

# **Report to Housing Board on the review of the current Safe Accommodation Strategy and proposed changes for 2024.**

## **1. Introduction**

This report outlines the current Safe Accommodation Strategies in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough between April 2021 and March 2024. Two strategies were produced for the two councils respectively and these sit parallel and broadly cover the same range of provisions, services, and goals. This can be found on the DASV website [Cambridgeshire County Council DASV Partnership \(cambsdasv.org.uk\)](https://cambsdasv.org.uk)

Safe Accommodation Strategies must be reviewed every three years.

## **2. Context**

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 set in statute that Tier One authorities must prepare and publish a local strategy based on a robust needs assessment that sets out the ways in which provision for accommodation-based domestic abuse support will be developed, commissioned, and delivered.

Accommodation-based domestic abuse support includes provision of support to victims and their children in a range of settings, including:

- Refuge accommodation
- Specialist safe accommodation
- Dispersed accommodation
- Sanctuary schemes
- Move-on or second stage accommodation.

Alongside provision of safe accommodation, the following types of domestic abuse support have been provided:

- Advocacy support – development of personal safety plans, liaison with other services (for example, GPs and social workers, welfare benefit providers)
- Domestic abuse prevention advice – support to assist victims to recognise the signs of abusive relationships, to help them remain safe (including online) and to prevent re-victimisation.
- Specialist support for victims with relevant protected characteristics and / or complex needs (for example, interpreters, faith services, mental health advice and support, drug and alcohol advice and support, and immigration advice)
- Children's support – including play therapy and child advocacy.
- Housing-related support – providing housing-related advice and support (for example, securing a permanent home and advice on how to live safely and independently)
- Counselling and therapy for both adults and children

The strategy set out the overall, holistic approach to deliver a rounded offer of support to victims in safe accommodation.

## **3. Funding for the strategy**

The statutory requirements (Domestic Abuse Act 2021) led to a grant for the provision of specialist support with regards to safe accommodation of £1,140,318 for Cambridgeshire and £477,374 for Peterborough. The Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities have confirmed funding in 2022/23 and 2023/24. In future years this will be incorporated into the overall grant from the government to the Tier One local authorities

Across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, there were almost 3,000 individuals who received support via this funding stream.

## **4. Identification of local needs**

Key challenges for the Domestic Abuse system, are currently:

- Provision of easily accessible safe accommodation to those at risk of abuse and their children, acknowledging survivors' choice where it is safe, to stay within the county and near established links if provided with additional support.
- Provision of therapeutic support for survivors and their children who have experienced domestic abuse.
- Need for cultural competency among service providers, navigating highly complex circumstances for survivors, language barriers and concerns around immigration status.
- Ensuring support and training is provided across the housing sector in Cambridgeshire & Peterborough to continue to improve awareness of and support to, those experiencing domestic abuse.
- Ensuring a consistency of support across both urban and very rural areas.
- Domestic abuse data is not collected and collated consistently across all partners who work with survivors, to be able to assess local needs accurately.

**4.1 Local Need in Cambridgeshire & Peterborough**

- Estimated number of victims of Domestic Abuse (aged 16+) in Cambridgeshire & Peterborough based on the Crime Survey for England and Wales prevalence estimates for 2022/23\* - 32,000
- Police reported incidents of domestic abuse in Cambridgeshire 2022/23: 8247.
- Police reported incidents of domestic abuse in Peterborough 2022/23: 5045.
- Violence against the person accounted for most Domestic Abuse related offences in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough ranging from 77%-78% of all offences over the last four years. Arson and criminal damage were the next most prevalent category of DA offence, accounting for 7% of offences in 2022/23

**4.1 Local Need in Cambridgeshire & Peterborough**

- 32% of children responded that there had been ‘any physical aggression or any shouting or arguing at home in the last month that frightened them’ (Source: Data provide by Public Health from Health-Related Behaviours Survey Cambridgeshire & Peterborough) 2022.
- Referrals to the Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) service increased by over 25%, largely due to the increase in specialist staff and threshold for referrals. 3186 referrals in 2022/23.

**4.2 Joint Statistics 2022/23**

Number using the four refuge services (across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough) – 105 and most victims came from outside Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, mainly from the East and Southeast of England.

Number using the local Target Hardening Service (Cambridgeshire and Peterborough) to increase the security of their home, in conjunction with domestic abuse support –508.

Referrals to Mobile Advocacy/Outreach Support for those subjected to Domestic Abuse – 881

Cases referred to the Independent Domestic Abuse Advisor (IDVA) Service-3186

**5. Whole Housing Approach to domestic abuse**

The Safe Accommodation Strategy is based on a Whole Housing Approach model. Cambridgeshire County Council/Peterborough City Council and partners were one of the key delivery systems in developing and adopting the Whole Housing Approach (WHA), with funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) from 2018 to 2021, (now DLUHC).

This approach is endorsed by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, Nicole Jacobs, as well as being highlighted as good practice within the Domestic Abuse Act Guidance. The approach has enabled victims of domestic abuse to access safe accommodation regardless of the tenure of property and enables specialist domestic abuse staff to offer a range of flexible options with regards to increasing the safety of those suffering domestic abuse and their children.

A whole system approach is required to effectively address the key issues and barriers experienced by survivors, and to ensure they have access to a safe place to call home. The WHA model offers a framework for the domestic abuse and

housing sectors to work together to address the immediate and longer-term housing needs of survivors. The model incorporates the experiences of survivors, the expertise of system leaders, and established, evidence-based practice.

**6. How we are addressing local needs in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough – what are the outcomes?**

The following sections describe the services and interventions that have been commissioned to meet the objectives of this strategy. It also outlines the outcomes achieved through the Safe Accommodation work and how they have impacted upon service users.

**1. Refuge Support**

In Cambridgeshire & Peterborough, support costs are provided for four refuges, equating to space for 40 women and up to 72 children at any given time. Last year 105 adults used [\[VC1\]\[DE2\]](#) the refuges.

Refuges are available to those fleeing from out of area, and within area if there is a significant distance and this is deemed to be safe. Children’s support workers are funded within each refuge and residents can also access talking therapies.

In addition to this, refuges have access to “Flexible Funding”, to support those moving on from refuge, who will need resources to support their new home. All refuges are expected to be as accessible as possible to those with additional support needs, in line with “Refuge for All” principles.

**2. Dispersed safe accommodation.**

Dispersed Accommodation increases the options and choice for survivors across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The accommodation is primarily for residents in this area who are subjected to domestic abuse and provides access to safe accommodation those who are not able to live in a “traditional” refuge, including people who need a carer; large families; those with disabilities; people with pets; families with teenage boys (many refuges will not allow boys over the age of 12); people from the LGBT community; and those who have no recourse to public funds.

Being supported in this accommodation Being supported in this accommodation may mean the survivor does not have to give up their employment, move their children from schools, access new support services. Survivors can still access their support network if safe to do so, and they will have regular support provided by the Housing IDVAs (Independent Domestic Violence Advisers). Housing IDVAs who will support them to move back to their own homes with safety measures in place, for example Occupation Orders, Restraining Orders, and target hardening where this is safe to do so, or alternative accommodation if required.

The properties are furnished, with services connected and available across the county. Since the Safe Accommodation Strategy Report in 2021-2022, there are now eight units of dispersed accommodation in Cambridgeshire, a mix of 2-3 and 4 bed properties. These are let in conjunction with local Domestic Abuse organisations who provide intensive housing management and offer licenced accommodation.

**3. Housing IDVAs**

Across Cambridgeshire & Peterborough, a team of Housing IDVAs can offer a direct service to victims/survivors who attend a housing advice service. They are partially co-located in the housing advice teams and support victims/survivors, offering advice on safety planning and risk management. They also offer case management support

and deliver awareness raising training and advice to staff based in these departments. They also offer support to those in temporary local authority accommodation who have suffered domestic abuse.

Housing IDVAs are currently co-located in Huntingdon DC, East Cambs DC and Cambridge City Council housing advice offices and are linked with all the housing advice/options teams in Cambs and Peterborough, as well as building close links with local Housing Associations. This has led to shared learning between the housing teams and the housing IDVAs as well as building strong relationships between the IDVA service and Local Authority housing teams to the benefit of our clients. They are seeing clients at the housing office and supporting the wider IDVA service when IDVAs are wanting information in regards housing in their areas.

The Housing IDVAs receive regular referrals from housing teams, including referrals for clients who have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRTPF) (deemed ineligible for housing) and have been able to assist the clients with their Domestic Violence Destitution Concession applications and then once successful in gaining this, re-applying as homeless. These clients are particularly vulnerable due to their immigration status and the control exercised by the abusive partner.

Housing IDVAs supported 327 survivors between in 2022/23.

**4. Target Hardening/Sanctuary Schemes**

Target hardening/Sanctuary schemes enable people who have been subjected to domestic abuse to remain in their own homes and reduce repeat victimisation through the provision of enhanced security measures. This is delivered in conjunction with working with a domestic abuse specialist and a safety plan and legal orders as appropriate. During 2022-23 the Sanctuary/target hardening scheme went out to tender due to the ending of existing contract. 24/7 Locks have been providing target hardening for the IDVA Service since January 2023.

24/7 Locks work with clients referred to their service, they carry out inspections of a property and provide safety advice to households and install appropriate security aids. They respond to referrals swiftly and liaise directly with the individual to ensure that visits are carried out at a time that is best for that person.

During 2022/23, 508 survivors across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough were assisted by target hardening to help them feel safer in their own homes.

**5. Flexible Funding**

Flexible funding supports victim/survivors to achieve or maintain safe and secure housing. It is low-barrier and does not require victim/survivors to provide evidence of abuse and is not means tested but is available as part of an individual's domestic abuse support package.

Unlike most other funding sources, there is no set list of what will be funded, and victims/survivors are able to access whatever will make the most difference to their housing situation and their lives, in order that the victim/survivor and their children can stay safe. This will only be offered in conjunction with working with a domestic abuse specialist.

The purpose of the funding is to enable someone to remain safe, have a voice in what they and their family need rather than being told what they can have and remove additional anxieties on the individual around their household income and limited financial resources, particularly when they are moving to alternative accommodation. This can then reduce the likelihood of reconciliation with an abusive partner due to financial pressures on the survivor.

This funding supported over 160 survivors in 2022-2023

Examples of flexible funding provided: • removal costs • emergency accommodation • dash cameras in vehicles for clients experiencing talking and harassment • vehicle repairs following perpetrator damage • flights to return to safe home in Europe • fresh food for children and adults reliant on food parcels facing economic hardship or NRPF • taxi

journeys for safe travel to appointments – Court, GP, safe addresses • installation of CCTV/Security Systems for high-risk clients • clothing for adults and children needing to replace items lost or unable to retrieve after fleeing domestic abuse

## **6. DAHA Accreditation**

The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance's (DAHA) mission is to improve the housing sector's response to domestic abuse through the introduction and adoption of an established set of standards and an accreditation process. Obtaining accreditation not only enhances how housing providers interact with victim/survivors. It also strengthens the local area's coordinated community response to domestic abuse.

Currently, across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, Cambridge City Council have been reaccredited, South Cambridgeshire have gained accreditation. Huntingdon DC, East Cambs DC, Fenland DC and Peterborough City Council are working towards accreditation.

Cambridge Housing Society have become the first Housing Association to be reaccredited in East Anglia and Cross Keys Homes have gained accreditation and Havebury Housing Association are working towards DAHA accreditation.

## **7. Managed Reciprocals**

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Housing Reciprocal agreement is a voluntary collaboration between local authorities and registered providers which allows tenants with a social tenancy at risk of harm from domestic/sexual violence, to move to another local authority area and keep their social tenancy.

A Managed reciprocal move can be an additional housing option for those subjected to domestic abuse in social tenancies to move to different local authority areas in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough without having to make a homeless approach or arguing for 'special circumstances' via HomeLink or Jigsaw. They are a positive housing option for those survivors where the immediate risk of harm has been reduced, but because of the domestic abuse experienced in the property the survivor and their children continue to experience trauma and want to move away from the property and the area but may not be seen as an urgent priority for housing; or a survivor whose perpetrator is in prison but wishes to move before they are released.

The Housing reciprocal agreement demonstrates the positive collaborative work between local social landlords and IDVA Service in looking for housing options for those needing safe accommodation in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Referrals are made by IDVAs and local domestic abuse support services for clients to be considered for a housing reciprocal move and those referrals are shared with local housing teams and housing providers. This housing option is delivered in conjunction with 24/7 Locks target hardening and ongoing IDVA support. Local Housing providers in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough support the reciprocal scheme and 14 survivors moved via this scheme during 2022/23.

## **8. Therapeutic Support for adults experiencing domestic abuse**

To provide specialist trauma informed counselling and therapeutic support for adults who are victims of domestic abuse. In Peterborough, 65 adults received counselling whilst 55 did in Cambridgeshire.

## **9. Therapeutic support for children experiencing domestic abuse.**

It is vital to provide specialist trauma informed counselling and therapeutic support for children who are victims of

domestic abuse. Through Embrace, a charity dedicated to supporting children and young people who are victims of crime, 99 children and young people in Cambridgeshire and a further 43 in Peterborough have been supported through counselling.

## **10. Mobile advocacy outreach support**

This is a service which survivors can directly access across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, enabling survivors to access domestic abuse led outreach support. This service is open access for advice, information and support in a way which is needs led, trauma informed and supports the wishes of the person requiring support.

Working with survivors at locations of their choosing including a range of community settings where the outreach service can develop links with other community organisations. Support can be offered which includes safety planning, exploring and pursuing options for survivors to remain in an existing property and relocating if needed for safety reasons. Assisting, and advocating for survivors to secure stable housing, support with benefits and income management. Liaising with other agencies working with the client and their families.

The outreach workers have access to all elements within this strategy such as flexible funding, managed reciprocals, and therapeutic support. Following a competitive tender in accordance with Cambridgeshire County Council procurement legislation a new contract was awarded to DASS (Domestic Abuse Specialist Service) (Impakt) in October 2022. Impakt are now providing outreach support across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. 881 individuals were supported by mobile outreach services in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough in 2022-2023.

## **11. Awareness of domestic abuse among social landlords**

Working with local private landlords and local Private Rented Sector teams in the Local Authorities to increase the awareness of domestic abuse and how this affects their tenants, and awareness of how private landlords can assist where there is domestic abuse.

In 2022/23 hosted six online webinar's and attended local Landlord forums and steering groups, raising awareness about domestic abuse and how landlords and agents can identify and offer support to tenants experiencing domestic abuse.

## **12. Sheltered Accommodation/Supported Accommodation/Hostels**

All newly commissioned providers must have a domestic abuse policy for staff and residents. Ideally working towards or having DAHA Accreditation, or "Make a Stand" accreditation from the Chartered Institute of Housing.

Developing links with Sheltered accommodation providers is a priority going forward, recognising the increased risk and barriers for older persons experiencing domestic abuse. Training is available in conjunction with Hourglass and in 2022/23 an older person's DASH was introduced for referrals into the IDVA service.

Working with providers of supported housing and direct access hostels is a priority going forward, to ensure domestic abuse awareness and support options are available to those who access these accommodations. Often survivors living in these settings have complex needs and multiple disadvantages.

## **13. Victims with no recourse to public funds**

The Housing IDVAs and Mobile Advocacy Support Workers will work with clients with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) status to access the Domestic Violence Destitution Concession from the government where possible. Where a client is not eligible for this, they would still be eligible for all the options outlined within the strategy, except for local refuge accommodation.

#### **14. The interests of victims of domestic abuse & their children:**

The Domestic Abuse Act requires that the Partnership Board has:

- at least one person appearing to the authority to represent the interests of victims of domestic abuse.
- at least one person appearing to the authority to represent the interests of children of domestic abuse victims.

Through this strategy feedback mechanisms for victims and their children will be developed to ensure there is independent representation which operates from views gathered independently of the commissioned services

#### **Proposed changes to the current Safe Accommodation Strategy.**

To be included in the proposed new strategy:

##### **Shared Lives project LD survivors:**

This is a pilot scheme and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership are working with Cambridgeshire County Council's Shared Lives team to offer support to survivors of domestic abuse with learning disabilities. The pilot, led by a Shared Lives Co-ordinator utilises the Shared Lives approach of carers welcoming people with support needs into their own homes.

Carers and survivors are carefully matched with the intention of providing a long-term relationship. Shared Lives Carers receive full vetting and undertake mandatory training before they are approved, which includes home visits to assess the health and safety of the environment. The project follows on from a pilot lead by Shared Lives Plus in 2020 that successfully supported four survivors with complex needs using the Shared Lives approach.

The Cambridgeshire project focuses on survivors with learning disabilities who also have care and support needs and specialist domestic abuse support is provided by the IDVA Service. The Shared Lives Carers receive basic awareness training around domestic abuse but are not expected to provide specialist support in this area, instead their role is about increasing the confidence of survivors and giving them space to build independence from their abuser and consider their next steps.

To be included in the proposed new strategy:

**Eastern European IDVA:**

A dedicated Eastern European IDVA will be funded as part of the new Safe Accommodation Strategy.

Eastern Europeans are the largest migrant group within Cambridgeshire, and it is vital to have specialist IDVAs who understand the lived experience of Eastern European migrants and can communicate in their mother tongue where possible. Having staff with relevant language skills helps survivors with low levels of English to understand services and how to access them. Staff with cultural awareness and experience of working with specific nationalities helps survivors overcome cultural barriers to accessing services.

Many more migrants are living in private rented accommodation in Cambridgeshire compared to the overall population, with some of this accommodation sub-standard and in rural locations. The work of the Eastern European IDVA will link in with the current work within the safe accommodation strategy to engage with the private sector and will be vital in ensuring that survivors in this group are made aware of the domestic abuse support available to them in Cambridgeshire.

To be included in the proposed new strategy:

**The interests of victims of domestic abuse & their children:**

The Domestic Abuse Act requires that the Partnership Board has:

- at least one person appearing to the authority to represent the interests of victims of domestic abuse.
- at least one person appearing to the authority to represent the interests of children of domestic abuse victims.

Through this strategy feedback mechanisms for victims and their children will be developed to ensure there is independent representation which operates from views gathered independently of the commissioned services.

To be removed from the proposed new strategy:

**Housing First IDVA:**

- The role of the Housing First IDVA has been removed from the Safe Accommodation Strategy going forward due to financial viability.
- Supporting survivors experiencing domestic abuse who are sleeping rough or the hidden homeless (women are often missing from rough sleeping counts because they tend to be less visible than male rough sleepers due to the risk of violence on the street) will be a continuing part of the Safe Accommodation Strategy. Developing links with those agencies working with these individuals, to increase awareness of domestic abuse and the domestic abuse support available in the area. Delivering training to as well learning from these agencies how best to offer tailored support and increase engagement with these multi-disadvantaged survivors.

To be removed from the proposed new strategy:

**DAHA:**

The strategy no longer focuses on DAHA as this work is well underway with all district and City Councils either accredited or working towards accreditation.

**Delivery:**



- The strategy is the statutory responsibility of Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council and must be agreed by cabinet.
- This strategy will be overseen by the Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence Strategic Partnership Board and Violence Against Women & Girls Operations Group, in conjunction with the Housing Board.
- Once published a working action plan will be developed to ensure all elements are working in conjunction with each other and the needs of all victims are being met appropriately, and there will be mechanisms in place to ensure effective oversight.

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[VC1]It's draft, leave in, but this is wildly different to other numbers

[DE2]105 on DHLUC return for Cambs