

# Safe Accommodation Strategy April 2024 – March 2027

## Cambridgeshire County Council

### 1. Context

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 set in statute that Tier One authorities must prepare and publish a local strategy based on a robust needs assessment that sets out the ways in which provision for accommodation-based domestic abuse support will be developed, commissioned, and delivered, the first strategy was published in October 2021. Strategies must be reviewed every three years.

Accommodation-based domestic abuse support includes provision of support to victims and their children in a range of settings, including:

- refuge accommodation
- specialist safe accommodation
- dispersed accommodation
- sanctuary schemes
- move-on or second stage accommodation.

This strategy clearly sets out the overall and holistic approach to deliver a rounded offer of support to victims in safe accommodation.

### 2. Identification of Local Needs

Key challenges for the Domestic Abuse system, are currently:

- Provision of easily accessible accommodation to those at risk of abuse and their children, within the county where it is safe to do so, if provided with additional support.
- Provision of therapeutic support to victims and their children who have experienced domestic abuse.
- Ensuring greater support is provided to the housing sector to improve awareness and support to those experiencing domestic abuse.
- Ensuring a consistency of support across both urban and very rural areas.
- Domestic abuse data is not collected and collated consistently across the system to be able to assess need accurately.
- Supporting those subjected to domestic abuse who have no recourse to public funds.

#### 2.1 Local Need – Cambridgeshire Headline Figures, 2022/23

From April 2022 to March 2023:

- Estimated number of victims of DA (aged 16+) based on the Crime Survey for England and Wales prevalence estimates for 2022/23\* - 25,000.
- Police Incidents with a domestic abuse flag: 8,247
- Number of survivors using the three refuge services 105
- Cases at high risk of significant harm or homicide heard at MARACs 1077

The majority of those subjected to domestic abuse by a partner or family member do not report this to the police, or access specialist support, therefore it is vital that all services, especially housing agencies are able to recognise domestic abuse and respond appropriately.

### 3. Whole Housing Approach to Domestic Abuse

This strategy is based on the Whole Housing Approach model. This approach is highlighted as good practice within the Domestic Abuse Act Guidance. The approach enables victims of domestic abuse to access safe accommodation regardless of the tenure of property. Specialist domestic abuse professionals can offer a range of flexible options with an aim to increase the safety of those suffering domestic abuse and their children.

A whole system approach is needed to effectively address the key issues and barriers experienced by survivors and to ensure they have access to a safe place to call home. The WHA model offers a framework for the domestic abuse and housing sectors to work together to address the immediate and longer-term housing needs of survivors. The model incorporates the experiences of survivors, the expertise of system leaders, and established, evidence-based practice.

This approach ensures those subjected to domestic abuse have access to a range of tailored housing options and initiatives to give people subjected to domestic abuse the choice to either relocate or remain in their existing accommodation. The full suite of housing options enables agencies and organisations to work together more collaboratively. Effective coordination considers the long-term safety of the victim/survivor and their children, as well as managing crisis situations.

This strategy will ensure the needs of all victims with relevant protected characteristics are considered and met, including sex, race, gender, language, religion, sexual orientation, age, state of health and disabilities. The action plan will set out how the barriers faced by victims with relevant protected characteristics and / or multiple complex needs, will be addressed.

Based on the Whole Housing Approach model, and informed by our needs assessment and data, our strategy has three key aims:

- To achieve earlier identification and intervention for domestic abuse through access to domestic abuse support, local authority housing advice, and social and private landlords.
- To achieve a reduction in the number of people who become homeless because of domestic abuse by providing a range of tailored housing options.
- To increase housing sustainment options so that people subjected to domestic abuse can remain safely in their home when it is their choice to do so, or not lose their tenancy status if they relocate.



## Whole Housing Approach:

## 4. Addressing Need in Cambridgeshire

The following section describes the services and interventions that will be delivered by Cambridgeshire County Council to meet the objectives of this strategy.

### 4.1 Refuge Support

We will provide the support costs for three refuges, equating to space for 32 women and up to 55 children at any given time. These will be available to those fleeing from out of area, and within area if there is a significant distance and this is deemed to be safe. Within the package, there will be funding for children's support workers and a flexible fund to enable those who need it to access talking therapies. In addition to this, refuges will have access to "Flexible Funding", to support those moving on from refuge, who will need resources to support their new home. All refuges will be expected to be as accessible as possible to those with additional support needs, in line with "Refuge for All" principles.

### 4.2 Dispersed Safe Accommodation

Provision of dispersed housing units across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough increases the options for those subjected to domestic abuse across Cambridgeshire, for whom out of county refuge provision would not be suitable. It will provide access to safe accommodation for: victims/survivors and their children who are not able to live in a communal facility; people who need a carer; large families; those with disabilities; people with pets; male victims; families with teenage boys (many refuges will not allow boys over the age of 12); people from the LGBT community; and BAME victims whose needs are not met with traditional refuges.

Being supported in this accommodation may mean the survivor does not have to give up their employment, move their children from schools, access new support services. Survivors can still access their support network if safe to do so, and they will have regular support provided by the Housing IDVAs who will support them to move back to their own homes with all safety measures in place, for example Occupation Orders, Restraining Orders, and target hardening where this is safe to do so.

Properties are furnished, let on a weekly licence and eight units will be available across Cambridgeshire & Peterborough.

### 4.3 Housing IDVAs

A team of Housing IDVAs will work alongside colleagues in District Council Housing Options Teams and Social Landlords and will accept referrals for those subjected to domestic abuse at any level of risk. They will be partially co-located in the housing advice teams and will support victims/survivors, offering advice on safety planning and risk management. They also offer case management support and deliver awareness raising training to staff based in these departments. They will also offer support to those in temporary local authority accommodation who have suffered domestic abuse.

#### 4.4 Flexible Funding

Flexible funding supports victim/survivors to achieve or maintain safe and secure housing. It is low-barrier and does not require victim/survivors to provide evidence of abuse and is not means tested. Unlike most other funding sources, there is no set list of what will be funded, and victims/survivors are encouraged to ask for whatever will make the most difference to their housing situation and their lives, in order that the victim/survivor and their children can stay safe. This will only be offered in conjunction with working with a domestic abuse specialist.

#### 4.5 Target Hardening (Additional Security)

A provider will continue to be commissioned to work with domestic abuse specialists to enhance the security in the homes of victim/survivors, and to enable those at risk of further domestic abuse to remain in their own homes and reduce repeat victimisation through the provision of enhanced security measures.

#### 4.6 Managed Reciprocals

This is a mechanism whereby those suffering domestic abuse in a social tenancy are able to relocate to a different area whilst maintaining their security of tenure. This is delivered in conjunction with other resources such as target hardening and specialist domestic abuse support.

#### 4.7 Therapeutic Support for children experiencing domestic abuse.

We will fund specialist trauma informed counselling and therapeutic support for children who are victims of domestic abuse within the refuges and as part of a separate service in the community.

#### 4.8 Mobile Advocacy Outreach Support

This is a service that survivors can access directly, and receive support in any location, including a range of community settings across Cambridgeshire. Support is offered to survivors to secure stable housing, which includes exploring and pursuing options for remaining in an existing property and relocating if needed for safety reasons. These specialist trauma informed workers would have access to all elements within this strategy.

#### 4.9 Awareness of Domestic Abuse Amongst Social Landlords

We will be working with local private landlords and local Private Rented Sector teams in the Local Authorities to increase the awareness and identification of domestic abuse, how this affects their tenants, and how private landlords can assist where there is domestic abuse

#### 4.10 Shared Lives Domestic Abuse Project

Cambridgeshire County Council's Shared Lives team will pilot an offer of support to individuals with learning disabilities, with care and support needs, who are being subjected to domestic abuse. The pilot will operate until June 2025, and uses the Shared Lives approach of carers welcoming people with support needs into their own homes or meeting in safe spaces. Specialist domestic abuse support will be provided by the IDVA service. The role of the Shared Lives Carers is to increase the confidence of survivors and giving them space to build independence from their abuser and consider their next steps.

#### 4.11 Eastern European Clients

Eastern Europeans are the largest migrant group within Cambridgeshire, and it is vital to have specialist IDVAs who understand the lived experience of Eastern European migrants and can communicate in their first language where possible. Staff with cultural awareness and experience of working with specific nationalities helps survivors overcome cultural barriers to accessing services.

Many more migrants are living in private rented accommodation in Cambridgeshire compared to the overall population, with some of this accommodation sub-standard and in rural locations. The work of the Eastern European IDVA will link in with the current work within the safe accommodation strategy to engage with the private sector and will be vital in ensuring that survivors in this group are made aware of the domestic abuse support available to them in Cambridgeshire.

#### 4.12 Sheltered Accommodation/Supported Accommodation/Hostels

Supported Accommodation providers commissioned by Cambridgeshire County Council must have a domestic abuse policy for staff and residents. Ideally working towards or having DAHA Accreditation, or "Make a Stand<sup>1</sup>" pledge from the Chartered Institute of Housing

#### 4.13 Victims with No Recourse to Public Funds

All commissioned domestic abuse services will work with clients with NRPF status to access the Domestic Violence Concession from the government where possible. Where a client is not eligible for this, they would still be eligible for all the options outlined within the strategy, with the exception of local refuge accommodation (if refuge is required, a placement would be sought elsewhere).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cih.org/policy/make-a-stand>

#### 4.14 The interests of victims of domestic abuse & their children

The Domestic Abuse Act requires that the Partnership Board has:

- at least one person appearing to the authority to represent the interests of victims of domestic abuse.
- at least one person appearing to the authority to represent the interests of children of domestic abuse victims.

Through this strategy feedback mechanisms for victims and their children will be developed to ensure there is independent representation which operates from views gathered independently of the commissioned services.

## 5. Delivery

The Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence Strategic Partnership Board and Violence Against Women & Girls Operations Group, will oversee the strategy in conjunction with the Tier 2 Local Authorities as part of the “Sub-Regional Housing Board”. Once published a working action plan will be developed to ensure all elements are working in conjunction with each other and the needs of all victims are being met appropriately, and there will be mechanisms in place to ensure effective oversight.