

16 Days of Activism 2025:

‘Where will I go?’ Access to housing for domestic abuse survivors

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 was instrumental in improving the way the UK defined, prioritised and responded to domestic abuse. It sought to reduce homelessness and improve housing protections for survivors by ensuring that anybody made homeless by domestic abuse was granted ‘priority need’ for housing. Sadly, four years on, while priority need has improved survivors’ ability to make, and be granted homelessness applications, there remains a myriad of barriers and obstacles in their way.

Key findings in our report

Barriers

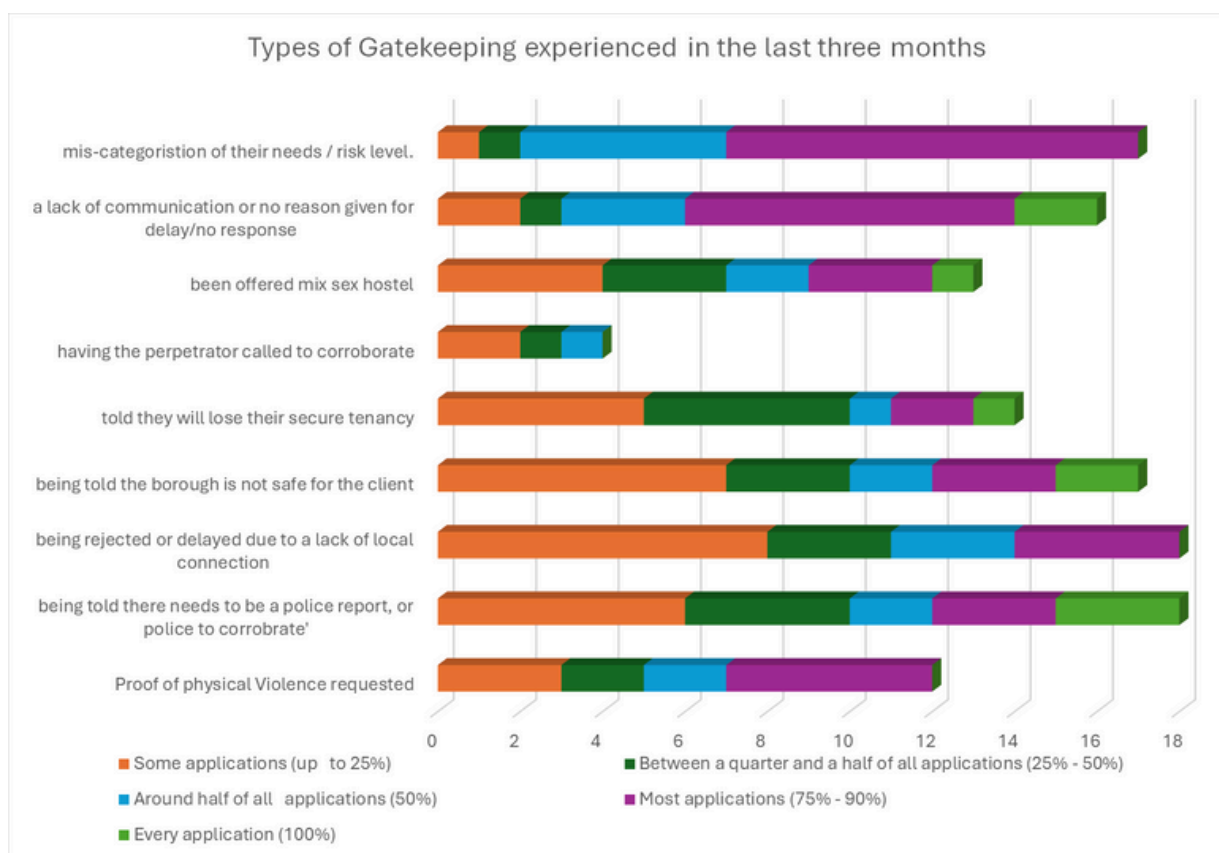
- Both front-line staff and survivors described systemic barriers when first approaching local authorities for housing or homelessness support, including difficulty proving their homelessness and not being given an interpreter.
- 40% of survivors described difficulty getting hold of housing officers, and 50% said the information they received was unhelpful.
- 40% of survivors were told that staying in a refuge was a prerequisite to having a housing duty granted.
- 45% of staff confirmed domestic abuse was regularly misunderstood by housing officers in the majority of housing applications - demonstrating the need for regular trauma-informed domestic violence training.

A lack of safe or suitable accommodation

- Survivors are regularly offered inappropriate, poor-quality and/or unsafe housing offers. Half (50%) of survivors said they felt unsafe in their temporary accommodation, and 30% moved into properties with no electricity or heating.
- More than 50% of frontline staff confirmed survivors had been placed in mixed sex hostels in the last three months.


Gatekeeping

- Systemic gatekeeping remains prevalent: more than 80% of frontline staff respondents said their services had experienced some form of gatekeeping from housing departments in the last three months.
- More than 80% of front-line staff confirmed housing officers told survivors they needed a 'local connection' to the area - going against MHCLG statutory guidance.
- Nearly a quarter (23%) of frontline staff reported that proof of physical abuse was requested in most housing applications, and 10% reported that perpetrators had been contacted to corroborate evidence in up to half of all housing applications.



Impact

- 60% of survivors said the process of applying for housing was stressful.
- 35% confirmed it caused physical impacts such as weight loss, exhaustion and difficulty sleeping.
- 85% of survivors with children described a negative impact on their child from the process; including declines in their mental health, schooling and behaviour
- 20% of survivors spoke of gained independence once they secured safe housing. 10% described feelings of safety and hope - demonstrating the importance of good practice



It's been extremely stressful, and it does get depressing, and it does make you angry.

-survivor



Top recommendations

- Local authorities should ensure all housing officers have been trained in their duties related to domestic abuse, with each housing team having a domestic abuse lead or specialist who can support with additional training, and streamlining applications. This would also make better use of specialist Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVA), and ensure a trauma-informed approach is adopted.
- Local authorities should co-locate specialist housing IDVAs within their local housing departments to provide advice and training to housing officers and to provide direct support for homelessness applicants.
- Local authorities should ensure that there is a physical presence in housing departments during normal business hours, with the ability to apply for housing being possible in person, over the phone, and digitally.
- Local authorities should ringfence 5% of all new social housing built for survivors of domestic abuse.
- The Government should update MHCLG Statutory Guidance and improve its oversight to ensure correct implementation. This includes reflecting the need for mandatory and regular domestic abuse training, transparency on processes, and eligibility criteria, and the expectation for a physical presence in housing departments during business hours.
- The Government should ensure at least 20% of the Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse Grant is allocated to Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation.
- The Government should expand priority need for housing to include survivors of sexual assault and rape, and place this into legislation through amendments to Domestic Abuse Act, Housing Act 1996 and Housing Allocations Regulations 2025.