

Bath & North East Somerset Council

DVA Safe Accommodation Strategy 2024 to 2029

Bath & North East
Somerset Council

Improving People's Lives



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Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy for Bath and North East Somerset

Introduction

The purpose of this strategy document is to address the critical need for domestic abuse support and safe accommodation within our community. As mandated by Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, our local authority is committed to providing a comprehensive and coordinated response to domestic abuse. This strategy focuses on prevention, early intervention, and robust support for victims, survivors, and their families.

Key Objectives

1.

Prevention:

- Raise awareness and educate the community about domestic abuse.
- Implement preventive measures to stop abuse before it escalates.

2.

Early Intervention:

- Swiftly identify and address domestic abuse cases.
- Provide timely support to prevent further harm.

3.

Support for Victims/Survivors and Families:

- Tailor assistance to meet the diverse needs of individuals affected by abuse.
- Ensure safe accommodation options for those seeking refuge.

Legal Requirement and Proactive Approach:

- The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 requires that our local authority create a DVA safe accommodation strategy every five years.
- Our proactive approach demonstrates our commitment to safeguarding victims and preventing abuse within our community.

Championing Rights and Safety:

- By enacting this strategy, we pledge to champion the rights of all individuals to live free from fear and violence.
- Safe accommodation is a lifeline for victims, providing refuge from abusive situations.

Annual Review

- We will review this strategy annually in collaboration with our Domestic Abuse Partnership to ensure its effectiveness and adaptability.



Corporate Strategy Priorities

We have one overriding purpose – to improve people’s lives

This might sound simple, but it brings together everything we do, from cleaning the streets to caring for our older people. It is the foundation for our strategy, and we will ensure that it drives our commitments, spending, and service delivery. We have two core policies – tackling the climate and nature emergency and giving people a bigger say. These will shape everything we do.

To translate our purpose into commitments, we have identified three principles. We want to prepare for the future, deliver for residents and focus on prevention. “We are outcomes-driven, working to provide the right services and solutions for our communities. Our culture is open, owns decisions, and is resilient. We trust each other to act in the best interest of residents, customers, and colleagues”.

Our shared values guide our decisions, behaviours, and relationships at work, our interactions with our residents, our partners, and how we interact with you, a prospective employee.



Domestic Abuse, also known as domestic violence, involves a pattern of controlling, coercive, or abusive behaviour within intimate or family relationships. It can include physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, or financial abuse. The cross-party definition of domestic abuse encompasses both abusive and violent behaviour that aims to control, coerce, or threaten a partner or family member. This definition was enshrined in law, in 2021 and gives us the first legal definition of domestic abuse.

The Legal Context

In the United Kingdom, the legal context surrounding domestic abuse safe accommodation is governed by various laws and regulations aimed at protecting and supporting individuals affected by domestic abuse. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021, which came into force in April 2021, introduces important legal provisions related to domestic abuse, including the provision of safe accommodation for survivors. Under this Act, local authorities have a duty to provide support and accommodation for individuals affected by domestic abuse, ensuring that safe and secure housing options are available to survivors and their children.

The Act also emphasises the importance of cooperation between local authorities, housing providers, and support services to ensure that survivors have access to suitable accommodation and necessary support. In addition to the Domestic Abuse Act, there are other legal

frameworks, such as housing and welfare laws, that play a role in ensuring that individuals affected by domestic abuse have access to safe accommodation. For instance, housing legislation may provide mechanisms for accessing emergency housing, priority need status, and other forms of support for survivors fleeing domestic abuse. Furthermore, local authorities are expected to adhere to statutory guidance and best practices in providing safe accommodation for survivors of domestic abuse. This may include following guidelines set forth by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, as well as complying with relevant housing and homelessness legislation. Overall, the legal context surrounding domestic abuse safe accommodation in the UK is underpinned by a framework that prioritises the safety, well-being, and housing needs of individuals affected by domestic abuse, with the aim of providing them with the necessary support and protection to escape abusive situations.

Key statistics on Domestic Abuse in the UK

- The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) estimated that 5.0% of adults (6.9% women and 3.0% men) aged 16 years and over experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2022. This equates to an estimated 2.4 million adults (1.7 million women and 699,000 men) (ons.gov.uk).
- Approximately 1 in 5 adults experience Domestic Abuse during their lifetime. This equates to 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6-7 men (ncdv.org.uk).
- The police recorded 1,500,369 domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes in England and Wales in the year ending March 2022 (ncdv.org.uk).
- The number of police recorded domestic abuse-related crimes in England and Wales increased by 7.7% compared to the previous year (ons.gov.uk).
- The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) domestic abuse-related charging rate in England and Wales increased for the first time in four years to 72.7% in the year ending March 2022 but remains below the year ending March 2018 (75.9%) (ons.gov.uk).
- The National Domestic Abuse Helpline delivered 50,791 support sessions through phone call or live chat in the year ending March 2022 (ons.gov.uk).



The Prevalence of Domestic Abuse in Bath and North East Somerset

In Bath & North East Somerset (B&NES), the prevalence of domestic abuse is a significant concern, with statistics and data indicating the following:

1. Population and Prevalence:

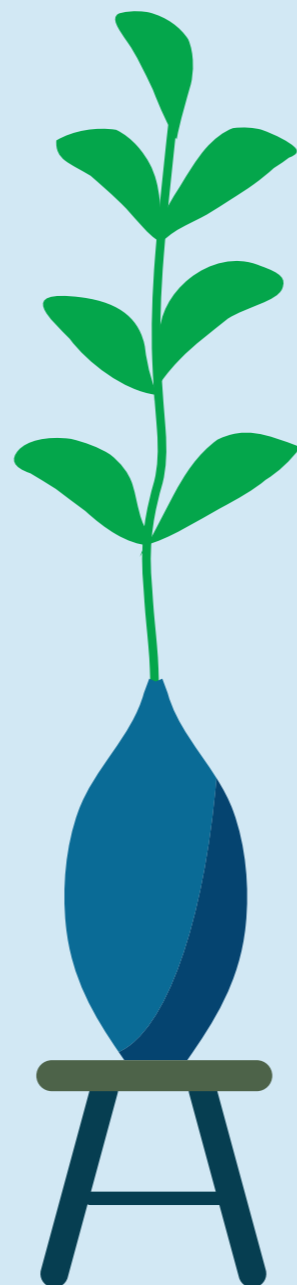
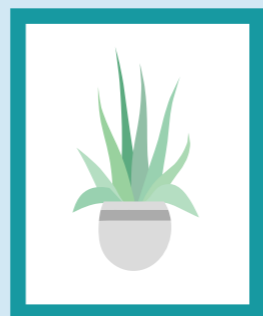
- Total population in B&NES in 2021 193,400.
- Estimated prevalence of domestic abuse among individuals aged 16 or over: approximately 27,870 individuals have experienced domestic abuse over their lifetime.
- On an annual basis, around 8,400 individuals experience domestic abuse (both familial and intimate partner violence).

2. Age Demographics:

- B&NES has a higher-than-average older population (24% compared with 22% nationally).
- Approximately 1,520 adults over the age of 60 experience domestic abuse each year.
- Older adults may face barriers in seeking help and support due to mobility and health-related considerations.

3. Disability Demographics:

- Approximately 39,150 disabled adults in B&NES, with 4,510 experiencing domestic abuse every year (54% of the victim population).
- Mobility and accessibility considerations need to be considered in providing safe accommodation.



4. Children and Young People:

- Around 2,740 individuals aged over 16 experience domestic abuse each year.
- 16–24-year-olds are more likely to experience domestic abuse, requiring specific considerations for this age group.

5. Types of Violence:

- Domestic incidents are the most common forms of violence in B&NES.
- Offenders are predominantly ex-intimate or current male partners, under 34 years of age, with mental health, alcohol, and substance misuse issues.

6. Children Exposed to Domestic Abuse:

- Presence of a substantial cohort of children at risk due to intergenerational effects of domestic abuse.
- In 2015, the police recorded 42 under 18-year-olds as witnesses of domestic abuse.

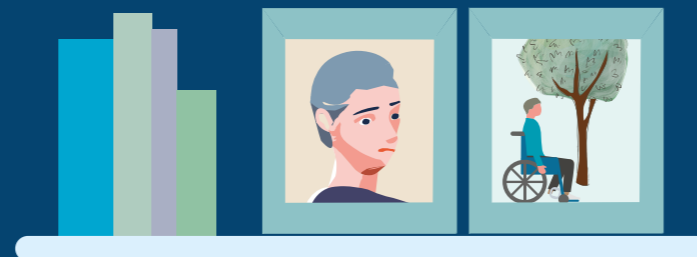
7. Reported Cases and Trends:

- Half of domestic violence incidents believed to take place on the street.
- Trend shows a strong association between levels of domestic violence and levels of socio-economic disadvantage.
- Majority of domestic violence victims are female, aged between 21 and 50, with disability being a known risk factor.



Characteristics of Domestic Abuse Victims/Survivors

In Bath & North East Somerset (B&NES), domestic abuse victims/survivors exhibit various characteristics and demographics:



1. Gender:

- Domestic violence victims (survivors) are predominantly female.
- More women are killed as a result of domestic abuse than men.

2. Age:

- Victims/survivors of domestic abuse come from a wide age range, with considerations for older adults (over 60) and younger individuals (16-24 years old).

3. Disability:

- There is a significant number of disabled adults in B&NES who experience domestic abuse, with mobility and accessibility considerations being important factors.

4. Children and Young People:

- Children exposed to domestic abuse are part of a substantial cohort at risk.
- A notable number of children are either witnessing domestic abuse or living in households experiencing domestic violence.

5. Offenders:

- Perpetrators/offenders of domestic violence are predominantly ex-intimate or current male partners, often under 34 years of age, with a high incidence of mental health, alcohol, and substance misuse issues.

6. Characteristics:

- Domestic violence incidents often involve controlling behaviours, stalking, harassment, and other forms of abuse.
- Domestic abuse victims/survivors may face barriers to access safe and long-term accommodation.

These characteristics of domestic abuse victims/survivors in B&NES

provide insight into the diverse demographics and challenges faced by individuals impacted by domestic violence in the region. They inform the need for tailored support services and interventions to address the specific needs of different groups affected by domestic abuse.

Bath and North East Somerset (BANES) has adopted a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to **addressing domestic abuse** within its community. Let's explore the various initiatives and strategies that contribute to creating a safer environment for victims:

1. Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment:

- BANES conducts a thorough Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment to identify the housing requirements of domestic abuse victims. This assessment considers factors such as family size, accessibility needs, and emotional well-being.
- The goal is to tailor housing solutions, whether it's emergency shelter, transitional housing, or permanent accommodation, to meet the unique needs of survivors.

2. Domestic Abuse Partnership Group:

- Is legally required under the 2021 Act to provide leadership and strategic direction on domestic abuse.
- This collaborative group brings together professionals, community leaders, and survivors.
- **Behavioural Transformation:** The group actively promotes behavioural change by challenging harmful attitudes and fostering empathy. Awareness campaigns, workshops, and educational programs play a crucial role.
- **Victim-Centric Support:**
 - **Perpetrator Intervention:** Swift action is taken against abusers to remove them from the victim's environment.
 - **Financial and Legal Guidance:** Homeownership can be weaponised as a form of extended abuse. BANES provides tailored advice to homeowners, empowering them to protect their rights.

3. The Safe Accommodation Strategy:

- **Refuge and Safe Accommodation:** The strategy aims to emphasise safe havens where victims and their children find respite, emotional support, and counselling.
- **Assessing Demand:** Rigorous assessments ensure efficient allocation of resources.
- **Strategic Provision:** The strategy aims to cover crisis intervention and long-term housing solutions.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Regular reviews assess effectiveness, ensuring continuous improvement.

4. Wider Vulnerabilities and Therapeutic Needs:

- BANES takes a holistic approach, linking domestic abuse with wider vulnerabilities such as child sexual exploitation, substance misuse, and mental health.
- **Children's Well-Being:** Immediate safety and long-term therapeutic needs of children living in or visiting households with domestic abuse are addressed.

In summary, BANES's commitment extends beyond policy documents— it's woven into the fabric of the community. By prioritising victim support, behaviour change, and safe accommodation, BANES stands as a beacon of hope for survivors.

Remember, these efforts represent real lives transformed and futures rebuilt. Let's continue championing a world where safety, empathy, and resilience prevail. For more information, you can explore the [B&NES Domestic Violence & Abuse services](#)



Accommodation-based Support for Victims of Domestic Abuse in Bath and North East Somerset

The Accommodation-based Support for Victims of Domestic Abuse in Bath and North East Somerset includes various types of safe accommodation, such as sanctuary schemes and refuge accommodation. The provision of safe accommodation is crucial in meeting the needs of victims and survivors of domestic abuse. Refuge provisions in Bath and North East Somerset include:

1. Julian House

- Type(s) of accommodation: An 8-bed shared refuge

2. Renew Refuge

- Type(s) of accommodation: A 2-bedroomed dispersed shared flat

3. Serena Rosa Project

- Type(s) of accommodation: A shared 2-bedroomed house, 3 self-contained dispersed flats
- User needs: Accommodation and practical and emotional support for those fleeing domestic abuse
- Accept pets: In the 2-bedroomed shared flat only
- Upper age limit for boy children: 14



Refuge Provisions:

- The overall population of Bath and North East Somerset is expected to increase to nearly 200,000 by 2024, indicating a need for a total of 20 refuge places.
- The current commissioned provision saw a 273% increase in referrals for refuge places in the latest reporting year.
- There are 14 commissioned spaces in Julian House, with 83% of referrals to refuge being declined.
- Out of area referrals for refuge provision show that more than a third of referrals come from victims outside of Bath and North East Somerset, with most coming from within the Avon and Somerset force area, particularly from Bristol and Wiltshire.
- The tenure of victim/survivors prior to being referred into refuge provision varies, with the majority living with friends or family, in social housing, or as private renters.



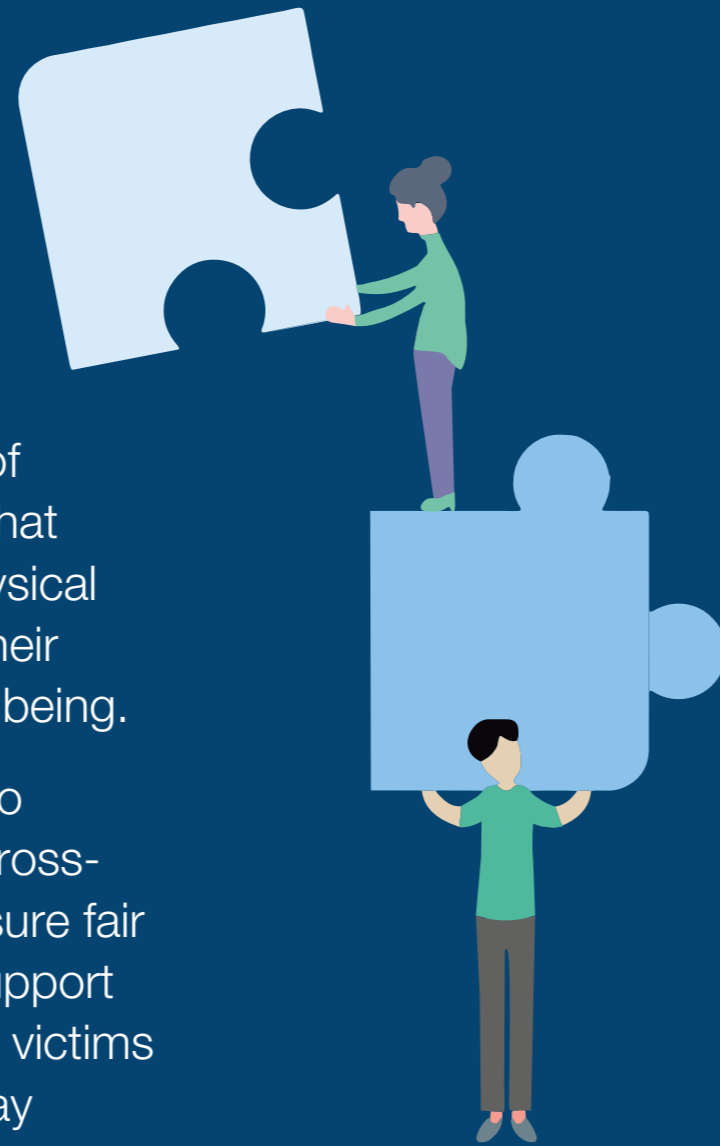
It is recommended to accelerate the implementation of the Sanctuary scheme and to explore opportunities for larger dispersed options for larger families. Additionally, the Partnership will consider demographic factors and decide whether to increase the availability of provision to meet the growing demand.

The data indicates that there is a significant demand for safe accommodation in Bath and North East Somerset. The report highlights that while the provision of refuge units meets the recommended level by the Council of Europe, there is still a high rate of referrals to refuge being declined, with 83% of referrals being declined. This suggests that there is a gap between the demand for safe accommodation and the available spaces, indicating a need for increased targeted provision to meet the needs of victims and survivors.

Furthermore, the data reveals that there are specific needs and preferences expressed by service users in Bath and North East Somerset. The most common

factors identified as important to victims were a confidential service, evening availability, text support, and flexible service. Additionally, the survey found that the most common support need expressed by victims was related to mental health, with 78% stating that they needed support in this area. This highlights the importance of providing holistic support that addresses not only the physical safety of victims but also their mental and emotional well-being.

The needs assessment also emphasises the need for cross-border collaboration to ensure fair and equitable access to support in safe accommodation for victims of domestic abuse who may

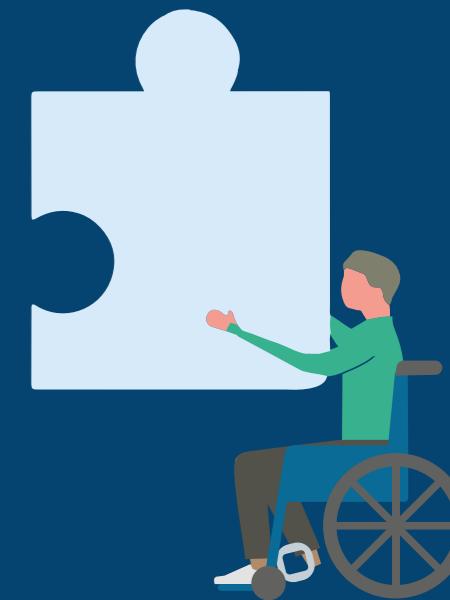


need to leave their local area to secure safety. This suggests that a coordinated approach is necessary to address the needs of victims who may be seeking refuge from outside the local authority area.

In addition, the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places a new duty on local authorities to provide support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other safe accommodation. This includes the requirement to appoint a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board, assess the need for domestic abuse support, prepare and publish this strategy for the provision of support, and monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy. However, the

Act does not contain provisions specifically for women with insecure legal status, indicating a gap in the support system for this group.

Overall, the data highlights the importance of addressing the specific needs and preferences of victims and survivors, increasing the provision of safe accommodation to meet the demand, and implementing a coordinated and holistic approach to support victims of domestic abuse in Bath and North East Somerset. It is essential for local partnership boards to establish links with providers and ensure an appropriate response to victims of domestic abuse, considering the specific needs and preferences expressed by service users.



Understanding the Specific Needs of Domestic Abuse Service Users in Bath and North East Somerset

The needs assessment document shed light on the unique requirements and preferences of service users in the Bath and North East Somerset area concerning domestic abuse support and safe accommodation. Let's delve into the key findings:

1. Confidentiality and Evening and Weekend Availability:

- Service users consistently prioritise confidentiality. They seek a safe space where they can share their experiences without fear of exposure.
- Evening availability is crucial. Many incidents of domestic abuse occur during nighttime hours, and having support services accessible during these times is essential.

2. Text Support and Flexibility:

- The online survey conducted among victims and survivors highlighted the importance of text-based support. Some individuals may find it easier to communicate via text messages rather than phone calls.
- Flexibility in service delivery is valued. Service users appreciate options that adapt to their unique circumstances, such as work schedules, childcare responsibilities, or health conditions.

3. Specific Support Needs:

- **Mental Health Support:** A significant percentage of respondents expressed the need for mental health-related assistance. Domestic abuse takes a toll on emotional well-being, and tailored mental health services are crucial.
- **Physical Safety at Home:** Victims often face threats within their own homes. Ensuring their physical safety is paramount. This includes strategies to prevent further harm and secure their living environment.



4.

Gaps in Legislation and Services:

- The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 has made significant strides, but gaps remain. Notably:
 - **Insecure Legal Status:** Women with insecure legal status face additional challenges. The act should address their specific needs.
 - **Stalker Register:** The absence of a register for stalkers hinders effective prevention and protection.

5.

Local Refuge Provision Configuration:

- The needs assessment delves into local refuge provision:
 - **Accommodation Types:** Understanding the types of safe accommodation available (e.g., emergency shelters, transitional housing) is crucial.
 - **Capacity:** Assessing the number of available refuge places ensures adequate support for victims.
 - **User-Centric Approach:** Tailoring services to user needs—whether it's single individuals, families, or specific demographics—is essential.

In summary, the needs assessment provides a roadmap for improving domestic abuse support in Bath and North East Somerset. By implementing targeted strategies, we can better serve victims and survivors, ensuring their safety, well-being, and empowerment.

Key Findings

- 1. Demand Surge:** The past year saw a 273% surge in referrals to the existing commissioned services, highlighting a critical rise in the demand for refuge spaces during 2021-22.
- 2. Population Growth Impact:** With Bath & North East Somerset's population projected to reach nearly 200,000 by 2024, it's estimated that at least 20 refuge spots will be necessary to meet the Council of Europe's guidelines.
- 3. Large Family Accommodation:** There's a noticeable shortage of refuge options for families with four or more children, underscoring the urgency to develop larger, more dispersed accommodation solutions.
- 4. Sanctuary Scheme Benefits:** Sanctuary schemes have proven to keep families together in their homes, minimising disruption and offering a cost-effective solution. A push for faster implementation of these schemes is advised.
- 5. Housing Partnerships:** It's advised to forge stronger connections with Registered Social Landlords to expand housing choices for those recovering from domestic abuse.
- 6. Cross-Border Support:** The legal obligation to provide support in safe accommodation highlights the necessity for cross-border cooperation to guarantee consistent and fair support for domestic abuse victims seeking safety outside their local areas.
- 7. Hostel Accreditation:** The current local hostel services lack formal accreditation, which is a benchmark for national best practices, indicating a need for such accreditation to be established.
- 8. Research on Re-housing and Rough Sleepers:** Further investigation is needed to comprehend the scope of perpetrator re-housing and to identify effective strategies to address the needs of female rough sleepers with a history of domestic abuse.

Additional points

- 1. Capacity Planning:** Given the substantial increase in refuge space requests, future commissioning must account for this heightened demand.
- 2. Addressing Complex Needs:** The present services fall short in catering to the complex requirements of victim-survivors, especially those from LGBTQ, BAME, and disabled communities. A more inclusive engagement strategy is recommended.
- 3. Data on Protection Orders:** The absence of localised data on Domestic Violence Protection Notices and Orders represents a significant gap. Collaborative efforts with law enforcement to gather this data are essential.
- 4. Equality in Refuge Access:** Currently, only a pair of refuge spaces cater to male victims. It's crucial to monitor contracts to improve this and ensure the success of JH's equality plan. Specific support pathways for disabled survivors and other protected groups like LGBTQ individuals should be a priority in the next accommodation strategy, with cross-border collaboration being a key factor in its development.

Recommendations

- 1. Collaborative Response:** BANES domestic abuse commissioners ought to collaborate with local housing services to ensure victims receive suitable support.
- 2. Inclusive Engagement:** Commissioners need to enhance involvement with groups having protected characteristics, adopting a ‘by and for’ strategy to cater to the complex requirements of victim-survivors, especially those from LGBTQ, BAME, and disabled communities.
- 3. Data Collection:** The local partnership is encouraged to join forces with the police to gather more granular data on Domestic Violence Protection Notices and Orders.
- 4. Male Victim Accommodation:** Commissioners must oversee that housing for male victims meets standards of equality and accessibility.
- 5. Accessible Refuge:** Future refuges should be universally accessible and provide specific pathways for disabled individuals.
- 6. Specialized Support:** The development of specialized accommodation or support for distinct protected characteristic groups, such as LGBTQ+, should be explored through cross-border collaboration.
- 7. Demand-Driven Commissioning:** Upcoming commissioning processes should reflect the growing demand for refuge spaces and demographic changes to enhance service availability.
- 8. Family-Friendly Spaces:** Investigate the potential for more extensive dispersed housing solutions for larger families to overcome the scarcity of spaces for households with four or more children.
- 9. Sanctuary Scheme Acceleration:** Hasten the Sanctuary scheme’s rollout to deliver swift assistance to victims.
- 10. Homeowner Support:** Guarantee that homeowners can readily obtain customised financial and legal counsel to tackle prolonged abuse/control and related legal matters.
- 11. Whole Housing Approach:** Execute the Whole Housing Approach to domestic abuse and vigorously pursue DAHA accreditation among local housing entities.
- 12. Equitable Support Access:** Evaluate cross-border collaboration to provide equitable support access in safe accommodation for domestic abuse victims seeking safety outside their local region.
- 13. Hostel Accreditation:** Secure formal accreditation for hostel services in alignment with national best practices.
- 14. Perpetrator Re-housing Research:** Conduct additional studies to comprehend the extent of perpetrator re-housing and the requirements of marginalized groups, like female rough sleepers with a history of domestic abuse.

Action Plan

Objectives:

- To conduct a thorough review and expansion of the referral system and commissioned services.
- To assess and expand inclusive housing options for individuals with disabilities and larger families.
- To analyse the long-term effects of Domestic Violence Protection Notices/Orders and enhance support for survivors.

Action Plan Overview:

- 1. Sanctuary Scheme Development:** Establish a task force to design and execute a Sanctuary Scheme.
- 2. Multi-Agency Support Integration:** Draft a collaborative protocol among key services.
- 3. Early Help and Prevention:** Launch an early help and prevention.
- 4. Recovery and Resettlement Support:** Develop a resettlement support framework to aid recovery post-refuge.
- 5. Impact of Homelessness Consideration:** Complete research on domestic abuse-induced homelessness.
- 6. Lived Experience Inclusion:** Form a survivor advisory board to guide policy.

7. Budget and Funding:

A detailed budget will be prepared, outlining the financial requirements for each action item. Funding sources will include government grants, community partnerships, and private donations.

Conclusion:

The proposed action plan provides a structured and strategic approach to improving domestic abuse support services. By implementing these initiatives, we aim to create a more responsive, inclusive, and effective support system for survivors.

Domestic Violence & Abuse Support

Reporting Domestic Violence - If you or your children are in immediate danger, always call 999 and ask for the Police.

If you are not in immediate danger, then please contact any of the following as they are waiting to help you:

Avon and Somerset Police:

Telephone 101 (24 hours)

Report a problem online

24-Hour National Domestic Violence Freephone Helpline Telephone 0808 2000 247. A partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge - The purpose of the joint Helpline service is to give women, children and their supporters the confidential support and information they need at the time that they need it. Our main aim is to keep women and children safe.

Lighthouse Victim and Witness Care: Services provided for victims and witnesses by a team of staff from the police and victim support organisations, working together to guide, advise and support victims and witnesses. **Telephone 101 (or in an emergency call 999).**

Southside: Telephone 01225 331243 Independent Domestic Violence Service (IDVA) offers expert support to both men and women (9am - 5pm Monday to Friday).

VOICES: Telephone 01225 984189 or 07523 506239 VOICES - is a Bath based charity founded by women who have experienced Domestic Abuse, which provides peer support and recovery programmes for women who are experiencing or have experienced domestic abuse. Open 9.am - 5pm Monday - Friday. Email: info@voicescharity.org or go to the Website: www.voicescharity.org

SARSAS: SARSAS is a specialist support service for people in Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset, Somerset, or South Gloucestershire, who have experienced any form of sexual violence, at any point in their lives. Please use this link to access support.

Forced Marriage: Contact the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) if you're trying to stop a forced marriage or you need help leaving a marriage you've been forced into. fmufco.gov.uk **Telephone: 020 7008 0151 From overseas: +44 (0)20 7008 0151** Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

Out of hours: 020 7008 1500 (ask for the Global Response Centre) Find out about call charges.

Department of Work and Pensions (DWP): Help is available from the Department for Work and Pensions for people who are victims of domestic violence and abuse.