rehouse people fleeing domestic abuse and offer suitable move-on housing for women leaving refuge to free up vital spaces. It is vital that councils follow [existing guidance](#) to exempt survivors leaving refuge and other forms of safe accommodation from residency requirements in housing allocations, as they may have had to move out of area to be safe. We also call for housing providers to include managed transfers and cross-boundary reciprocal moves in their emergency response to ensure that tenants are not trapped in an unsafe home during lockdown, and don't have to choose between homelessness and violence.

### Being innovative

We encourage lettings teams to implement [innovative practice](#) to continue lettings for essential moves while respecting social distancing guidelines and keeping staff safe. These include the use of video to carry out viewings, discussing paperwork over the phone, accepting electronic sign-ups, using key safes and supporting tenants with removals and set up. It is also vital to carry out regular welfare checks with tenants and residents, upskill staff to spot the signs and [ask about domestic abuse](#), and raising awareness about support services.

### Welfare checks and spotting signs of domestic abuse

Housing providers have a unique access into people's homes and are ideally placed to spot the signs of domestic abuse and help people whilst out delivering food parcels, carrying out routine welfare checks and carrying out essential repairs during lock down. DAHA has produced a comprehensive [Covid 19 guide for housing providers](#) with advice and scripts on how to safely check up on tenants during the lockdown.

### Raising awareness

We encourage housing providers to relay the [Government campaign](#) raising awareness about domestic abuse, and to give information on how to access support, listing key numbers on websites, social media and notice boards:

- Refuge's 24 hour Freephone National Domestic Abuse Helpline **0808 2000 247** and [web support](#)
- [Women's Aid chat](#)
- Galop LGBT+ DA Helpline 0800 999 5428 and [Online Chat](#)
- Men's Advice Line 0808 8010327
- Respect's Helpline for perpetrators 0808 8024040
- Silent help from the police: if unable to speak ring 999 and when prompted press 55
- [Resources for survivors and community members](#)

This Call to Action has been initiated by:

**saferlondon**



This Call to Action is supported by:

- Agenda
- AVA (Against Violence and Abuse)
- Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA)
- National Federation of ALMOs
- National Housing Federation
- Refuge
- Revive by Homefinder UK
- Safer London
- SafeLives
- Standing Together
- Solace
- Surviving Economic Abuse
- Women's Aid Federation of England