

# DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY 2021-2024

**COMMUNITY  
SAFETY  
PARTNERSHIP**

**WOKINGHAM  
BOROUGH  
COUNCIL**



**WOKINGHAM  
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

# WBC DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY 2021-2024

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# WBC DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY 2021-2024

## Notes On Language

### **Victim - survivor**

These terms are used interchangeably throughout this strategy to refer to people who have or are currently experiencing domestic abuse.

### **Perpetrator**

This term is used throughout to refer to the person using abuse.

### **Lived experience**

This term refers to individuals who share their expertise and knowledge based on their first-hand experience of domestic abuse, including controlling or coercive behaviour, economic abuse, psychological or emotional and/or physical and sexual abuse.

### **Specialist domestic abuse service**

This term refers to organisations/services independent from the state (i.e. third sector), whose core business is to support victim-survivors and/or perpetrators and/or children and young people impacted by domestic abuse, sexual violence, forced marriage, so called 'honour-based' violence and female genital mutilation (FGM).

### **'By and for'**

Dedicated specialist support for victims with relevant protected characteristics and / or complex needs – where personnel running and / or working in service have the same demographics and / or experiences as victim types they are specialising in.

# WBC DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY 2021-2024

## Foreword

I am delighted to introduce the 2021 - 2024 Wokingham Domestic Abuse Strategy on behalf of the Council and our partners. The Strategy details how we have undertaken a robust needs assessment to help us to understand the issues faced by individuals and families from Wokingham Borough who are experiencing, and those who have experienced, domestic abuse. Following public consultation and work with our partner organisations, we have created this ambitious Strategy.

Domestic abuse can affect anyone, regardless of age, disability, gender identity, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. It can also manifest itself in specific ways within different communities. In the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021, 568 men and 1479 women reported domestic abuse incidents to Thames Valley Police from the Wokingham area and yet statistically we know that this figure under-represents the number of people who are affected but are currently not in a position where they feel they can report what is happening.

At the heart of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and wider national programme of work is the prevention of abuse and the protection of all victims, including children. This Strategy sets out our three-year plan for how we will work in partnership with organisations in our area to meet new duties for local authorities as set out in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 relating to support for victims of domestic abuse and their children in safe accommodation, as well as our wider response to domestic abuse.

To support delivery of this Strategy, a detailed action plan has been developed in partnership with victim-survivors and partners to strengthen and coordinate the work of the council and partner agencies so that individuals and families across Wokingham, and those who need to flee to Wokingham, can see real and lasting progress being made. This action plan will be monitored by the Wokingham Domestic Abuse Partnership Board and Domestic Abuse Networking Group with progress reported to the Community Safety Partnership.



**Councillor Bill Soane, Lead Member, Neighbourhood and Communities**

**December 2021**

# WBC DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY 2021-2024

## Introduction

This strategy outlines Wokingham's approach to **tackling domestic abuse, which** we see as an unacceptable issue which blights the lives of thousands of Wokingham residents. Our priority is **the safety of all victims of domestic abuse, regardless of age, disability, gender identity, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation or financial means.**

Domestic abuse is defined<sup>iii</sup> as any single incident, course of conduct or pattern of abusive behaviour between individuals aged 16 or over who are "personally connected" to each other as a result of being, or having been, intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. Children who see, hear or experience the effects of the abuse and are related to either of the parties are also considered victims of domestic abuse.

**The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (the 'Act')**, which was signed into law on 29th April 2021 provides additional support for people who experience domestic abuse; strengthening measures to tackle perpetrators; providing a legal definition of domestic abuse which incorporates a range of abuses beyond physical violence, including emotional, coercive or controlling behaviour and economic abuse and: recognising children as victims in their own right.

Within this Strategy, Wokingham Borough Council details how we will apply overarching Statutory Guidance for the Act, including our new duty **to provide support for victims of domestic abuse and their children in safe accommodation.** We recognise that support in safe accommodation is only one aspect of addressing domestic abuse and this document also covers our wider response to this issue, including tackling root causes and help to enable people to start re-building their lives.

To inform this strategy, Wokingham Borough Council and partner agencies across the Borough conducted a needs assessment consisting of a robust, comprehensive and holistic assessment of data, in-depth interviews, expert input and a public consultation. The needs assessment will be used as a baseline to monitor progress of our aims to ensure that local residents are able to see real, long-lasting changes.

This needs assessment has considered relevant legislation, guidance and best practice as well as research findings. Support for children and young people who are affected by domestic abuse is an essential aspect of our work as is the need to address the gaps we have identified in support and options.

We recognise that every individual will have unique needs and experiences and that many people will face additional barriers and concerns in seeking and accessing help and support, including those who have no recourse to public funds. Our analysis of data has identified where victim-survivors are not currently 'visible' to domestic abuse services, and we have set out below how we will work to reduce and remove barriers to help seeking so that ALL those affected by domestic abuse feel able to access help and support regardless of **age, disability, gender, race,**

# WBC DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY 2021-2024

religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation, and where they have multiple complex needs.

Additionally, we recognise the wider impact of domestic abuse on family members, friends, neighbours, colleagues, pets and wider society and our approach of creating a 'stronger system' will help every person and every organisation to understand the role they play in tackling this issue.

Effective prevention needs to include **early intervention** to attempt to influence values in childhood and adolescence, as well as shifting social norms to become less accepting of violence and abuse. Awareness raising campaigns are seen as vital to address stigma to encourage victims and survivors to seek support, to offer counter narratives to normalisation of these crimes and to encourage more open discussion of them within society.

**The Strategy sets out how we will raise awareness and accessibility of information, effectively communicating across and within services at all levels and how we will produce clear pathways to support and interventions.**

**Our ambition is to address stigma; encourage all victims and survivors, including children to seek support and offer counter narratives to normalisation of these crimes, breaking the cycle of re-offending and re-victimisation, taking the responsibility for dealing with the impact of domestic abuse away from victim-survivors and putting the onus firmly on perpetrators of abuse to change their behaviour.**



Berkshire Healthcare  
NHS Foundation Trust



## Purpose And Approach of Strategy

# WBC DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY 2021-2024

Our aim is for Wokingham residents and those who need to come to our area from a different geographical area as a result of domestic abuse to feel safe, acknowledged and 'heard' and to be able to navigate systems and services to get to the help they need based on their own unique needs and issues.

Within this strategy we have set out how we have collectively as agencies arrived at the priorities detailed below, identifying actions for the short, medium, and longer term, aligning our local response to national direction.

Supporting the overall delivery of the powers and duties of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and in line with statutory guidance on support within safe accommodation for victims of domestic abuse we are required to:



Appoint a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board.



Assess the need for accommodation-based domestic abuse support for all victims and their children who reside in relevant safe accommodation, including those who come from outside our area.



Prepare and publish a strategy for the provision of support to cover our area based on findings from the needs assessment.



Give effect to the strategy through commissioning and decommissioning decisions.



Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy.



Report back annually to central government.

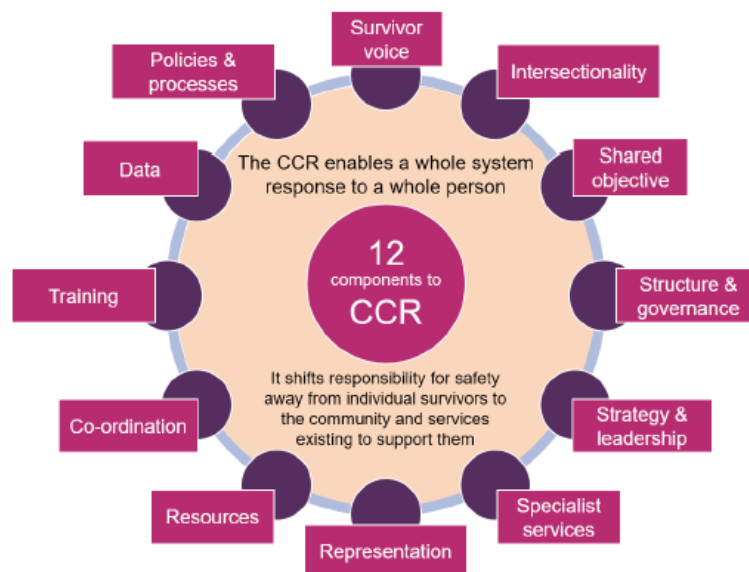
## Our Approach



# WBC DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY 2021-2024

We recognise that domestic abuse is a complex social problem that impacts people, communities, and services across society. To tackle and ultimately prevent domestic abuse, a Coordinated Community Response<sup>iv</sup> (CCR) has been created. A CCR is an approach which brings together services, including health, housing, social care, education, criminal justice and communities. The aim is to ensure local systems keep survivors safe, hold abusers to account and prevent domestic abuse.

The following model is now widely accepted as best practice and is one we are seeking to adopt across Wokingham borough:



## Progress To Date

To prepare for the new duties under the **Domestic Abuse Act 2021**, a Wokingham Domestic Abuse Partnership Board was appointed in March 2021, consisting of key statutory, voluntary organisations and those who could represent the 'voice' of diverse victim – survivors, including children, experiencing domestic abuse.

Alongside the Partnership Board, a Networking Group was established in April 2021 of over 40 local organisations who are invested in supporting those affected by domestic abuse, whether they are victim-survivors, children and young people or those who are perpetrating abuse.

In order to understand the needs of those affected by domestic abuse in Wokingham as well as those fleeing to our area as a result of domestic abuse, a robust needs assessment was undertaken. This consisted of analysis of data; in depth interviews with victim – survivors, children and young people<sup>v</sup>; analysis of available safe



accommodation options<sup>vi</sup> within the Borough and, wider national and emerging research and best practice.

The results of our analysis were published by way of a domestic abuse strategy consultation. The outcomes of the analysis and feedback from the consultation process have led to this strategy; the identification of key priorities to make real and sustainable progress; and the development of a three-year plan, within which will be detailed annual action plans.

## Consultation Process

Throughout the consultation process, we have sought to better understand the experiences of those in our area in accessing information and services.

Following in depth interviews with individuals who had been directly affected by domestic abuse as well as practitioners and local organisations, a draft strategy was put out for public consultation in July 2021 for a period of four weeks.

**118**

**Responses**

118 responses were received, providing a rich source of data and detailed feedback on their experiences of domestic abuse and our suggested priorities and approach. Respondents were representative of our area, from a wide range of age, genders, sexualities, ethnicities and disabilities and we have heard first-hand about serious trauma, physical harm, and long-term mental health impacts of experiencing domestic abuse.

We were encouraged to see that most of the respondents had a good understanding of the different forms domestic abuse can take. Just over 50% of respondents had experienced domestic abuse in their adult relationships; 19% had grown up with domestic abuse; 3% were concerned about their own behaviour; and many more were aware of family members, friends, neighbours and colleagues who had been affected by this issue. The quotes used within this document are from the consultation responses and are real people's experiences<sup>vii</sup>.

**50%**

Over 50% of respondent have experienced DA in their adult relationships

**19%**

Of respondents grew up with domestic abuse






**3%**

3% of respondents were concerned about their own behaviour

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## Data Analysis

Domestic abuse is often a 'hidden' issue which presents challenges to understanding the full extent of this issue within Wokingham Borough. To inform the needs assessment, data was gathered from the following organisations:

<b>Thames Valley Police</b> 	<b>Berkshire Women's Aid</b> (domestic abuse commissioned service during this data period) 	<b>Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) Homelessness Team</b> 	<b>WBC Home Refuge (Sanctuary) Scheme</b> 
<b>WBC Children's Services</b> 	<b>WBC Adult Services</b> 	<b>Health – Clinical Commissioning Group and Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust</b> 	<b>Voluntary Organisations</b> 

## Prevalence

In the period 1/4/2020 – 31/3/2021, Thames Valley Police responded to **2047<sup>viii</sup>** incidents of domestic abuse (**1479 women / 568 men**) in Wokingham. However, we are aware that many people don't feel able to report incidents to the police for a wide variety of reasons, and the true number of Wokingham residents who will have experienced domestic in the past year is likely to be much higher, based on Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) research findings.

In the year to March 2021, **136<sup>ix</sup>** Wokingham victims of domestic abuse were identified as being at high risk of serious harm or homicide, with **165** children living in these households. The commissioned domestic abuse service supported **292** victims alongside support for children and interventions to address perpetrator behaviours.

<b>136</b> DA Wokingham victims were identified as being at high risk of serious harm or suicide.	<b>165</b> Children were identified as living in those households.	<b>292</b> Commissioned DA service supported 292 victims alongside early-intervention models of work
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## Representation within Services

We recognise that every single person is a unique individual with their own needs and that many people face intersectionality's of multiple needs, issues and barriers to accessing support.

However, collation of data from the agencies detailed above alongside interviews with victim-survivors, indicates that people who share the following characteristics are currently under-represented in services and / or need specialist targeted interventions and support:



**Male victims**



**Those who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Trans-gender+**



**Older people**



**Younger people (16-18 year-olds)**



**People with health needs or disabilities**



**Those who need to flee to another area because of domestic abuse**



**People with complex needs , for example those with an offending history; substance misuse needs; those facing multiple forms of abuse within the family, including so called 'honour' based abuse and forced marriage**



**Those for whom there are limited safe accommodation options as a result of family size, gender, sexuality, having adolescent boys, health or mobility needs**



**Those experiencing cultural, religion and / or faith, language barriers and / or insecure immigration status**

## Emerging Needs

Alongside data collected about individuals accessing services, an analysis was undertaken to understand more about our Wokingham borough residents, looking at age, ethnicity, affluence and other known factors. This information enabled us to identify issues which are likely to be specific to our area and could impact on individual's choices and responses to experiencing domestic abuse.

This analysis identified the following issues to consider when developing this Strategy:

### Specialist Support

A need for 'by and for' specialist services that meet the needs of survivors from minoritised backgrounds.

### Economic Abuse and Housing

A need to focus on economic abuse and housing, where research has highlighted specific issues relating to mortgages and other debts secured to privately owned property.

### Demographics

To better understand the needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender (LGBT)+ domestic abuse; older people; people with a disability; male victims; those from ethnic diverse communities.

## Survivor's Voices

In depth interviews were held with those who had been directly affected by domestic abuse in order to understand their experiences and inform this strategy.

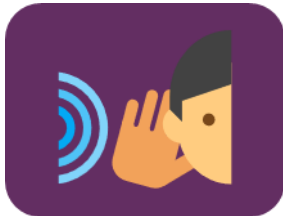
# WBC DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY 2021-2024

Victims and survivor interviews identified that they want:



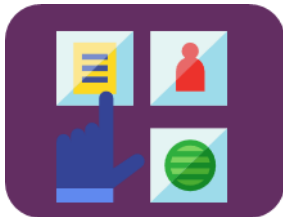
## **To Feel Safe**

Whether at home, out and about, at school, financially and when engaging with services



## **To Feel Acknowledged and 'Heard'**

regardless of gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity or whether they have disabilities, mental well-being or other issues



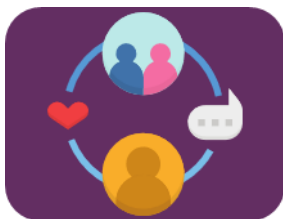
## **For Organisations to be more Trauma-informed**

when talking to victims / survivors; understanding the impact of economic, emotional, psychological, sexual, physical, coercive, narcissistic, controlling behaviours, 'honour' based abuse, forced marriage and FGM



## **For Front-line Officers to Know**

what safe and suitable accommodation options are available to the individual based on their circumstances



## **For Support or Therapy to be Tailored**

to their unique circumstances, from initial support through to where they are able to start rebuilding their lives



## **Effective Signposting and a Co-ordinated Response**

across the borough in partnership with voluntary services as well as commissioned and council-based services.

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## Children And Young People's Voices

Children and young people, as well as non- abusive parents identified they need:



### **To Feel Safe**

at home, out and about, in school and with their contact with social and other services



### **To Feel Acknowledged and 'Heard'**

with adults understanding and listening to the things they are saying – but also to be aware of the things they are 'not saying' verbally, but perhaps expressing through body language. Adults to be empathetic and to be a 'person they can trust to help them'



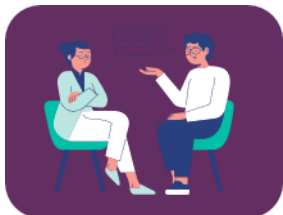
### **For Organisations to be More Trauma-informed**

understanding the trauma(s) that the child has gone through/is going through; confusion of how to process things and dilemmas faced when simultaneously trying to protect their non-abusive parent whilst maintaining a relationship with their other parent



### **For Front-line Officers to Understand Option**

which will meet their safe accommodation needs, but still enable them to be near schools, close to their friends and other important locations for them



### **For Support or Therapy to be Tailored**

to their unique circumstances and needs (this could include Post Traumatic Stress Therapy; Eye Movement De-sensitisation and Reprocessing; Colour Art or Play Therapy)



### **Effective Signposting and a Co-ordinated Response**

across the borough in partnership with voluntary services as well as commissioned and council-based services



### **Peer Support**

so children know they are not the only ones going through the situation, reducing isolation and providing opportunities to talk to other children who have/are going through the same thing as them

# WBC DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY 2021-2024

## Quotes From Public Consultation On Domestic Abuse Draft Strategy

*"You don't just have one type of abuse. It's all interlinked. The abuser wouldn't get physical unless they had worked on your mind first. My ex tried to murder me by strangulation yet it's the psychological scars that are hardest"*

*"I didn't recognise all the forms of abuse while I was in the relationship, and only after leaving and educating myself on abuse did I realise just how much abuse there was"*

*"A friend of my partner's was physically attacked by his wife, I never discussed it with him so don't know if there was any other abuse and he had just left her by the time I met him, but the physical scars were still visible".*

*"Family friend sexually assaulted me; 2 guys off a gay dating app (Grindr) drugged and assaulted me and I suffered psychological / emotional abuse from parent due to being gay as a child".*

*"Support for victims, friends and family as they can feel helpless at the time and then guilty when their intuition proves to be correct and yet they felt powerless to help or know where to go for help".*



## Priorities And Aims

Based on analysis of the data collected; outcomes of the interviews; public consultation feedback; best practice and research findings, the following priorities and aims have been agreed:

### Awareness and Early Intervention



- Ensure information is in a range of formats and language
- Deliver targeted awareness raising campaigns
- Make information available in community settings
- Support educational settings to raise awareness of domestic abuse
- Deliver training to enable domestic abuse to be identified and responded to

### Support for Victims, Survivors and Children



- Ensure information is available at the earliest opportunities for victim-survivors and children
- Ensure a wide range of holistic support options are available
- Tailor support to meet the individual's needs, empowering individuals to make safe choices
- Increase the number of people who are currently 'under-represented' in services
- Create clear pathways to support

### Minimising Harm



- Encourage those who are causing harm as a result of their abusive and controlling behaviour to access support to change
- Hold those who perpetrate domestic abuse to account
- Tackle the root cause of domestic abuse, including seeking to break the cycle of abuse

## Priorities And Aims Continued

### Justice, Recovery and On-going Protection



- Work with the Criminal Justice Services to support victims and survivors to give their best evidence in court
- Improve the experiences of those going through the Civil and Family Court systems
- Support individuals in achieving long-term wellbeing, both physically and emotionally so they can feel safe and move forward with their lives

### Driving Change Together



- Support partner organisations to work together to provide holistic and co-ordinated support
- Reduce the number of times that someone has to 'tell their story'
- Promote 'whole family and whole system' approaches
- Ensure the 'voices' of victims, survivors, children and perpetrators are 'heard'
- Provide and co-ordinate multi-agency training events, workshops and conferences

### Delivering the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 Duty



- Understand the needs of those who need to access safe accommodation
- Ensure a wide range of safe accommodation options are available
- Provide support for domestic abuse victims, survivors and their children in safe accommodation
- Support wider delivery of the act

## Domestic abuse strategy: Part 4, Domestic Abuse Act 2021 Duty

### Overview

Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 placed new duties on Local Authorities to provide support for domestic abuse victims and their children residing in safe accommodation. Statutory guidance<sup>x</sup> on how this duty should be delivered has been produced by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), previously the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and guides this local strategy in respect of the new duties.

In line with recommendations, we seek through this strategy to detail how we will fulfil our responsibilities to Part 4 of the Act as part of a coordinated response in a way that follows a victim-survivor's housing journey.

### The Wokingham Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board

A Wokingham Domestic Abuse Partnership Board (the 'Board') was formed in March 2021. The Board includes the responsible bodies and agencies as required by law to be represented. Members are responsible for ensuring they report back and feed into the Board on behalf of their represented group / body.



Representatives of diverse victims 'voices' including LGBT+, male, minority ethnic, older and disabled victims



Representative/s of Wokingham Borough Council



Representative/s of children of domestic abuse victims



Representatives for charities and other voluntary organisations that work with victims of domestic abuse in the area



Representative/s for health care services in the area



Representative/s for policing of criminal justice in the area



Representative/s for housing services

# WBC DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY 2021-2024

## Support for Domestic Abuse Victims including Children Living in Safe Accommodation

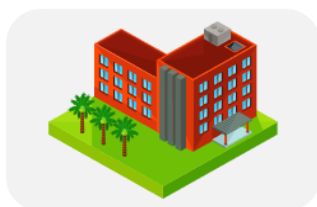
The Board supports Wokingham Borough Council by providing advice on the following:

- Assessing the scale and nature of the needs for support within relevant safe accommodation for all victims including their children, those who require highly specialist support and those that come from outside Wokingham area
- Preparing and publishing a strategy to detail how support in relevant safe accommodation will be delivered
- Taking into account the strategy when making decisions about funding at a local level for support in relevant safe accommodation
- Monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the strategy, including local delivery of support within relevant safe accommodation
- Reporting on progress and how funding has been used

## Support for domestic abuse victims and their children in safe accommodation

The new duty created under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, relates specifically to support within safe accommodation as other legislation covers the provision of accommodation. Support in community settings is also excluded from this new duty although this is addressed in the first section of this strategy and forms part of the wider national and local domestic abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls (which includes men and boys) responses.

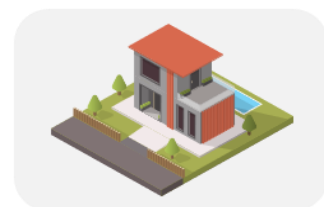
‘Safe accommodation’, also defined as ‘relevant accommodation’ is specified by the Secretary of State in regulations as:



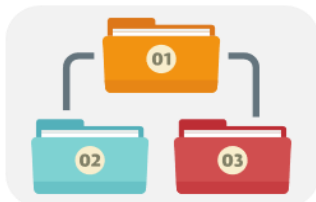
**Refuge  
Accommodation**



**Specialist, safe  
Accommodation**



**Dispersed  
Accommodation**



**Sanctuary Schemes  
(Wokingham: Home Refuge  
Scheme)**



**Second-stage  
Accommodation**



**Other Forms of Domestic  
Abuse Emergency  
Accommodation**

# WBC DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY 2021-2024

The statutory guidance states that accommodation such as Bed and Breakfast accommodation, shared mixed gender accommodation, privately owned and managed temporary accommodation which is not separate or self-contained is excluded in the Regulations

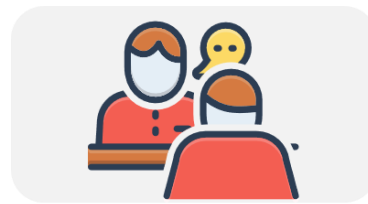
Duties under other Acts, such as temporary accommodation provided under Part 7 of the **Housing Act 1996**<sup>xi</sup>, continue to be met by Wokingham Borough Council and regard is given to victims presenting as homeless who are considered priority need in terms of access to accommodation, safe move-on accommodation from refuges and the ability to maintain secure tenancies where applicable.

## **For the purposes of the new duty, support within relevant accommodation includes:**

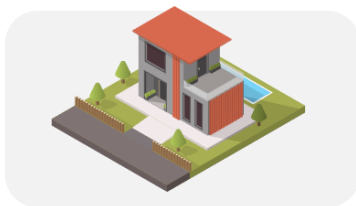
- Overall management of services within relevant safe accommodation
- Support with the day-to-day running of the service
- Advice service – including financial and legal support, including access to benefits, support into work and establishing independent financial arrangements



**Advocacy support** – development of personal safety plans, liaison with other services (for example, GPs and social workers, welfare benefit providers).



**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.



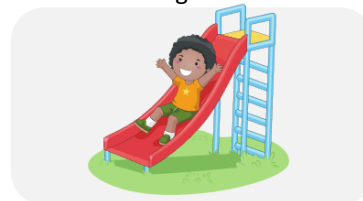
**Housing-related support** – providing housing-related advice and support, for example, securing a permanent home and advice on how to live safely and independently.



**Specialist support** for victims with relevant protected characteristics and / or complex needs, for example, interpreters, faith services, mental health advice and support, drug and alcohol advice and support, and immigration advice.



**Counselling and therapy** - for both adults and children.



**Children's support** – including play therapy and child advocacy or a specialist children's worker.

# WBC DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY 2021-2024

## Needs Assessment Approach and Outcomes

The following actions were undertaken to gain an insight into the diverse needs of those accessing support within safe accommodation and opportunities for earlier intervention:



Collection of data to understand the number and demographics of people accessing services and interventions, including those who must flee to or from Wokingham to access safe accommodation



Review of Wokingham population data to understand population in terms of age, gender, disability, ethnicity, income, home ownership and faith in order to compare this with the number of individuals 'visible' to services



Review of safe accommodation options currently available and demographics



In depth interviews with individuals with lived experience of domestic abuse, including young people and non-abusive parents



In depth interviews with local practitioners and national specialist services supporting those who share relevant protected characteristics



Analysis of gaps in provision, including understanding if those who own their own homes are seeking help



Review of research, best practice, national and local strategies and guidance documents



## Accommodation-related Data Findings

Thirty-seven family units contacted Wokingham Borough Council to say they were homeless because of domestic abuse during the period 1/4/2020 – 31/3/2021 and an additional forty-four families were supported to remain in their own homes with the provision of security measures installed through the Wokingham Home Refuge (Sanctuary) scheme.

All those presenting as homeless were female; 11% had a disability; 67% were White; 14% Asian or Asian British; 16% Black or Black British and 3% of mixed ethnicity. Despite the demographic makeup of our area, there were no Gypsy, Roma or Travellers within those seeking help. 62% of those who sought help were adults with children and 38% had no accompanying children.

A three-bedroom refuge supports those who need to flee from other areas to access safe accommodation and additional refuge provision is currently being secured. Of the 20 people who were known to have come to our area as a result of fleeing domestic abuse, eight were from the Reading area, four from other neighbouring areas and eight from further afield.

## Safe accommodation options currently available

In order to provide a holistic and inclusive response to the safe accommodation needs of victims, to include children in Wokingham Borough, we are seeking to adopt the Whole Housing Approach. The Whole Housing Approach (WHA)<sup>xii</sup> is a framework for addressing the housing and safety needs of victim-survivors of domestic abuse in a local area.

A review has been undertaken to identify which component parts are available in Wokingham and which are currently gaps in our provision. The outcomes of the review can be found in the table below.





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## Current Safe Accommodation Options

The following information summarises findings from Standing Together<sup>xiii</sup> who were commissioned in April 2021 to undertake this section linked to their domestic abuse housing expertise.

Part 4 Requirement	Current Status	Gaps/ Needs	Initial Recommendations
<b>Refuge</b>	<p>Berkshire Women's Aid provide safe housing for up to 38 women and children in 7 refuges in Reading, Wokingham and Bracknell.</p> <p>(Note: From 1<sup>st</sup> July 2021, Cranstoun who were awarded the contract to deliver domestic abuse support in Wokingham, have been working to secure additional refuge provision of at least 3 extra spaces for victims and their children)</p>	<p><b>The following could not be accommodated:</b></p> <p>22: No recourse to public fund survivors</p> <p>37: Complex needs unable to access</p> <p>108: No space or unsuitable room size</p> <p>10: Complex mental health needs unable to access</p> <p>7: Substance use needs</p> <p>2: Complex disability needs unable to offer</p> <p>33: Not safe in area unable to offer space</p> <p><b>In addition:</b></p> <p>Traveller and Roma Gypsy community: no caravan or mobile homes</p> <p>Male Victims/ LGBT+: no provision</p> <p>Disability: no rooms adapted to meet physical disabilities</p> <p>BWA Refuge is not a 'by and for' refuge</p> <p>Insufficient size rooms to meet larger family needs</p>	<p>Council of Europe recommendation: 1 refuge space per 10, 000 population</p> <p>Review the main reasons for why survivors can't access BWA refuge (main reasons based on No Woman Turned Away: disability, teenage son, BME, 4+ children</p> <p>To commission specialist support to meet the specific needs of victims from marginalised groups.</p>
<b>Sanctuary Scheme</b>	<p>The Home Refuge scheme is delivered by WBC.</p> <p>Scheme is fitted by Age UK.</p>	<p>No self-referrals received Jan- April 2021: People in need may not be engaging with services.</p> <p>No referrals since lockdown from WBC housing team. Historically they make the most referrals. Referrals continued from other sources including self-referral.</p>	<p>Sanctuary scheme offered as part of a package of support with access to DA services for safety planning.</p> <p>Sanctuary scheme promoted to encourage self-referrals.</p>

# WBC DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY 2021-2024

		Demographic breakdown available.	Review process, looking at length of wait, costings, any issues with private rented sector, demographic data etc.
<b>Move On/ Dispersed</b>	<p>BWA staff support survivors to make homelessness applications as part of outreach provision.</p> <p>Monthly Housing Panel meetings to discuss complex and urgent cases.</p> <p>Silva Homes have reciprocals agreement with WBC and Vivid have nominations rights managed by WBC.</p>	<p>No immediate relief (so not placed in accommodation before doing the homelessness appointment).</p> <p>Not enough temporary accommodation in the Borough.</p> <p>Lack of culturally specific services attached to accommodation and not being able to keep pets.</p>	<p>Access Move on Fund via Homes England, which has funding ring fenced for DA accommodation.</p> <p>Ensure designated DA safe accommodation through new affordable housing provision.</p>
<b>Social Housing/ DAHA</b>	<p>Wokingham Borough Council and 3 Local Housing Associations have committed to seeking DAHA (Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance) Accreditation.</p>	<p>Staff not aware of dynamics of DA and needs of the other survivor.</p> <p>Need for perpetrator management.</p>	<p>Refuge providers, leads for other forms of housing, commissioners to be involved in work.</p> <p>Housing partners to attend national DAHA workshops.</p>
<b>Co-located Advocacy/ Mobile Advocacy</b>	<p>No co-located advocacy service in place.</p>	<p>There is some uncertainty of housing options available to support survivors.</p> <p>Feedback included that staff not aware of dynamics of DA and needs of the survivor.</p>	<p>Commission co-located housing advocate.</p>
<b>Flexible Funding</b>	<p>Not currently available.</p> <p>Some support available through Cowshed and other local organisations.</p> <p>Designated funding pot that survivors can access easily and quickly to retain or secure safe and stable</p>	<p>Where parents require financial help in order to travel to schools that are located far away from their home address, they often have to pay for the cost upfront before being able to claim it back.</p>	<p>Establish pot, ideally dispersed via the specialist domestic abuse services – Whole Housing pilot included £100k for a three pilot sites over 2 years</p>

# WBC DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY 2021-2024

	housing. There is not set list of what will be funded. It exists to fund whatever will help survivors access the best housing outcome possible for them in the short and long term.	Accommodation does not always have furnishings.	
<b>Managed Reciprocal Scheme</b>	<p>Local Housing Provider Forum meet quarterly.</p> <p>Silva Homes have reciprocal agreement with WBC and Vivid have nominations rights managed by WBC</p>	<p>Not enough temporary accommodation available.</p> <p>Survivors highlight the location for housing was not always suitable.</p>	Consider introducing a reciprocal scheme with surrounding LA's and main providers to help survivors maintain social tenancies.

## Victim-survivors Needs Relating to Their Lived Experience

Our interviews with victim-survivors of domestic abuse to discuss safe accommodation and support within safe accommodation, which were undertaken by an independent specialist<sup>xiv</sup>, identified the following key needs:



**To Be Safe**



**To FEEL ACKNOWLEDGED AND 'HEARD'** regardless of gender, age, sexuality, ethnicity, disability, or any other characteristic



For front line officers to be aware of **NUANCES OF DOMESTIC ABUSE** and the impact of economic, emotional, psychological, sexual as well as physical abuse, to understand coercive and controlling behaviour, 'honour' based abuse and forced marriage



For front line officers to **UNDERSTAND INTERSECTIONALITIES**, including mental health, culture and faith



**A RANGE OF SUITABLE SAFE ACCOMMODATION** options



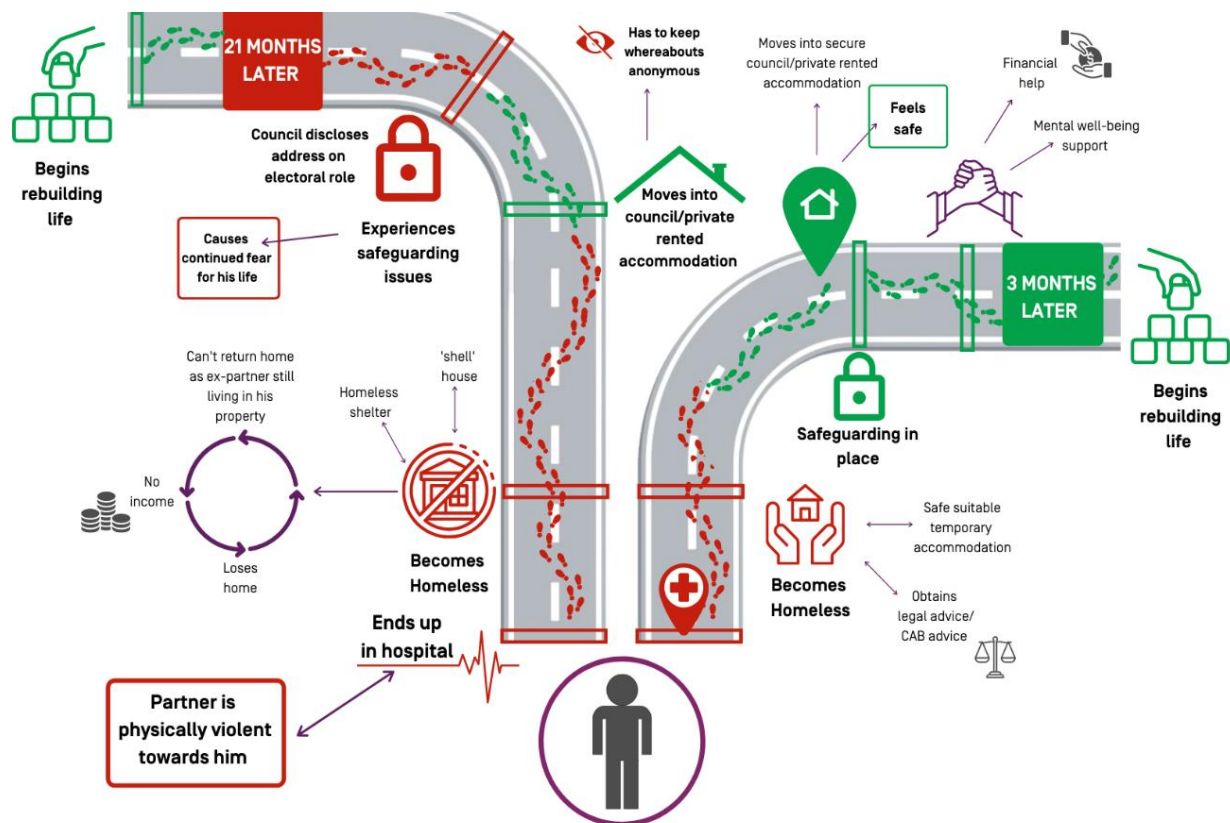
**SUPPORT TAILORED** to their unique circumstances



**EFFECTIVE SIGNPOSTING AND A CO-ORDINATED RESPONSE** across the borough in partnership with voluntary services as well as commissioned and council-based services

## One Victim's Experience

The need to ensure that victims are fully supported, with tailored support and responses through their journey to safe accommodation was highlighted in the journey of one male victim, who shared his story during our consultation. It was identified that potentially his journey to safe accommodation could have been shortened from 21 to 3 months.



## Quotes from public consultation linked to support in safe accommodation

*"...a safe place to go that doesn't involve having to prove what's happening to you and without having to leave your home, job, school, friends, life"*

*"There is a huge need for support for children under 11 years"*

# WBC DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY 2021-2024

*"To make sure there is easily accessible support for marginalised communities which understand their experiences of domestic abuse vary"*

*"...and that other mental health issues and trauma may also need to be addressed as part of recovery".*

*"Financial help must be made available under the barrier of support, as economic abuse is a constant and long terms threat which often traps mums for longer and still has a strong hold after separation too".*

*"Having been a victim of domestic abuse leaving if you own a home and have teenage boys is impossible".*

*"Sometimes school is the only place where a child feels safe and removing them from that school because they are forced to move out of their home basically rips away their only safe place"*

*"Accommodation for disabled people or people with disabled children is difficult at the best of times, this leads to disabled people being forced into unsuitable housing or temporary accommodation".*

*"Older people who have had their own homes being forced into bed and breakfast situations with considerably young people is really hard"*

*"...people need to have people of their own age group around them who understand their life experiences".*

## Support In Safe Accommodation

In forming and detailing the priority areas for action, we have tried to ensure that the diverse needs of victim – survivors, which includes children, are reflected. This includes ensuring that services are provided in locations and ways that are accessible.

Consultation and discussions are informing our approach to meeting the needs of those with sensory needs; in need of translation services; in need of support linked to physical mobility issues or using wheelchairs; for those who are blind or have sight issues; those who are deaf or hard of hearing; or have learning or other needs.

**Feedback from those with lived experience of domestic abuse identified the following support holistic needs:**



**Assertiveness workshops**



**Drawing and relaxation courses**



**Information on civil legal protection orders**



**Counselling and long-term support**



**Life skills to include money management and budgeting; financial planning; maintaining a tenancy; basic DIY skills**

**Identified support needed for children and young people includes:**



**Colour art and play therapy**



**Confidence building**



**Fun activities**



**Trauma-based interventions**



## Meeting The Needs of All Victims Based on Protected Characteristics<sup>xv</sup>

Research findings have identified that having multiple complex needs or protected characteristics can make it more difficult for victim-survivors to access help and support.

The following details some of our plans to make available support services that meet the needs, and address barriers faced by victims with relevant protected characteristics.

A calendar of training events for local practitioners has been developed, which will increase skills and knowledge around barriers faced by those with a protected characteristic or complex needs. Information gained from training, professional's feedback and research findings will enable the table below to be expanded upon, and gaps in support identified and responded to.

	Potential barriers and needs identified	Proposed action to address needs
<b>Age: Young (aged 16-19)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Increased prevalence of abuse compared to other age groups</li> <li>-Casual nature of relationships</li> <li>-Reliance on technology</li> <li>-Not recognising the term 'domestic abuse'</li> <li>-Poorly equipped to deal with practical problems faced when trying to escape the abuse</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Literature and information written using terminology used by young victims</li> <li>-Interventions in education settings</li> <li>-Practical and emotional support</li> <li>-Use of young people's risk assessment tools</li> </ul>
<b>Age: Older (65+)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Isolation</li> <li>-Years of prolonged abuse</li> <li>-Health issues or disabilities</li> <li>-Reliance on abuser for care or money</li> <li>-Abuse by family members</li> <li>-Refuge accommodation may not be seen as practical or suitable for the unique living needs of older people</li> <li>-Public picture of domestic abuse</li> <li>-Generational ideas/attitudes of abuse</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Training for practitioners</li> <li>-Increase safe accommodation option to think more holistically than refuge accommodation</li> <li>-Support to respond to practical needs</li> <li>-Printed information available in community venues</li> </ul>
<b>Disability (including but not limited to deaf or hard of hearing, visually impaired,</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Accessible accommodation and transport</li> <li>-Need for assistance with personal care, medication, sign language interpreters, equipment</li> <li>-Fear of losing their children</li> <li>-Fear of loss of independence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Tailor support needs to the individual</li> <li>-Identify a range of safe accommodation options including those which are: wheelchair accessible and have</li> </ul>

# WBC DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY 2021-2024

<b>autistic, wheelchair users and those with learning difficulties)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Lack of accessible information</li> <li>-Concerns about who will care for the abuser</li> <li>-Communication difficulties making it difficult to seek help or raise alert</li> <li>-Specialised practical and emotional support needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>been assessed to meet any sensory needs</li> <li>-Fire service specialist equipment</li> </ul>
<b>Marriage and civil partnership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Cultural expectations to remain in the relationship</li> <li>-Joint assets and lack of access to money or credit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Raise awareness of services who can provide advice on financial options</li> </ul>
<b>Pregnancy and maternity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Increased vulnerability</li> <li>-Trigger for domestic abuse</li> <li>-Escalation in abuse</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Work with health services to ensure signposting information available and practitioners aware of support services</li> </ul>
<b>Race, religion, or belief</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Cultural and/ or spiritual expectations</li> <li>-Normalising of abuse in some cultures</li> <li>-Risk of so called 'honour' based abuse and forced marriage</li> <li>-Distrust of police and other statutory agencies</li> <li>-Fear of rejection by wider community</li> <li>-Concerns relating to immigration status</li> <li>-Language barriers</li> <li>-Intersectionality impact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Develop ethnically sensitive preventative work and awareness raising.</li> <li>-Specialist, ethnically sensitive training for practitioners</li> <li>-Workshops for community groups</li> <li>-Commissioning of 'by and for' services</li> <li>Interpretation services</li> </ul>
<b>Sexual orientation and gender identification</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-'Public picture' of domestic abuse</li> <li>-Abuse from family members</li> <li>-Fear of being 'outed'</li> <li>-Fear of responses to seeking help</li> <li>-Lack of awareness LGBT+ relationships can be abusive</li> <li>-Professionals may not recognise intimate nature of relationship</li> <li>-'Social 'acceptability' of violence between 2 men or 2 women</li> <li>- Higher rates of mental health needs, including self-worth</li> <li>-May not feel fit into 'women only' or 'men only' services</li> <li>-Not recognised as bi-sexual depending on gender of abuser</li> <li>-Medication needs</li> <li>-Lack of acceptable refuge accommodation provision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Campaigns to raise awareness of LGBT+ domestic abuse</li> <li>-Promote LGBT+ Domestic Abuse specialist service</li> <li>-Seek safe accommodation options</li> <li>-Training for professionals to use preferred name and pronouns</li> </ul>

# WBC DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY 2021-2024

In addition, the following have been identified as facing additional barriers to accessing help and support:

	Potential barriers and needs identified	Proposed action to address needs
<b>Male victims</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'Public picture' of domestic abuse leading to lack of recognition for male victims</li> <li>-Dismissal of men's injuries</li> <li>-Women's abusive acts ignored / dismissed</li> <li>-Male victims treated as offenders</li> <li>-Fear of not being believed</li> <li>-Isolation</li> <li>-Lack of refuge provision, especially for men with children</li> <li>-Lack of awareness of support available</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Ensure all information, leaflets, posters, web-based campaigns are inclusive</li> <li>-Work to provide refuge provision for men</li> <li>-Commission services which will support male victims</li> <li>-Delivery of specialist training for agencies</li> </ul>
<b>Those with complex needs (for example an offending history, mental health issues, substance misuse, intersectionalities)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Additional needs obscure the abuse</li> <li>-Increased risk of violence</li> <li>-Unable to access refuge and other accommodation</li> <li>-Fear of being labelled as the abuser</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Joined up approach by agencies to address issues simultaneously</li> <li>-Seek safe accommodation options and reciprocal agreements</li> </ul>
<b>Victims with insecure immigration status</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Reluctance to report abuse due to fear of deportation</li> <li>-Reliance on perpetrator for residency</li> <li>-Lack of recourse to public funding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Raising awareness of fee waivers, changes of No Recourse to Public Funding conditions. Destitution Domestic Violence Concession</li> <li>-Promote pathways to support based on individual situations</li> </ul>
<b>Those with limited English proficiency</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Communication barriers</li> <li>-Difficulties expressing abuse</li> <li>-Lack of accessible information</li> <li>-Isolation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Information in accessible formats</li> <li>-Interpreter support</li> </ul>
<b>Victims who have to move away from their local areas due to domestic abuse</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Lack of local knowledge on support and services</li> <li>-Likely to be isolated from previous support network</li> <li>-Need to register with local services and schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Work collaboratively with other local authorities to put in place support which allows victims easy movement from one area to another, whilst ensuring their safety.</li> </ul>

# WBC DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY 2021-2024

		<p>This will include funding for travel, 'warm' handovers to new area service providers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Information pack for those fleeing to Wokingham</li> </ul>
<b>Victims with adolescent male children</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Refugees may not take adolescent boys</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Seek alternative safe options</li> </ul>
<b>Victims with children, including large families and children who have a disability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Refuge accommodation may not be available or practical</li> <li>-Child needs to continue with current treatments; home adaptations; specialist school provision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Identify different safe accommodation options</li> <li>-Consider home refuge scheme (if appropriate)</li> </ul>
<b>Victims who have intersectionality issues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Domestic abuse may not be recognised</li> <li>-May be reluctant to seek help from professionals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Cultural understanding training for professionals</li> </ul>
<b>Victims who have pets</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Lack of safe accommodation options which will take pets</li> <li>-Victims reluctant to leave abusive relationship if they are unable to take their pets with them</li> <li>-Reluctance by some private and social landlords to accept pets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Increase awareness of pet fostering services for victims of domestic abuse</li> <li>-Encourage landlords, where possible to consider allowing pets</li> </ul>
<b>Children</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Abuse perpetrated to a parent affecting neurodevelopment</li> <li>-Emotional regulation impact</li> <li>-Trauma impact</li> <li>-Post Traumatic Stress</li> <li>-Impact on physical and emotional wellbeing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Trauma informed support</li> <li>-Training for professionals</li> <li>-Range of support options</li> <li>-Long term support options</li> </ul>

## Domestic Abuse Strategy – Part 4, Domestic Abuse Act Duty

Based on the above findings linked to the provision of safe accommodation options and support within these settings, the Wokingham Domestic Abuse Partnership Board has agreed the following priorities and aims under each priority for the new strategy.

### **Increase awareness of safe\* accommodation choices for all victims of domestic abuse**

- Ensure information is available in a wide range of formats
- Enhance domestic abuse support within the WBC homelessness team
- Increase awareness of the WBC Home Refuge (Sanctuary) scheme, particularly to male and older victims and home owners
- Ensure practitioners are aware of safe accommodation options and pathways to this support
- Increase the number of victims and survivors who are not currently accessing advice and support linked to their housing options

\*Relevant safe accommodation encompasses the broad based and wide diversity of accommodation that victims of domestic abuse and their children may live in, or chose to live in, including refuge, specialist safe accommodation, dispersed accommodation, sanctuary schemes and second stage accommodation.

### **Provide an inclusive range of safe accommodation options to meet the needs of all individuals (regardless of gender / age / sexuality/ ethnicity/ economic means / ownership of property / race / faith and culture)**

- Ensure there is a holistic, needs driven range of appropriate safe accommodation within Wokingham Borough
- Increase the safe accommodation provision based on identified gaps and needs
- Ensure that victims and survivors of domestic abuse are aware of how to protect their new address
- Work with other areas to put in place reciprocal arrangements for families who need to move areas as a result of domestic abuse
- Work with health services to ensure access to equipment, community mental health and Rapid Response
- Ensure information about anonymous registration on the Electoral Role is provided to reduce a perpetrator finding their victim.

## **Provide support for victims/ survivors / children living in safe accommodation**

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- **Ensure a holistic range of support is available within Wokingham for as long as the individual needs this**
- **Support those who need to flee from the Wokingham areas as a result of domestic abuse through the process to accessing safe accommodation in another area**
- **Ensure coordinated support where a family may have adult services, children's services involvement as well as other agencies**
- **Create a 'welcome' pack for those moving to safe accommodation to include practical and holistic information**
- **Deliver and signpost to practical and emotional support (eg DIY skills, financial planning, drawing, music, sports activities etc)**
- **Work in partnership with neighbouring districts to maximise support options for individuals**
- **Provide training for support workers to ensure they are equipped to address the needs of those with complex, mental, physical and sensory needs and communication barriers**

## **Strengthen partnership work to drive and improve outcomes**

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- **Organisations across Wokingham Borough working together to support the council to meet its new duty**
- **Develop and deliver multi agency training to ensure practitioners can respond to those who may need to access safe accommodation**
- **Ensure that the 'voices' of victims, survivors and children are at the heart of our partnership working by ensuring representation on the Partnership Board of all victims, to include children affected by domestic abuse in our area, regardless of gender, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, faith or culture, economic status and family size**
- **Develop and deliver an annual action plan to continually drive improvements to the options and support available for those who need to flee as a result of domestic abuse**
- **Develop a consistent dataset to be used across agencies to monitor impact**

## Support Individuals to Begin Rebuilding their Lives

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- Provide safe, supported accommodation where individuals can have the space and time to decide how to move forward with the next stage of their lives
- Enable children and young people to access the support they will need to come to terms with what they have experienced and start to feel safe and more secure emotionally and physically
- Help facilitate access to the means to moving forward, be that through training, support with job seeking, confidence building, safety planning or whatever the individual identifies as being important to them
- Develop a system which reduces the number of times a victim, survivor or child must 'tell their story'
- Provide prompt access to practical support needed, including housing related support, opening a bank account and registering with a GP
- Working in partnership with agencies and community groups to develop additional opportunities to engage in activities and start building new friendships and support networks
- Ensure that no victim-survivor or child is disadvantaged from accessing appropriate support as a result of their gender, sexuality, economic means or protected characteristic. This may necessitate separate programmes being delivered where necessary.



## Implementation, Development and Funding of Strategy

The effective implementation of this Strategy relies on a cross-system approach of a co-ordinated and cohesive response. A three-year action plan is being developed in line with our outlined priorities to ensure effective implementation and delivery through a partnership approach, with designated lead agencies aligned to each action.

An annual action plan will enable realistic, sustainable, achievable but ambitious progress to be made and ensure flexibility to respond to emerging research findings and best practice examples.

We will keep under review any effect of the Part 4 duty strategy on the provision of other domestic abuse support in the area.

## Funding

Each Tier One authority was allocated funding of £50,000 to help prepare for the new duty detailed above. This funding enabled us to commission specialist input to inform our needs assessment in respect of analysis of safe accommodation available as well as for in-depth interviews with those with lived experience and local practitioners, alongside training for practitioners, flexible funding to support victim-survivors and other relevant costs.

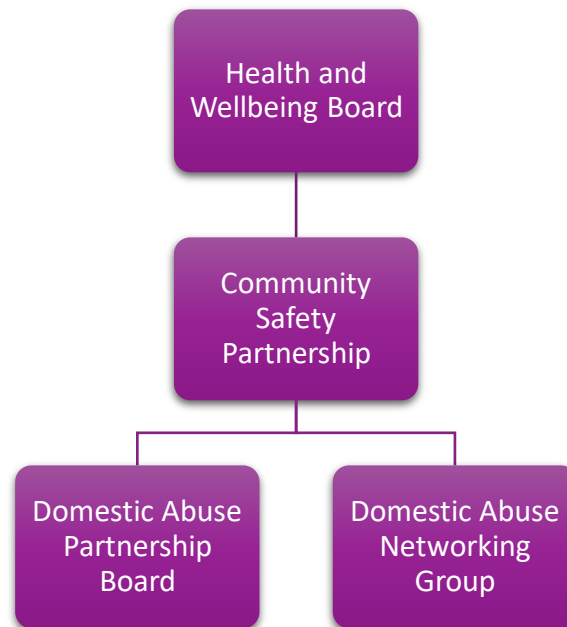
Funding was allocated to each Tier One authority to meet new duty costs relating to support in safe accommodation for the year 2021 / 22, with Wokingham Borough Council being allocated **£247,326**. A breakdown of funding being committed to deliver on the areas set out in the strategy is agreed with the Partnership Board and details will be made available. An announcement under the Spending Review will set out future year's funding for this duty.

Alongside allocated funding linked to the new duty, Wokingham Borough Council has committed to investing funding for the next seven years to commission specialist community based domestic abuse support. Partner agencies additionally invest in domestic abuse support and significantly contribute to the overall response to domestic abuse across the borough.

**The Partnership Board will monitor the impact on community-based support as a result of the new duty.**

## Governance

Both the Networking Group and Partnership Board report into the Community Safety Partnership, who in turn report into the Health and Wellbeing Board.



## Monitoring Progress and Measuring Success

This strategy sets out a framework for delivery of the Domestic Abuse Act duty under Part 4, alongside our wider commitment to improving the lives of those affected by domestic abuse.

Local delivery of the action plans which underpin this strategy will be overseen and driven by the Partnership Board in respect of the Part 4 new duty, with the Networking Group overseeing the wider domestic abuse action plan.

We will use a range of quantitative data and qualitative input through listening the voices of those with lived experiences to find out whether victim-survivors are able to access the support they need and the reduction in barriers faced. This will help us to understand how local decisions and actions impact the needs assessments and victim journeys within our area.

An annual evaluation through ongoing needs assessments will be undertaken.

## Links To Other Strategies

This strategy has been informed at national level by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (formerly MHCLG) Statutory Guidance for local authorities: Delivery of Support to Victims of Domestic Abuse in Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Services<sup>xvi</sup>; Domestic Abuse: Draft Statutory Guidance Framework<sup>xvii</sup>; Violence Against Women and Girls (which includes men and boys) Strategy<sup>xviii</sup>; Modern Slavery<sup>xix</sup>; Community Safety<sup>xx</sup>; Victims Strategy<sup>xxi</sup>; Housing and Homelessness Reduction<sup>xxii</sup>; Safeguarding; Supporting Families<sup>xxiii</sup> guidance. It has additionally been informed by other relevant national and local strategies and guidance documents.

Statutory requirements include (but not limited to) those set out in the Equalities Act 2010; Human Rights Act 1998; Children's Act 2004; Housing Act 1996; Homelessness Act 2002 and Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

## Equality Impact Assessment

In order to ensure that the Public Sector Equalities Duty under the Equality Act 2010<sup>xxiv</sup>, has been met, an Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken to ensure that the Domestic Abuse Strategy has due regard to:

- The Elimination of unlawful discrimination
- The advancement of equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those don't
- Foster or encourage good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.

Protected characteristics are defined as age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex and sexual orientation.

## Process for Organisations and Individuals to Raise Concerns Linked to this Strategy

Any organisation or individual who have concerns regarding this strategy can contact the Wokingham Domestic Abuse Coordinator, or Community Safety Team. In addition, concerns can be raised using Wokingham Borough Council's complaints procedure which can be found at <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/contact-us/tell-us-about-a-problem/>

## Review Period

The strategy is designed to be flexible in order to adapt to changing needs and national guidance with annual action plans developed to monitor progress and direct funding commitments.

Any revisions to this strategy (excluding insubstantial revisions) will only be made as a result of consultation with the Partnership Board and Networking Group members, following circulation of the up to date version of the strategy and allowing for adequate time for organisations to review and feedback. Unless there are circumstances which require a quick response, a period of at least one month will be provided for agency representatives to consult and agree changes.

**The strategy will be reviewed in full every three years, with an annual refresh. The first annual review will take place in October 2022, with the full review due in October 2024.**

## Strategy Format

If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact [karen.evans@wokingham.gov.uk](mailto:karen.evans@wokingham.gov.uk)

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Domestic Abuse Act 2021 - Part 1 Definition of 'domestic abuse'

(1) This section defines 'domestic abuse' for the purposes of this Act.

(2) Behaviour of a person ('A') towards another person ('B') is "domestic abuse" if—

- (a) A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and
- (b) the behaviour is abusive.

(3) Behaviour is 'abusive' if it consists of any of the following:

- (a) physical or sexual abuse
- (b) violent or threatening behaviour
- (c) controlling or coercive behaviour
- (d) economic abuse (see subsection (4))
- (e) psychological, emotional or other abuse

and it does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.

(4) 'Economic abuse' means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on B's ability to:

- (a) acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or
- (b) obtain goods or services

(5) For the purposes of this Act A's behaviour may be behaviour 'towards' B despite the fact that it consists of conduct directed at another person (for example, B's child).

(6) References in this Act to being abusive towards another person are to be read in accordance with this section.

(7) For the meaning of 'personally connected', see section 2.

### Section 2: Definition of 'personally connected'

(1) Two people are 'personally connected' to each other if any of the following applies:

- (a) they are, or have been, married to each other
- (b) they are, or have been, civil partners of each other
- (c) they have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated)
- (d) they have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been terminated)
- (e) they are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other

- (f) they each have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child (see subsection (2))
- (g) they are relatives.

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1)(f) a person has a parental relationship in relation to a child if:

- (a) the person is a parent of the child, or
- (b) the person has parental responsibility for the child.

(3) In this section:

- 'child' means a person under the age of 18 years;
- 'civil partnership agreement' has the meaning given by section 73 of the Civil Partnership Act 2004;
- 'parental responsibility' has the same meaning as in the Children Act 1989;
- 'relative' has the meaning given by section 63(1) of the Family Law Act 1996.

### **Section 3: Children as victims of domestic abuse**

(1) This section applies where behaviour of a person ('A') towards another person ('B') is domestic abuse.

(2) Any reference in this Act to a victim of domestic abuse includes a reference to a child who:

- (a) sees or hears, or experiences the effect of, the abuse, and
- (b) is related to A or B.

(3) A child is related to a person for the purposes of subsection (2) if:

- (a) the person is a parent of, or has parental responsibility for, the child, or
- (b) the child and the person are relatives.

(4) In this section:

- 'child' means person under the age of 18 years;
- 'parental responsibility' has the same meaning as in the Children Act 1989 (see section 3 of that Act);
- 'relative' has the meaning given by section 63(1) of the Family Law Act 1996.

## Appendix 2: Safe Accommodation – Statutory Guidance

**A3.1** While we acknowledge the critical role of refuge in providing safety and support, particularly to those victims at high risk of serious harm, government recognises that victims may need to live in a variety of different forms of relevant safe accommodation.

**A3.2** Privately-owned and managed temporary accommodation which is not separate or self-contained and with shared toilet, bathroom, or kitchen facilities (such as Bed and Breakfast accommodation) is not considered relevant safe accommodation, and is specifically excluded in the Regulations, so local authorities should not commission domestic abuse support for victims within these types of accommodation under these duties.

**A3.3** Commissioning authorities and local housing authorities should work together closely to ensure that duties owed to victims of domestic abuse under other Acts, such as temporary accommodation provided under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, continue to be met alongside this duty. It is possible for support under this (Part 4) duty to be provided in accommodation associated with another duty such as a Housing Act 1996 Part 7 duty, provided, such accommodation adheres to the description of relevant safe accommodation.

**A3.4** Description of ‘relevant accommodation’ (also referred to as ‘safe accommodation’ throughout this guidance) is specified by the Secretary of State in regulations as:

- Refuge accommodation – a refuge offers single gender or single sex accommodation and domestic abuse support which is tied to that accommodation. The address will not be publicly available. Victims, including their children, will have access to a planned programme of therapeutic and practical support from staff. Accommodation may be in shared or self-contained housing, but in both cases the service will enable peer support from other refuge residents.
- Specialist safe accommodation – specialist safe accommodation offering single gender or single sex accommodation, alongside dedicated domestic abuse support which is tailored to also support those who share particular protected characteristic(s) (see section B5) and / or who share one or more vulnerabilities requiring additional support (see section B5). Accommodation may be in shared or self-contained housing, and the address will not be publicly available.

This includes ‘By and For’ services where victims are able to see themselves reflected in the staffing, management and governance structures. By and For services are designed and led by those that share the same protected characteristic(s) as the victims they aim to serve. For example, a specialist domestic abuse organisation that is led by Black and minoritised women and children, for Black and minoritised women and children.

- Dispersed accommodation:

i. Safe (secure and dedicated to supporting victims of domestic abuse), self-contained accommodation with a similar level of specialist domestic abuse support as provided within a refuge but which may be more suitable for victims who are unable to stay in a refuge with communal spaces, and/or where peer support from other residents may not be appropriate, due to complex support needs, or where older teenage sons cannot be accommodated in a women only refuge, for example. Where two or more units share any part of the accommodation, including shared hallways or access routes, provision should be single gender or single sex.

ii. Safe (secure and dedicated to supporting victims of domestic abuse), self-contained 'semi-independent' accommodation which is not within a refuge but with support for victims who may not require the intensive support offered through refuge, but are still at risk of abuse from their perpetrator/s. Where two or more units share any part of the accommodation, including shared hallways or access routes, provision should be single gender or single sex.

- Sanctuary Schemes properties with local authority or private registered providers of social housing installed Sanctuary Schemes which provide enhanced physical security measures to a home or the perimeter of the home. A Sanctuary Scheme is a survivor centred initiative which aims to make it possible for victims of domestic abuse to remain in their own homes, where it is safe for them to do so, where it is their choice, and where the perpetrator does not live in the accommodation. This is done by providing additional security – 'installing a sanctuary' – to the victims' property or perimeter. The [Whole Housing Approach Toolkit on Sanctuary Schemes](#) provides further information.
- Second stage accommodation - accommodation temporarily provided to victims, including their children, who are moving on from other forms of relevant accommodation and/or 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 settled accommodation. Where second stage accommodation is in shared housing it should be single gender or single sex. There is no expectation that every victim will require this. Many victims are ready to move straight to a settled new home from refuge. However, second stage accommodation (sometimes known as 'move-on') may be helpful in some cases.
- Other forms of domestic abuse emergency accommodation – a safe place (single gendered or single sex, secure and dedicated to supporting victims of domestic abuse) with domestic abuse support tied to the accommodation to enable victims to make informed decisions when leaving a perpetrator and seeking safe accommodation. For example, short term (e.g. 2-3 weeks) accommodation providing victims with the space and safety to consider and make informed decisions about the options available to them.

**A3.5** Some domestic abuse safe accommodation services may fall under more than one of the above descriptions.

**A3.6** Local Authorities must carry out their duties relating to the provision of accommodation-based support by providing support within such accommodation in line with the above descriptions in the Regulations



**A3.7** All support provided under the duties must be provided to victims of domestic abuse, including children, who reside in relevant safe accommodation as set out above and such support should meet the DLUHC Quality Standards (See Annex B), [Women's Aid National Quality Standards](#), [Imkaan Accredited Quality Standards](#), [Male Domestic Abuse Network Service Standards](#) and / or [DAHA Accreditation Framework for Housing Providers](#).

## Appendix 3: Support within relevant safe accommodation – Statutory Guidance

**A4.7** This guidance describes domestic abuse support within relevant safe accommodation as:

- **Overall management of services within relevant safe accommodation** – including capacity building, support and supervision of staff, payroll, financial and day to day management of services and maintaining relationships with the local authority (such functions will often be undertaken by a service manager)
- **Support with the day-to-day running of the service** – for example scheduling times for counselling sessions, group activities (such functions may often be undertaken by administrative or office staff)
- **Advocacy support** – development of personal safety plans, liaison with other services (for example, GPs and social workers, welfare benefit providers).
- **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**
  - **Designed specifically for victims with relevant protected characteristics** (including ‘by and for’), such as faith services, translators and interpreters, immigration advice, interpreters for victims identifying as deaf and / or hard of hearing, and dedicated support for LGBTQ+ victims [not limited to].
  - **Designed specifically for victims with additional and / or complex needs** such as, mental health advice and support, drug and alcohol advice and support [not limited to], including sign posting accordingly.
- **Children’s support** – including play therapy, child advocacy or a specialist children worker (for example, a young people’s violence advisor, IDVA or outreach worker specialised in working with children).
- **Housing-related support** – providing housing-related advice and support, for example, securing a permanent home, rights to existing accommodation and advice on how to live safely and independently.
- **Advice service** – including financial and legal support, including accessing benefits, support into work and establishing independent financial arrangements; and,
- **Counselling and therapy** – (including group support) for both adults and children, including emotional support.

**A4.8** This list of support is not an exhaustive list and other relevant support services can be put in place (based on victims’ needs).

## **Appendix 4: DLUHC Quality Standards**

### **1. Safety, Security and Dignity**

- Victims can access crisis support at any time and receive a timely response.
- On referral, services rigorously assess and agree with the victim whether the service's geographical location can offer a victim safety. Victims are not expected to accept an offer of support in safe accommodation which does not provide a safe location.
- Victim safety is prioritised throughout. Victims should not be expected to stay if a service location is no longer safe for them (e.g. found by their perpetrator), but should be given urgent assistance to move.
- Victims are assessed and offered trauma informed services on the basis of their individual need for safety and support.
- Measures are in place to ensure service users are safe from being found by their perpetrator.
- Physical buildings to be well maintained, safe and meet the relevant building standards.
- Provision is located in single gender or single sex services.
- Victims' duration of support to be based on needs and not pre-set timescales.

### **2. Rights and access**

- Victims are believed and listened to and service interventions are respectful of their rights to self-determination.
- Victims with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 can access dedicated specialist services addressing their needs (for example accessibility for disabled victims)
- Resources are allocated to addressing barriers to access, including supporting service users with limited English proficiency, and those with insecure immigration status.
- Services (including use of technology and virtual support) are informed by victims' choice and delivered in a way that meet the needs and preferences of the victim group and /or individual and in a range of formats which are accessible and appropriate

### **3. Health and wellbeing – trauma informed**

- Victims are supported to access services that meet their physical, mental, and sexual health needs.
- Victims are supported to access individual counselling or group work to build their confidence and resources.
- The organisation should work in partnership with and have appropriate referral pathways to a range of other services including the sexual violence sector, drugs, alcohol/mental health services.
- The safety, wellbeing and motivation of staff teams is attended to ensuring safe working practices that protect the physical safety and mental wellbeing of staff.

## **4. Stability, resilience, and autonomy**

- Victims are supported to take charge of decision-making processes in their own lives.
- Victims are encouraged to identify goals and access education, training, and employment to maximise their stability and independence.
- Victims have access to resettlement and follow-up services with exit strategies tailored to individual need. This should include access to ongoing specialist support in the community as part of resettlement, including through partnerships and appropriate referral pathways.

## **5. Children and young people**

- The safety and wellbeing of children and young people is addressed in risk assessment and support planning.
- Children are able to access support to understand their experiences and build their resilience and confidence.
- Support is provided to parents to develop their parenting resources and maintain their relationships with their children.
- Services are responsive to the needs and views of children and young people.

## **6. Prevention & repeat victimisation reduction**

- Safety plan/advice includes advice and interventions to support victims in reducing the risk of returning to an abusive relationship.
- Children and young people are better informed and educated around consent, healthy relationships, gender inequality and violence against women and girls (which includes men and boys).
- The service provider assists development of wider training and awareness-raising activities with other professionals and within the local community, as requested, and as capacity allows.

## Appendix 5: Protected Characteristics – Information from Statutory Guidance

**B6.1** Victims with each relevant protected characteristics as per the Equality Act 2010 must be able to access the support that they need. Under this duty, we expect authorities to ensure sufficient appropriate support is available within relevant safe accommodation to meet the needs of all victims including those with relevant protected characteristics, additional and / or multiple complex needs, or whose support needs cannot be properly met within non-specialist domestic abuse safe accommodation, such as:

- Black Asian and Minority Ethnic victims [Including Gypsy Roma and Traveller, with consideration to the [Women and Equalities Committee report](#)]
- Male victims
- Female victims
- Transgender and Non-Binary victims
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual victims, and others who may face barriers as a result of their sexuality
- Disabled victims– includes but is not limited to victims who are deaf or hard of hearing, visually impaired, autistic, wheelchair users, those with learning difficulties, as well as those with age-related disabilities
- Young (aged 16-18 – including care leavers) and older victims (over 65)
- Victims with an offending history
- Victims presenting with complex needs including those with mental health and/or drug and alcohol use support needs
- Victims with histories of sleeping rough
- Victims with histories of offending
- Victims facing multiple forms of abuse within the family such as honour-based violence and forced marriage
- Victims from a particular religion and/or with a spiritual belief, particularly if facing barriers to support as a result
- Migrant victims, including victims having insecure immigration status
- Victims from isolated and/or marginalised communities, including where there is limited English proficiency.
- Victims who have no choice but to move away from their local areas, communities, and friends to escape their perpetrator to stay safe and receive the support they need.
- Children of victims (including adolescent male children) who need to move with their parent into relevant safe accommodation.
- Victims accompanied by children, including large families and those with older adolescence boys (12+)
- Pregnant victims

**B6.2** Commissioning authorities should consider the needs and specific barriers of victims that may fall into more than one relevant protected characteristic and / or additional and complex needs.

## Appendix 6: Key National Guidance Documents and References

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-support-within-safe-accommodation/delivery-of-support-to-victims-of-domestic-abuse-in-domestic-abuse-safe-accommodation-services>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/domestic-abuse-act-statutory-guidance/domestic-abuse-draft-statutory-guidance-framework>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls-strategy>

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-support-within-safe-accommodation/delivery-of-support-to-victims-of-domestic-abuse-in-domestic-abuse-safe-accommodation-services>

<sup>ii</sup> Protected characteristics are detailed in Appendix 5 of this document

<sup>iii</sup> Full definition is contained in Appendix 1 of this document

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.standingtogether.org.uk/what-is-ccr>

<sup>v</sup> Undertaken by independent consultancy Three Sixty Marketing Consultancy April – July 2021 “Domestic Abuse Housing Needs Assessment Report, May 2021” and “Domestic Abuse Report of Children and Young People’s Journey Report” July 2021

<sup>vi</sup> Undertaken by independent associates of Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse “Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and Wokingham Borough Council” report June 2021

<sup>vii</sup> Detailed by individuals as part of domestic abuse strategy consultation responses

<sup>viii</sup> Data Source: Thames Valley Police Custody Recording System and Crime Recording System (Niche) – data extracted 17<sup>th</sup> May 2021

<sup>ix</sup> Safelives MARAC data 1/4/2020 – 31/3/2021

<sup>x</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-support-within-safe-accommodation/delivery-of-support-to-victims-of-domestic-abuse-in-domestic-abuse-safe-accommodation-services>

<sup>xi</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities/chapter-21-domestic-abuse>

<sup>xii</sup> <https://www.dahalliance.org.uk/what-we-do/whole-housing-approach/what-is-the-whole-housing-approach/>

<sup>xiii</sup> <https://www.standingtogether.org.uk/housing>

<sup>xiv</sup> Three Sixty Degree Marketing Consultancy

<sup>xv</sup> Details of Protected Characteristics are included in Appendix 5 of this document

<sup>xvi</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-support-within-safe-accommodation/delivery-of-support-to-victims-of-domestic-abuse-in-domestic-abuse-safe-accommodation-services>

<sup>xvii</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/domestic-abuse-act-statutory-guidance/domestic-abuse-draft-statutory-guidance-framework>

<sup>xviii</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls-strategy>

<sup>xix</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/modern-slavery>

<sup>xx</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/117509/community-safety-partnerships.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/117509/community-safety-partnerships.pdf)

<sup>xxi</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/746930/victim-strategy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/746930/victim-strategy.pdf)

<sup>xxii</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities/overview-of-the-homelessness-legislation>

<sup>xxiii</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-families-programme-guidance-2021-to-2022>

<sup>xxiv</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>