

**SAFER
CORNWALL**

Kernow Salwa

Domestic abuse safe accommodation and housing strategy



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Safer Cornwall (Cornwall's Community Safety Partnership) is committed to ensuring support is available to everyone who needs access to safe accommodation when fleeing domestic abuse.

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Safer Cornwall is committed to ensuring support is available to everyone who needs access to safe accommodation when fleeing domestic abuse.

This Strategy is one part of the wider Safer Cornwall Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy and sets out how Cornwall Council will respond to its statutory duty under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (described below). The Strategy has been informed by the Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment, people with lived experience of domestic abuse in Cornwall and front-line professionals, and through insights gathered in multi-agency workshops, focus groups, interviews and case studies.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 seeks to provide further protections to the millions of people who experience domestic abuse, as well as strengthen measures to tackle those engaging in abusive behaviours. The Act introduced a statutory duty on local authorities to:

- Assess the need for domestic abuse support for victims and their children in safe accommodation including those who come from outside of their area

- Provide accommodation and support to victims and their children
- Prepare and publish a strategy for the delivery of the support
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of this strategy
- Appoint a Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board

The new duty holds a broad definition of ‘safe accommodation’ where we have a duty to provide support in recognition of the diversity of housing in which victims and their children may live. It covers the provision of support to victims and their children residing in some/all of the following, but does not include temporary accommodation, such as bed and breakfast and hotels.

Accommodation	Description
Refuge	Accommodation and intensive support for the residents
Specialist safe accommodation	Dedicated specialist support to victims with relevant protected characteristics and/or complex needs e.g., refuges for BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic), LGBT+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans -transgender, transexual), and disabled victims
Dispersed accommodation	Self-contained accommodation, which is safe, secure and dedicated to supporting victims of domestic abuse
Move-on or Second stage accommodation	Projects temporarily accommodating victims, including families who no longer need the intensive level of support provided in a refuge, but would still benefit from a lower level of domestic abuse specific support for a period before they move to fully independent and permanent accommodation
Sanctuary Schemes	Properties with local authority installed Sanctuary Schemes or other similar schemes which provide enhanced physical security measures within a home
Other accommodation designated as domestic abuse emergency accommodation	A safe place with support that provides safe, self-contained accommodation for victims to spend a temporary period of time. Must be provided by Local Housing Authorities (LHAs), social housing providers or registered charities

However, ‘safe accommodation’ is only considered safe if it is delivered with support. This can be directly provided within safe accommodation services and as outreach support to victims in other types of relevant accommodation, including their homes in the case of a Sanctuary Scheme. The government is clear that the introduction of this duty should not result in any negative impact on non-accommodation based local domestic abuse services. It is expected that support in safe accommodation should sit alongside and complement the support that is already available to victims.

Accommodation based domestic abuse support includes:

Type of Support	Examples
Advocacy Support	Development of personal safety plans, liaison with other services (for example, General Practices and social workers, welfare benefit providers)
General advice	Financial and legal support, benefits, support into work
Housing related advice and support	Securing a permanent home and advice on how to live safely and independently
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	Interpreters, faith services, mental health advice and support, drug and alcohol advice and support, and immigration advice
Children’s Support Counselling and therapy for both adults and children.	Play therapy and child advocacy



“ Safe accommodation is only considered safe if it is delivered with support ”

What we know

The Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment presents the latest data and information from a broad range of local partners – including police, commissioned domestic abuse and sexual violence service providers and Housing services– alongside national data and research. Further information was gathered through multi-agency workshops and Lived Experience focus groups and case studies.

Demand for accommodation

DA is a significant driver of statutory homelessness. Statutory homelessness in Cornwall increased in 2020/21, with domestic abuse being one of the main factors (up by 72%). The predominant need for safe accommodation in Cornwall is for women (cis gender), aged between 25 and 44 years and identifying as white and heterosexual, although we know that a more diverse profile are experiencing abuse¹. People under the age of 25 and over the age of 65 were notably under-represented in safe accommodation in 2020/21. Men are also under-represented but may also be less likely to seek safe accommodation.

The Needs Assessment identified unmet needs relating to people with physical disabilities, complex mental health issues, and drugs/ alcohol use as part of a picture of wider complex needs. There were very small numbers of people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups (BAME) and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT+) communities accessing safe accommodation and case studies indicate barriers to accessing support, suggesting we need a different approach to widen access for these populations.

When referrals for safe accommodation are declined, it is most often due to lack of space, and complexity of needs. People with a physical disability or diagnosed mental health conditions are less likely to be accommodated, and people who are pregnant or have children are more likely to be accommodated. We are seeing additional complexity and higher levels of harm being disclosed, and yet twice as many people were placed in temporary (not specialist) accommodation than safe accommodation in 2020/21, which has led to risks being missed or escalated due to the lack of specialist DA support.

What our people say about our current services:

- Safe accommodation prevents homelessness and saves lives, especially the dedicated provision for women with complex needs
- The majority of people feel valued, heard and understood
- Specialist services provide skilled, experienced and knowledgeable support; and help to navigate the system.
- Being within a community of others that are in a similar situation provides reassurance and empowerment
- Being able to access activities, counselling and recovery programmes are important in recovery from DA in building new skills, confidence and resilience

¹ National prevalence data indicates a diverse profile. Cornwall Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment 2021.

What we need to improve:

Our emergency accommodation offer so that it is allocated appropriately

We know from lived experience that some people are placed in emergency or temporary accommodation such as pubs, Bed and Breakfast, hostels and hotels that are not specialist and have no support available, leaving them feeling additionally vulnerable. People may be placed far from their support networks and may have to move to different accommodation at short notice. This can also limit or disrupt children's access to education.

The standard of emergency accommodation facilities

Facilities available in emergency accommodation vary but many do not offer access to kitchens or laundries, creating additional financial burden as people face eating out and using public laundries. Services and conditions in emergency accommodation also vary.

I had nowhere to keep my child's milk, cook for his special diet or wash his clothes

Awareness of the options available to people fleeing DA, dispel pervasive myths

Some people have told us that they were not aware that they could access safe or emergency accommodation, where to go or what to expect when they do reach out for help. We also know from lived experience that there are myths and misinformation about safe accommodation and support services, such as you can only access them if you have been physically assaulted or that you need proof of abuse such as police log numbers.

Support for people to remain safely in their own homes

Many people are not aware of the options available to enable them to remain safely in their own homes. Removing the person who is engaging in abusive behaviours from joint tenancies is often challenging and can take time even when there has been a clear breach of tenancy. We need to consider housing options for the person who is being abusive that also supports them to change their behaviour, reducing the risk of future abuse. Some Housing Providers and landlords need additional support to improve their confidence in identifying and responding to domestic abuse in their properties.

Access to support the first time

We know from lived experience that even where some people have disclosed domestic abuse to professionals working with them, safe accommodation options have not been discussed or they have been given false information about their options due to lack of professional awareness and understanding of what is available.

Support when moving on from domestic abuse safe accommodation

Those leaving safe accommodation are often expected to move into their new properties with very short notice with little or no furnishings. Lack of financial or practical support with storing belongings from their previous homes means that they often have to start again with only the very basic items for everyday living through access to limited grants or charity donations. Ongoing and holistic support is needed to enable people to keep their tenancies and resettle in the local community and recovery.

Reduce the delay for resettlement housing

HomeChoice Banding for those in safe accommodation is usually awarded as a C Band unless there are additional vulnerabilities. This means that it can be a long wait for social housing, longer than the optimal 20 weeks stay in refuge or other safe accommodation. Many people are now remaining in safe accommodation despite no longer needing the level of support and security provided. This can cause delays in accessing other services and in seeking employment. This also limits spaces available for those in crisis.

Understanding of Section 106 planning arrangements²

Section 106 agreements can mean that those who have escaped domestic abuse and are in need not accepted for some properties on the Homechoice register that are otherwise suitable for their needs. The nature of domestic abuse means that some people will need to resettle in areas where they do not have a local connection.

Section 106 agreements often mean that clients have stayed in locations where they remain at risk because they face losing the security of permanent accommodation.

Support and understanding of the barriers to accessing safe accommodation and support for communities with protected characteristics

People with protected characteristic are underrepresented in services. It is not clear why this is the case and so there is work needed to explore the barriers and have greater understanding of need through speaking to those with Lived Experience and specialist 'by and for' organisations.

“We have improved early intervention by ensuring more frontline staff are able to identify and respond to those impacted by domestic abuse and sexual violence”



² A Section 106 Agreement is an agreement between a developer and a local planning authority about measures that the developer must make to reduce their impact on the community. One of these measures may be a local connection criteria which restricts sales or lettings to only people with an established connection to the parish where the property is located. Those escaping domestic abuse may need to relocate to areas where they have no local connection for safety reasons and so Section 106 restrictions can limit their housing options.

What we have achieved

Whilst there has been considerable progress in Cornwall's response to domestic abuse and sexual violence, there is still a long way to go. This part of the strategy focusses on improving housing/ Safe Accommodation, as part of a wider strategy calling for action over the next five years, to end domestic abuse and sexual violence in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

- We have delivered more early intervention by expanding our housing support for victims. We have done this by developing a Housing Pathway for those accessing refuge, including ensuring provision is available for victims who wish to stay safe in their own homes. This ensures there is a joined-up approach between housing and specialist domestic abuse services. We have commenced support for registered social landlords to adopt the principles of the Domestic Abuse Housing Association (DAHA) and to work towards gaining accreditation.
- We have developed an inclusive and needs-led system by increasing the safe accommodation available for people with complex and multiple needs. We now have a refuge and dispersed units that are equipped to support those with mental health needs and drug and alcohol use. Across Cornwall we now have two women's refuges, one male refuge, 24 self-contained properties and 12 units providing specialist support for women with complex needs fleeing DASV. We have upskilled the workforce on complex needs within these different accommodation units.
- We have improved early intervention by ensuring more frontline staff are able to identify and respond to those impacted by domestic abuse and sexual violence, and individuals displaying abusive behaviours. We have done this by delivering multi-agency training to ensure the workforce understand the signs of DASV and are confident to ask questions and respond. We have strengthened our approach³ to prevention by embedding the Trauma Informed approach and skills into frontline practice. All Child and Young Person's Support Workers in our Safe Accommodation attend Trauma Informed School (TiS) training and ensure that all children living in Safe Accommodation have access to an Emotionally Available Adult.
- We have increased our safe accommodation units to 58 spaces of accommodation across Cornwall. Based on the recommendation by the Council of Europe⁴ Cornwall should provide 57 refuge places for women. Excluding the 5 places specifically for men, there is a small shortfall of 4 places or 7%. Nationally the shortfall is 30%, as reported by Women Aid⁵.

³ Trauma and adversity can affect people's self-worth and confidence to access and accept support from services and so often people who have experienced complex trauma and multiple adversity can be the most difficult to connect with. A Trauma Informed Approach realises the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery, recognises the signs and symptoms of trauma, responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies and practices and seeks to actively resist re-traumatisation.

⁴ Council of Europe (2008) Combating violence against women: minimum standards for support services recommends: "... safe accommodation in specialised women's shelters, available in every region, with one family place per 10,000 head of population." Estimate based on ONS mid-2019 population estimate for Cornwall and Isles of Scilly (571,802 people)

⁵ Women's Aid. (2021) The Domestic Abuse Report 2021: The Annual Audit, Bristol: Women's Aid.

What we aim to do

1

We will ensure services are easier to access by identifying and removing barriers and creating clearer pathways to support for those living in safe accommodation.

2

We will ensure survivors and children and young people are supported to stay safe in their own homes/accommodation where appropriate.

3

We will increase awareness of domestic abuse and routes to support across housing providers to support early identification of domestic abuse and access to safe accommodation.

4

We will work in partnership to establish a clearer and more coordinated county wide pathway to help victims leave safe accommodation and establish independent living.

5

We will incorporate the views of children and young people impacted by domestic abuse.

6

We will ensure accommodation is safe and appropriate.

7

We will continue to ensure support in safe accommodation for victims/survivors and children will enable recovery and aim to prevent those living in safe accommodation from experiencing domestic abuse again in the future.

Outcomes

We will know we are successful when:

- people know what support is available and where to access it
- people receive support at the right time and the right place
- people feel supported by services who work together
- people feel listened to by services and are in control of their own support
- communities participate in being part of the solution
- professionals, parents/carers, young people, local businesses and residents can identify domestic abuse and sexual violence, know who to contact and what will be done in response



“ We have delivered more early intervention by expanding our housing support for victims ”

Contact us

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