

Leeds

Domestic  
Violence  
and Abuse

We can stop it  
together

# Support in Safe Accommodation Commissioning Strategy

2021 / 22



# Foreword



## Welcome to the Leeds Domestic Violence and Abuse Support in Safe Accommodation Commissioning Strategy.

Domestic Violence and Abuse is a serious issue, both nationally and here in Leeds. It has a drastic, negative, and long-lasting impact upon the safety, health and wider life chances of individuals, children, and families; and creates wider crises such as homelessness and financial exclusion.

Making sure that victims-survivors and their children have access to safe accommodation is an absolute priority for Leeds City Council that is supported by our partners. It is not a standalone issue but rather one that is inherently connected to other serious social challenges that we face in the city. I am proud that this strategy has been developed in that spirit of partnership. This strategy will enable us to meet our duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and provides us with a clear set of priorities and actions to deliver the support in safe accommodation for our communities.

To deliver this strategy, we need a joined-up and coordinated response, involving the council, the police, the voluntary and community sector, other partners, and the wider community. Our vision is for Leeds to lead the way as a beacon city where Domestic Violence and Abuse is not tolerated and where victims-survivors and their children know how and where to get the help they need. The implementation of this strategy will be underpinned by a robust action plan that will secure real change for our residents.

It sets out our partnership approach and redoubles our commitment to intervene as early as possible to support victims-survivors and their children to stay safe, report crimes and rebuild their lives. We know that support in safe accommodation is only one part of the whole picture in preventing and reducing the harm caused by Domestic Violence and Abuse.

Reporting incidents and accessing support is difficult for everyone, and we know that some communities and those with complex needs may experience additional barriers. Therefore, we are pleased to be continuing the close work between statutory services and the voluntary and community sector to meet the needs of the diverse communities in Leeds and to ensure that our services are easier to access.

We all have a responsibility to help put an end to Domestic Violence and Abuse and I thank everyone involved in writing this strategy for their continued dedication to preventing all forms of Domestic Violence and Abuse in our city, safeguarding our residents and supporting victims-survivors to recover. It is vital work in which I hope we will all play our part.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Debra Coupar".

**Councillor Debra Coupar**  
Deputy Leader & Executive Member for Communities

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Refuge is a safe place for me to  
rebuild my life  
Olivia, 32



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## INTRODUCTION

Leeds has a strong partnership response to Domestic Violence and Abuse through the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board (DALPB) and is working towards developing a holistic Domestic Violence and Abuse strategy over the next 12 months.

This involves the contribution of many partner agencies and strategic boards. By using this partnership, we can mobilise the resources of many different services to provide a response to victims-survivors that is needs led, trauma informed and reflects the compassionate city ethos.

### Our vision

Our vision is that through this Support in Safe Accommodation Strategy we want to give victims-survivors options of where they can live safely and be supported by responding to their accommodation needs.

We believe that Domestic Violence and Abuse is everybody's responsibility and requires a co-ordinated and pragmatic partnership response influenced by a survivor leadership model.

Domestic Violence and Abuse is both a cause and consequence of gender inequality, with women disproportionately the victims-survivors. Women are more likely to experience repeat victimisation, be physically injured or killed as result of Domestic Violence and Abuse and experience non-physical abuse (including emotional and financial abuse), than men.

We are committed to furthering an understanding that Domestic Violence and Abuse is both a gendered issue whilst also recognising and responding to the needs of men who also experience abuse.

We recognise the work to address Domestic Violence and Abuse is related closely to work to tackle Ending Violence Against Women and Girls. The new West Yorkshire Mayor is committed to Ending Violence Against Women and Girls and Leeds is committed to being a strong delivery partner to work with the West Yorkshire Mayor. The future work on the Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy will ensure robust connections are made to help speed up progress in all aspects of violence against women and girls.

The anonymised comments from victims-survivors about the value of support in safe accommodation are reflected throughout this document and we are deeply grateful to them for adding to this strategy.

### Our ambitions

In this Support in Safe Accommodation Strategy, we are seeking to:

- Make sure that victims-survivors and their children who need support and accommodation know how to find it and can reach safety sooner.
- Make sure that there are options for victims-survivors to remain safely in their home, or to move to somewhere safe depending on their situation and choices.
- Make sure that those who have complex needs such as mental health issues or drug and alcohol problems are also supported and helped to be safe.
- Make sure that our services take steps to meet the needs of people in groups who might otherwise have challenges; this includes but is not limited to people from culturally diverse communities, those for whom English is not their first language. LGBT+ individuals, younger and older people, street sex workers and adults with physical and/or learning disabilities.

We recognise that everyone's journey and situation is unique, and we will strive to help everyone reach a place of safety. We also know that some people face more barriers and challenges, and we will strive to improve our responses to make our services more accessible.



It's fine to ask for help and support, it helps you move forward.

Bianca, 29



# Our values

There are several values we hold in Leeds which will underpin our priorities and form a thread throughout our delivery. These include:

Ensuring victims-survivor engagement is at the centre of our approach

Adopting a Trauma Informed approach

Listening and responding to the voices of children who have lived with Domestic Violence and Abuse.

Striving towards being a Compassionate city

Ensuring we focus on the strengths and assets within communities

Maintaining the Think Family, Work Family ways of working

Recognising the value that providing accommodation and support in the community where a victims-survivor can access it, and the added value from wider community networks

Tackling poverty and inequality as both causes and consequences of Domestic Violence and Abuse

Delivering via a multi-agency partnership.

Engaging and supporting perpetrators around their abusive behaviour to enable victims-survivors to feel safer in their homes

Recognising and responding to people with protected characteristics and the barriers faced by victims-survivors

## The purpose of this strategy

- To inform the commissioning of support in safe accommodation for individuals and children who have experienced Domestic Violence and Abuse.
- To ensure the voice of victims-survivors and children influence the delivery of services.
- To set out our vision and ambitions that will allow our priorities to be achieved.

This strategy has been informed by a housing needs assessment that includes information from victims-survivors, service providers and data from services who provide accommodation-based support.

## Statutory context

The Domestic Abuse Act was passed into law in April 2021.

The Act creates a statutory definition of domestic abuse:

'Abusive behaviour' is defined in the act as any of the following:

- Physical or sexual abuse
- Violent or threatening behaviour
- Controlling or coercive behaviour
- Economic abuse
- Psychological, emotional or other abuse

For the definition to apply, both parties must be aged 16 or over and 'personally connected'.

We also acknowledge that Domestic Violence and Abuse can take place in many forms and in many different intimate and familial settings including elder abuse, peer on peer abuse, child to parent violence or adolescent to parent abuse, post separation abuse, honour-based abuse, forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

The Act places a duty on local authorities to provide support to victims-survivors of Domestic Violence and Abuse and their children in refuges and safe accommodation.

It also ensures that a child who sees or hears, or experiences the effects of, Domestic Violence and Abuse and is related to the person being abused or the perpetrator is also to be regarded as a victim of Domestic Violence and Abuse.

Through this Support in Safe Accommodation Strategy, Leeds City Council and its partners will seek to make sure that we are meeting the duties in the new legislation and as it develops, going beyond that to provide a holistic, wide reaching response to all those affected by Domestic Violence and Abuse.



# 2

## SCALE OF THE PROBLEM AND CRITICAL ISSUES

### Domestic Violence and Abuse in Leeds

There have been increasing trends in reported Domestic Violence and Abuse in Leeds over recent years. This has been especially true during the covid 19 pandemic, with demand increasing further when restrictions were lifted. There have been more high-risk cases (as identified by the DASH risk assessment) and within these, the levels of complexity have also grown. A significant proportion of Domestic Violence and Abuse incidents have had children present or living in the household. We know that reported incidents are only part of the picture and that there are many people living with Domestic Violence and Abuse who do not disclose or report abuse. Many don't recognise their experience as abuse, are prevented from accessing support or are not ready to make changes about where or who they live with. Victims-survivors also face challenges accessing services that are not responsive enough, unable to meet their diverse needs or unable to deal with high levels of complexity.

### What we currently provide

We have a range of services that allow victims-survivors to access support in safe accommodation. These include:

1. Specialist Domestic Violence and Abuse emergency accommodation and temporary accommodation.
- A commissioned women's refuge that is staffed 24 hours with adults and children's workers
  - Commissioned dispersed properties within the community for women, men and their children, support provided by staff based at the refuge.

- Two non-commissioned women's refuges staffed during working hours.
- 2. A range of other commissioned housing services which can provide support directly and able to link into the commissioned specialist community-based Domestic Violence and Abuse service.
- 3. An established Sanctuary scheme to provide security for those who wish to remain in their homes.

The main routes to access these services are:

- Leeds Domestic Violence Service 24 hour helpline
- Leeds Housing Options
- Direct referral to housing providers

Our Support in Safe Accommodation Strategy will build on this existing provision.

### Needs identified

We have carried out a needs assessment to determine the level of provision required to meet our duty under the Act. It provides a breakdown of the differing needs of victim-survivor groups and analysis of the current support in safe accommodation. This assessment analysed a range of data sets from within Leeds City Council, the commissioned Domestic Violence and Abuse service, other commissioned and non-commissioned providers of supported housing. It also included feedback from victims-survivors who had accessed support in safe accommodation or community-based support, along with a call for evidence from a wide range of partner agencies. Alongside the needs assessment, we identified needs that could be immediately met and commissioned during the current year. This was done through a series of conversations with Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), local agencies, victim-survivors and DALPB members.



I was anxious about leaving and bringing shame on my family. Now I know this was the right decision, I am happy so are my children. Aysha, 46





## Accommodation needs

- Shortfall in available accommodation to meet the presenting need; this relates to refuge, dispersed and move-on accommodation across all groups of victims-survivors.
- Limited availability of support to respond to the numbers of children living in refuge.
- More victims-survivors could be safely supported to stay in their own homes.
- Longer than average duration of stay in refuge which therefore limits the availability of those spaces.
- For people with No Recourse to Public Funds, the requirement to seek legal/immigration advice is a barrier to accessing safe accommodation.

## Support needs

- High levels of complex needs in particular victims-survivors with mental health issues and also including those with substance misuse issues requiring more specialist support.

- Limited capacity to provide specialist Domestic Violence and Abuse support for children and young people within safe accommodation.
- Support needs around financial and practical issues to enable people to move on in a safely and timely way.

## Foundations

- There are gaps in the current available data to fully understand the extent of failure of tenure and/or repeat presentations for support in safe accommodation.
- It has been identified that there are fewer numbers of male victims-survivors accessing support in safe accommodation as a proportion of the numbers of overall male victims-survivors; this requires further analysis.
- Women from culturally diverse communities are over-represented in refuge accommodation, but under-represented in reported incidents to the police; this requires further analysis.
- The extent of support currently provided for children via social care or early help whilst in safe accommodation was not addressed fully in the needs assessment and needs to be better understood.
- Recognition that the highest concentrations of reported incidents are from communities with greater deprivation and hardship, where families tend to have a range of needs and require a response that acknowledges these realities.
- There is a cost barrier to accessing refuge for those who are working.
- There is a gap in a co-ordinated approach to workforce development across the partnership.





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## WHAT WE WILL DELIVER

We have set three overarching strategic objectives. Each of the three objectives has a set of priorities that have been identified through the needs assessment, collaboration from a multi-agency working group and consultation with victims-survivors. An Action Plan will support the priorities by providing the detail of activity, timescales and performance measures for their delivery.

All the above will be underpinned by our vision, ambitions and values.

- 1. To improve support to victims-survivors in safe accommodation**
- 2. To increase the availability of accommodation options for victims-survivors**
- 3. Improving our responses to Domestic Violence and Abuse through a co-ordinated partnership**

### OBJECTIVE 1:

#### To improve support to victims-survivors in safe accommodation

*Priorities:*

- To improve responses and increase support to victims-survivors with complex needs (especially mental health needs) in safe accommodation.
- To improve the offer to meet the support needs of children in safe accommodation.
- To improve specialist Domestic Violence and Abuse support for those people (including young people) in other supported housing.
- Explore use of personalisation funds to address the financial challenges faced by those seeking to move on from refuge.
- Develop pathways to support people with complex needs to access timely accommodation-based support
- Develop resettlement and longer-term support
- To reduce the barriers faced by, and improve the support available for, groups with protected characteristics including ensuring accommodation is accessible for those with physical disabilities.



A place where I felt safe with my children. I was protected by people who didn't want to harm me. Nusrat, 40



Gave me time and space to heal. Michelle, 49







## OBJECTIVE 2: To increase the accommodation options of victims-survivors

*Priorities:*

- To explore the provision of specialist Domestic Violence and Abuse accommodation for those with multiple and complex needs such as addictions, mental health issues, involved in the criminal justice system, are sex working or street homeless.
- To explore the gap in accommodation to see how much of this would be addressed if people were able to move out of refuge and dispersed properties quicker, and potential commissioning of extra housing units if required.
- To increase the numbers who can access accommodation by increasing the numbers who successfully move on to other accommodation.
- To develop a Sanctuary support team to work with those victims-survivors and their children who remain in their own homes.
- To explore the needs for support in safe accommodation for male victim-survivors especially those with children.

## OBJECTIVE 3: Improving our responses to Domestic Violence and Abuse through a co-ordinated partnership

*Priorities:*

- Develop data capture and analysis to reflect need and demand across the population.
- Build on and develop the connectivity and relationship to other strategies (e.g. Leeds Housing Strategy currently under review) including working with other local authorities to meet the needs of victims outside of our area.
- Provision of training to increase awareness of Domestic Violence and Abuse, pathways, and support services and also to broaden understanding of the impact of high levels of deprivation and hardship on people's ability to access support and move on.
- Further embedding the Think Family Work Family model to ensure joined up support to victims-survivors and their children.
- Develop a plan for everyone to be aware of what safe and supported accommodation there is in Leeds and what it looks like and for whom it is for.
- To improve the identification of male victims-survivors and increase understanding of their needs for support in safe accommodation.
- Further understand and respond to the challenges faced by those with No Recourse to Public Funds as appropriate and within legal constraints.



The support was amazing,  
I never felt judged.  
Dave, 47



Being able to walk my journey  
with someone has  
been really  
beneficial. John, 27





## GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

### Who is responsible and accountable for delivering this strategy?

Domestic Violence and Abuse is everybody's responsibility and requires a co-ordinated and pragmatic partnership response.

The statutory duty for providing support in safe accommodation belongs to Leeds City Council. Funding has been allocated by DLUHC to meet our statutory duties to provide support in safe accommodation. The needs assessment and strategy inform the allocation of this funding. The Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board (DALPB) has been established to support the council by providing advice and will be consulted on:

- Assessing the local needs for support within safe accommodation.
- Preparing and publishing a Strategy to meet locally identified need.
- Giving effect to the strategy by supporting the commissioning decisions and delivery of quality services which meet the needs and priorities identified by our needs assessment.
- A mechanism to performance manage and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy in line with the requirements of DLUHC.
- Reporting on progress and how funding has been used to the DLUHC.

In delivering these duties the council and DALPB will:

- Ensure this strategy is delivered and meets the needs of victims-survivors.

- Engage with third sector partners through the Domestic Abuse Voice and Accountability (DAVA) Forum.
- Put victims-survivors and their children at the heart of everything we do.

Knowing what success looks like is critical. Leadership and accountability at every level of delivery will be worked through and must be clear and visible.

Due to the cross-cutting nature of the work, the DALPB has direct accountabilities to Safer Leeds Executive and relationships with the Leeds Safeguarding Children Partnership, Leeds Safeguarding Adult Board and other relevant Boards.

There are several strategies that sit alongside this one including:

- Safer, Stronger Communities City Plan 2021-24
- Leeds Housing Strategy (currently under review)
- Leeds Safeguarding Children Partnership – Children witnessing and experiencing Domestic Violence and Abuse Review Report
- Drug and Alcohol Strategy 2019-24
- Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (currently under review)
- Leeds Modern Slavery Strategy 2020-23
- The emerging West Yorkshire Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy
- West Yorkshire Victims and Witnesses Strategy 2019-21

We will aim to align with those strategies to deliver a coherent and joined up response.

## Our structure



We believe that to achieve our vision and ambitions, it's critical that the partnership collectively apply the following capabilities:

1. **Leadership and strong partnerships**
2. **Understanding and knowledge**
3. **Skills, confidence and motivation**
4. **Continual learning**
5. **Quality Assurance and accountability**

This Support in Safe Accommodation strategy will be reviewed in 12 months to ensure it remains current and aligns with the next phase of the Domestic Violence and Abuse strategy and action plan. Through our existing governance arrangements, victims-survivors and partner agencies will be encouraged to contribute to this review.



Life is good. Looking forward to the future.  
Anushka, 78



A close-up photograph of a young child with curly brown hair being held by a woman with long, wavy, light brown hair. The child is looking down and has a somber expression. The woman's hand is visible, resting on the child's shoulder. The background is a blurred grey brick wall.

Leeds

## Domestic Violence and Abuse

We can stop it  
together

For further information or  
to comment on this strategy please contact  
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