

St Helens Domestic Abuse Strategy 2020-22

Safe Accommodation Strategy (Addendum)

This addendum to the existing Strategy is in response to the new duties introduced by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

This Strategy sets out how the St Helens Domestic Abuse Partnership Board will implement the statutory duties that relate to safe accommodation. This Strategy identifies the current strengths in the provision of safe accommodation support in the borough and, using the findings of the Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment, outlines the future commissioning intentions to address identified areas for improvement.

Background

Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act places duties on St Helens Council to:

- Appoint a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board which it must consult as it performs certain specified functions
- Assess, or make arrangements for the assessment of, the need for domestic abuse support in our area for all survivors and their children who reside in relevant safe accommodation, including those who come from outside of our area.
- Develop and publish a Safe Accommodation Strategy having regard to the needs assessment.
- Implement the strategy through commissioning / de-commissioning decisions.
- Monitor and evaluate local delivery and effectiveness of the strategy and;
- Report back to central government annually

Since the production of this St Helens Domestic Abuse Strategy in March 2020, the partnership in St Helens has formed the St Helens Domestic Abuse Partnership Board, with a membership of senior representatives across statutory partners and agencies delivering support to victim / survivors of domestic abuse in the borough.

This addendum to the existing St Helens Domestic Abuse Strategy presents how St Helens Council, working in partnership and led by the Partnership Board, will respond to the Statutory Duty to ensure that all victim / survivors of domestic abuse and their families are supported in Safe Accommodation

In response to the new duty, in July 2021 the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board commissioned Linxs Consultancy to undertake a Needs Assessment for the borough and agreed that this Assessment would initially focus on the need for safe accommodation support in the borough, with the final report considering the wider findings scheduled for delivery in February 2022.

Aims of the Safe Accommodation Strategy

The St Helens Domestic Abuse Partnership Board has agreed to the following aims for this Strategy:

- Victim / survivors of domestic abuse residing in safe accommodation receive good quality support provision
- Gaps in existing provision are identified and that future commissioning is directed to address these gaps

- The support needs of the children of victim / survivors are identified and met within safe accommodation services
- Where safe to do so, victim / survivors have support options available to enable them to remain safely within their own homes.
- Voices and experiences of victim / survivors shape commissioning and new service delivery.
- Ensure that there is sufficient safe accommodation and support available for victim / survivors in St Helens
- Reduce the use of inappropriate temporary accommodation for victim / survivors
- Ensure that there is a good resettlement offer for victim / survivors when they move on from safe accommodation.
- Recognise the intersectional nature of domestic abuse and act to meet all of the needs of victim / survivors of domestic abuse.
- Ensure that support services delivered meet existing quality standards as outlined in statutory guidance.

Safe Accommodation

The Statutory Guidance sets out the relevant accommodation and exclusions in defining safe accommodation and as such provides a framework for commissioning support within services in St Helens.

Relevant accommodation - and therefore the accommodation within scope of this Strategy - is defined as:

- Refuge accommodation
- Specialist safe accommodation
- Safe dispersed accommodation
- Sanctuary Scheme properties
- Second Stage Accommodation (Move On)

Exclusions in the definition of safe accommodation that are not considered relevant for this Strategy are:

- Privately-owned and managed temporary accommodation which is not separate or self-contained is not considered relevant safe accommodation
- Bed & Breakfast Accommodation

Support in Safe Accommodation

The Domestic Abuse Act sets out the range of support services that are considered eligible within the scope of this Strategy. This includes:

- Overall management of services within relevant safe accommodation
- Support with the day-to-day running of the service
- Advocacy support
- Domestic abuse prevention advice
- Specialist support for victims

- Designed specifically for victims with relevant protected characteristics (including 'by and for' services)
- Designed specifically for victims with additional and / or complex needs
- Children's support
- Housing-related support
- Advice service
- Counselling and therapy

St Helens Needs Assessment

The St Helens Needs Assessment provided a review of the current safe accommodation provision, in relation to both numbers and services available for survivors of domestic abuse. The Assessment also included the experiences of survivors when determining the areas for improvement in St Helens. The Assessment provided an analysis of the availability and demand for services and identified a number of thematic gaps in support that have been used to inform future commissioning intentions.

Demand for Safe Accommodation

The Needs Assessment reports the following:

- Since 2018/19 there have been 202 survivors in the St Helens refuge, including those who were already in safe accommodation at the start of the reporting year.
- Approximately two thirds of survivors were aged 25-44, with 42.6% aged 25-34. Just 2.5% were above the age of 55 (see figure 2 overleaf).
- During 2020/21 there were 46 new clients admitted to the refuge, compared to 69 in the preceding year (due to the impact of Covid / lockdown periods).
- 4 of the survivors admitted in the past year were male. 13 survivors with a mental health need (28.3%) 1 client with a physical disability; 10 survivors recorded as having a substance misuse history (21.8%); and 1 client was LGBT, although there were a number of cases where sexual orientation was not disclosed.
- 43.5% of referrals in 2020/21 coming from within St Helens - this ratio is relatively stable over time.
- The average length of stay in safe accommodation is 98.3 days. In 2020/21 this increased to 103.4 days due to Covid.
- There have been 504 applicants unable to be accommodated in the past three years into the Refuge due to a lack of available space, including 164 residents from St Helens as the table below demonstrates:

Year	St Helens Applicants	As %	Out of Area Applicants	As %	Total
2018/19	31	29.0%	76	71.0%	107
2019/20	61	33.0%	124	67.0%	185
2020/21	72	37.7%	119	62.3%	191

- There has been a significant increase in the number of homelessness presentations relating to applicants fleeing domestic abuse – rising from 18 presentations in 2018/19 to 36 presentations in 2020/21. 46% of these were households with children. The table below presents the information from St Helens Council Housing Options Service:

Duty	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Prevention	8	1	1
Relief	11	9	33
Main	1	1	1
Withdrawn	1	0	1
Total Number of Presentations	18	10	36

- The number of applicants rehoused via the Under One Roof allocations scheme in St Helens due to domestic abuse has increased from 85 in 2018/19 to 138 in 2020/21

Existing Provision and Identified Needs

The Needs Assessment identified the following strengths and gaps within the existing provision of safe accommodation support in St Helens.

For Refuge provision, the Needs Assessment commends that this service is open to all victim / survivors, including male survivors of abuse. The self contained nature of the accommodation and the availability of support 24/7 are also noted as positive aspects of delivery, with consistently positive feedback from residents of this service (*“a high quality safe accommodation environment is being provided”*) The demand data analysed in the research demonstrated that there is considerable in borough and out of borough demand for the Refuge and that the current provision cannot accommodate larger families in one apartment due to the configuration of the Refuge.

The Needs Assessment identified barriers to access that exist for victim / survivors who are in employment, highlighting the cost implications of the rent and support charges of accessing Refuge accommodation. The Assessment also recognises that victims of abuse who have No Recourse to Public Funds also face access barriers to services.

The Needs Assessment recognises the effective partnership work between the Refuge and IDVA provider and the Drug / Alcohol Treatment service provider and that funding has been secured for a Complex Needs IDVA to be appointed from January 2022, however the assessment identifies that there is a gap regionally to enable victim / survivors with complex needs to be accommodated.

Stakeholders engaged in the Needs Assessment have recognised that there are insufficient safe accommodation units commissioned in St Helens and the demand data highlighted in this Strategy also demonstrates this unmet need, both for St Helens residents and for residents from out of borough. The Needs Assessment recommends that a number of dispersed safe accommodation units are commissioned to either use as move-on properties freeing up spaces in refuge or to be used for applicants unable to access refuge (e.g. families with more than three children, survivors with emotional support animals and pets and those with physical disabilities as there is currently only one modified unit in refuge).

Whilst Resettlement services are offered for victim / survivors moving out of Refuge, the Needs Assessment recommends that provision could be improved as the current arrangement of three visits does not provide sufficient continuity of care post refuge. The key objective in continuity of resettlement services is to maintain the recovery journey for the victim / survivor and their family.

The Needs Assessment acknowledges the current absence of a Sanctuary Service in the borough and recommends that a full Sanctuary service is introduced to enable survivors to stay in their own homes (or to enhance safety for those moving into new properties). The Needs Assessment recognises that this would bring a more holistic service for survivors, combining physical security with safety planning and integrated specialist support as required to help address the physical and emotional complexities of staying in a property that the perpetrator had previously resided in.

The Needs Assessment highlights the importance of monitoring data and outcomes for victim / survivors. A key action will be bringing together a dashboard of data which will be regularly reported to the St Helens Domestic Abuse Partnership Board.

Overview of Current Provision

The table below captures the feedback from the Needs Assessment in relation to the areas of positive provision and also the identified needs for the borough.


Safe Accommodation Support	Positive Aspects of Current Provision	Identified Needs
Refuge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Accessible to all residents of all genders ✓ Self contained accommodation ✓ Support available is 24/7 ✓ Specialist programmes of support offered ✓ Allocated key workers ✓ Complex Needs IDVA from 2022 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊗ Lack of capacity to meet local demand ⊗ Refuge cannot accommodate larger families ⊗ Costs for survivor in rent / support charges ⊗ Supporting survivors with No Recourse to Public Funds who do not have children. ⊗ One unit accessible and adapted for residents who use a wheelchair ⊗ Service cannot accommodate residents with complex needs ⊗ Pets not allowed to reside in Refuge
Resettlement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Three visits offered post accommodation at Refuge ✓ Support available to move on from Refuge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊗ Need for longer term support identified by partners ⊗ Risk of sudden cessation of support ⊗ Ability to 'reach in' to other supported settings
Support for Children in Safe Accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Short term Counselling support available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊗ No provision for play therapy for children residing at Refuge ⊗ DART scheme has recently ended for children and families

Counselling Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Established service by Chrysalis Centre for Change ✓ New service commissioned by Torus Foundation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊗ Waiting lists for counselling support ⊗ Length of sessions available
Sanctuary Scheme		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊗ No existing scheme in St Helens

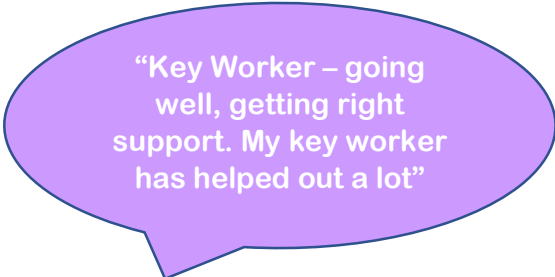
The findings of the Needs Assessment have directly informed and shaped the future commissioning priorities within this Strategy.

Survivor Voices

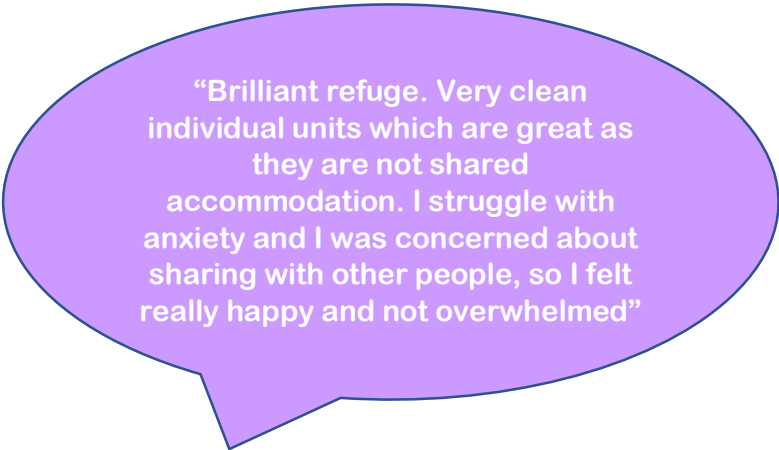
The Needs Assessment also included engagement with victim / survivors who have been supported in the existing safe accommodation in the borough. Here are some examples of the direct feedback from victim / survivors who have been supported by services:



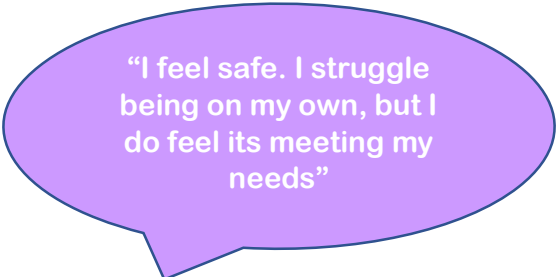
“I like it here
and feel safe”



“Key Worker – going
well, getting right
support. My key worker
has helped out a lot”



“Brilliant refuge. Very clean
individual units which are great as
they are not shared
accommodation. I struggle with
anxiety and I was concerned about
sharing with other people, so I felt
really happy and not overwhelmed”



“I feel safe. I struggle
being on my own, but I
do feel its meeting my
needs”

Together with the Chrysalis Centre for Change - a local domestic abuse charity that has been supporting residents for many years – a Survivor Forum has been established to bring together victim / survivors in a safe place to support each other and form a collective voice to inform the development and delivery of services to victims and their families. The Forum, established in October 2021 with initial support from Safe Lives -the national Domestic Abuse organisation - has already commenced this ambitious programme for change –inviting senior representatives from core agencies such as Merseyside Police to ensure that their experiences and feedback directly shapes the future.

The Survivor Forum will directly shape and influence the development of the new Domestic Abuse Strategy for St Helens and will also be involved in the future commissioning of support services for safe accommodation.

St Helens Safe Accommodation Support - Commissioning Priorities

As the current gaps in service provision and needs in relation to accommodation-based support have now been recognised by the Board, there is a need to progress with the commissioning decisions to meet the needs in order to fulfil the statutory duty.

In order to enable local authorities to meet the identified needs, Government has allocated additional funding to each local authority area. This funding is currently non-recurring, although further announcements regarding future years commitments are expected now the Comprehensive Spending Review has concluded. However, at present any commissioning of services will need to be within a 12-month framework.

Area of Need Identified	Proposed Commissioning Activity 2022-2024
Children living in safe accommodation	Play therapy and age-appropriate support for children residing in safe accommodation to be commissioned.
Children living in safe accommodation	Embedded Children's IDVA post within Children's Social Care / MASH
Victim / Survivors with complex needs	Commission a Complex Needs Worker to provide 'in reach' to Refuge
Resettlement / Move On	Funding for a Resettlement / Support worker to support victim / survivors when they leave safe accommodation
Counselling Support	Provision of additional counselling capacity to reduce waiting times and offer longer sessions of counselling
Victim / Survivors with No Recourse to Public Funds	Funding for emergency placements and initial support for victims who have no recourse to public funds
Victim / Survivors who are working	Discretionary funding pot to fund rent / support charges to ensure no victim has to leave their job or return to a perpetrator for financial reasons
Refuge provision	Additional capacity to meet demand and accommodate service users who cannot access Refuge
Sanctuary Scheme	Commissioning of a Sanctuary scheme to offer additional security and support to victim / survivors.

Funding the Safe Accommodation Duty

St Helens Council was awarded £436,525 in New Burdens funding from government in order to implement the Statutory Duty in 2021-2022. Whilst the Department of Levelling Up, Housing & Communities has provided a three-year funding commitment to this duty, future funding amounts beyond 2022 have yet to be confirmed.

Governance and Monitoring

This Safe Accommodation Strategy will be monitored by the St Helens Domestic Abuse Partnership Board and will be reviewed annually.

The St Helens Domestic Abuse Partnership Board was established in April 2021 and provides strategic oversight of the issue of domestic abuse in St Helens through the following actions:

- the commissioning, monitoring and evaluation of the Domestic Abuse Strategy for the borough
- ensuring the preparation and publication of the future Domestic Abuse Strategy setting out the steps required to meet the needs of all victims and their children
- holding agencies to account for the delivery of the actions within the Strategy by requesting regular updates on the agreed Action Plan within the Strategy
- assessing the needs and demand for support within safe accommodation and support for all victims and their children, including those that require highly specialist and cross-authority support.
- considering the commissioning and decommissioning decisions in relation to domestic abuse services funded and provided in the borough
- reporting on progress against domestic abuse and how funding relating to the new Domestic Abuse Act has been used to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing & Communities
- overseeing the development and submission of an Annual Report outlining activity and progress made against the requirements in the Act.
- considering best practice, policy development and future opportunities for service improvement in this sector.

The wider Domestic Abuse Strategy for St Helens will be reviewed during 2022 and future aims and priorities relating to safe accommodation will be incorporated into this Strategy. The new Strategy will be informed by the completion of the wider Needs Assessment for St Helens that is due to report in early 2022.