



Dear Colleague,

Last autumn, Eddie Hughes, the Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing, invited us to come together as a Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation National Expert Steering Group to oversee the implementation of the new duties on local authorities to provide support to victims of domestic abuse and their children within domestic abuse safe accommodation which are set out in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

Co-chaired by Nicole Jacobs the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, the group includes experts with a wide range of practical knowledge about both the needs of victims and best practice service provision from across the domestic abuse sector. It is critical for the safety of all victims of domestic abuse and their children, that the new duties are implemented fully and result in an increase in the provision of support in quality domestic abuse safe accommodation. We will be working together as a group to provide expert advice, data and evidence to Eddie Hughes as well as support to local authorities to ensure this happens.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all local authorities for your continued hard work in implementing the new duties. To date the DLUHC has provided £250 million of funding to support this, and we are grateful for your commitment last year to ensuring this was spent on these critical services. DLUHC has asked all tier 1 local authorities to commit to this again in 2022/23 through a Memorandum of Understanding.

At the February meeting of the National Expert Steering Group we were pleased to hear the positive results from the recent survey that all local authorities had set up their Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board and completed a needs assessment. We also heard that 94% of local authorities completed draft strategies by the October deadline and that all local authorities had provided funding for transitional services where existing contracts had ended. We would also like to acknowledge there is variation across local authorities and in some places more work remains to be done to ensure consistency of delivery.

As you are now turning your attention to commissioning according to your needs assessment, we wanted to ensure you were aware of all the support available for local authorities. For the year ending March 2020, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) estimated that 1.6 million women and 757,000 men aged 16 to 74 years experienced domestic abuse. As more women than men are victims of domestic abuse, we would expect service provision to reflect this. In addition children exposed to domestic abuse are never just witnesses and must be considered as victims who need support in their own right. Tier one authorities should use the expertise and knowledge of local and national

specialist services to support in identifying and understanding the level and types of needs. Local authorities should also be considerate of other commissioners, such as Police and Crime Commissioners, when undertaking their needs assessments to ensure alignment and eliminate duplication.

We especially wanted to draw your attention to the importance of commissioning the right specialist services in your area. It is essential to take into account the different needs of disabled victims and the barriers they face in finding the support in safe accessible accommodation. The needs of victims from minority ethnic or faith communities, those from the Gypsy Roma and Traveller community, LGBTQ+ victims, older victims, as well as victims with complex needs such as mental health or drug & alcohol problems must also be taken into consideration. Victims and survivors who face additional barriers to support such as black and minoritised victims, LGBTQ+ victims, deaf and disabled victims, and those with insecure immigration status, are best served by specialist 'by and for' services, which are run by highly specialist staff, whose work is designed to meet their specific needs.

During our meeting we discussed the commissioning of services for domestic abuse survivors with disabilities. 2017 Safe Lives research found that disabled people are twice as likely to experience domestic abuse as non-disabled people, but that referral rates for disabled people into domestic abuse services are much lower. Disabled victims of domestic abuse face ongoing discrimination when attempting to flee from abuse, especially due to lack of accessible safe accommodation.

Early findings from the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's mapping of domestic abuse services found that of the 154 respondents who stated that they wanted help from an organisation by and for disabled people, only 12% (18) of these respondents had this type of support available in their area and only 5% (8) of these respondents actually received this. The Women's Aid No Woman Turned Away Project (NWTAP) supports women experiencing domestic abuse who face barriers in accessing safe accommodation when they need it. Data from the project published in 2021 found that 21.1% of the women supported had one or more disability, including mental ill-health, physical disabilities and other long-term health conditions. This data emphasises the real difficulties facing disabled victims, which will be further compounded for victims from minoritised groups such as LGBTQ+, or black and minority disabled victims. It is critical that local authorities consider and set out plans to meet the support needs of disabled victims in their area.

Expert knowledge from domestic abuse charities will be invaluable when providing for specialist needs such as these. It is great to see new and existing partnerships being emboldened by the local partnership boards. We have heard of encouraging innovative work including cross boundary commissioning and pooling of budgets where individual Local Authorities do not have a high demand for certain services, or specialist service provider in their area. Another example of best practice is the respite rooms model for those particularly vulnerable victims at risk of, or actually, sleeping rough. Stakeholders have reported that the current Respite Rooms pilot projects are having a significantly positive impact and we would like to encourage commissioners to consider supporting such specialist services for victims who have complex histories.

We would like to ensure local authorities have sufficient tools to appropriately meet the needs of victims in their area, including those with protected characteristics, while including smaller voluntary organisations and those run by and for domestic abuse survivors.

The LGA have been holding a series of virtual workshop sessions for local authorities, these have focused on the delivery and implementation of the Part 4 statutory duty to deliver

accommodation-based support and services. Each workshop has included a presentation from DLUHC, as well as wider presentations from specialist services. There are plans to run more in the future to share best practice, reflect on what's working well and discuss any challenges. If you would be interested in attending please contact Rachel.Phelps@local.gov.uk.

Outlined and linked below are resources you may find useful from the members of our group:

[The Violence Against Women commissioning toolkit](#) and [the National Statement of Expectations](#) published by the Home Office compile guidance in a practical way to demonstrate how commissioning services to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) can be done to meet needs effectively.

Women's Aid Federation of England and Imkaan's [guide for successful commissioning](#) for services that support women and children survivors of violence.

Stay Safe East support disabled survivors of domestic abuse and [can provide customised training to staff for tackling hate crime and domestic and sexual abuse against Deaf and disabled people](#).

Imkaan and Ascent's [Good Practice Briefing](#) on "uncivil partnerships: reflections on collaborative working in the ending violence against women and girls sector".

Galop's guide [Commissioning for Inclusion: delivering services for LGBT+ survivors of domestic abuse](#) aims to support commissioners, services, policy-makers, and the government to work in partnership to better meet the needs of LGBT+ survivors of domestic abuse.

Mankind Initiative offer assistance for supporting male victims of domestic abuse with their [Quality Standards for Services Supporting Male Victims/Survivors of Domestic Abuse](#) and [Advisory support for Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Boards](#).

Respect's [Male Victims Standard](#) for services supporting male survivors of domestic abuse hopes to ensure service are safe, effective and accountable.

Once again, thank you for your continued dedication to implementing a landmark piece of legislation, we very much look forward to seeing the outcomes of your hard work in due course.

Yours sincerely,

The Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation National Expert Steering Group

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Nicole Jacobs Nicole Jacobs – Domestic Abuse Commissioner

R. de Souza Dame Rachel De Souza – Children's Commissioner

Ruth Davison Ruth Davison – Chief Executive, Refuge

Sophie Linden Sophie Linden – APCC Joint Victims' Lead, Deputy Mayor for London