



solace

‘Where will I go?’

Access to housing for domestic abuse survivors

solacewomensaid.org

Solace Women's aid is a charity registered in England and Wales.
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Executive Summary

Overview

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 was instrumental in improving the way the UK defines, prioritises and responds to domestic abuse. It introduced a range of measures, including a legal statutory definition, new criminal offences, better protection for victims and witnesses, the recognition of children as victims in their own right, and established the role of Domestic Abuse Commissioner.

It also sought to reduce homelessness and improve housing protections for survivors. The Domestic Abuse Act amended the Housing Act 1996, to ensure that anybody made homeless by domestic abuse was granted ‘priority need’ for housing. Priority need is where certain groups who are homeless or at risk of homelessness are considered more vulnerable or in need than others, and must be provided accommodation – even if just temporarily whilst housing officers make an assessment.

Previously priority had only been given to those with children, those pregnant, or those considered more vulnerable than others. This left housing officers to make judgement calls about the likelihood and impact of domestic abuse on survivors.

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, with a staggering proportion of survivors supported by Solace facing gatekeeping and delays. This situation is compounded not only by a lack of all forms of housing, but also a lack of understanding, training, and oversight for survivors of domestic abuse.



This report combines two main pieces of research:

- Data collected via a survey of Solace's community-based services and refuge teams, spanning 23 London boroughs. The survey was supported by focus groups and interviews with managers and frontline staff. On average, our frontline staff supported ten applications over a three month period; totalling 258 housing applications which informed the survey.
- Cross-sectional qualitative interview study with 20 survivors of domestic abuse in England who have presented as homeless within the last 24 months. This qualitative research captures the depth and impact of survivors' experiences in their own words. Further information on the survivors that participated can be found in the annex.



Key Findings

- 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.
- Of the frontline workers that had experienced gatekeeping (80%), respondents estimate this has happened for at least 190 of the 258 total housing applications (73%).
- The first-hand and frontline experience of staff in supporting survivors identified that gatekeeping can happen at multiple stages, but that it is most prevalent at the beginning of the application process.
- Nearly a quarter (23%) of frontline workers reported that proof of physical abuse is requested in most housing applications, and 10% reported that perpetrators had been contacted to corroborate evidence in up to half of all housing applications.
- Survivors are regularly offered inappropriate, poor-quality and/or unsafe housing offers. Half (50%) of survivors we interviewed said they felt unsafe in their temporary accommodation, and 30% moved into properties with no electricity or heating.

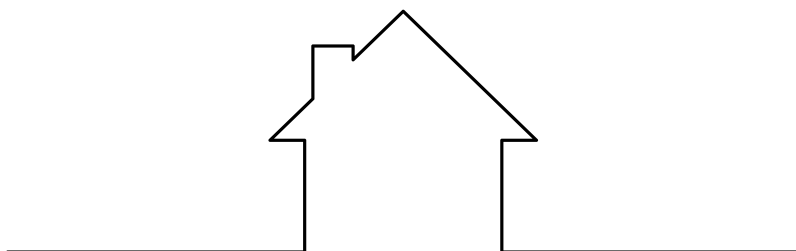
- Local authorities are not following Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Statutory Guidance regarding priority need for domestic abuse survivors including exemptions from local connection rules, suggesting a lack of understanding of domestic abuse or disregard for survivors.

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, streamlining applications. This would also make better use of specialist Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVA), and ensuring 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 whose first disclosure is to the housing authority.
- 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.
- Local authorities should publish clear guidance, guidelines and requirements regarding applying for priority need or presenting as homeless on their websites and at the office, to maximise survivors' access to information and minimise confusion. This should include FAQs and multiple forms of contact details.
- Local authorities should ensure timely responses to survivors' applications, with clear escalation routes in place. Local authorities should set expectations around swift and efficient communication as a performance metric for staff.
- The Government should update MHCLG Statutory Guidance to:
 - Reflect the need for mandatory and regular domestic abuse training – designed by, and given by, specialist organisations for housing officers.
 - Reflect the need for transparency on processes, and eligibility criteria for housing officers.
 - Mandate the expectation for a physical presence in housing departments during business hours.
- The Government to ensure at least 20% of the Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse Grant is allocated to Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation.
- The Government should ensure Fair Funding streams and the Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse grant is directly linked to performance metrics that measure sustainability of housing outcomes, including intra-

temporary accommodation moves, not just length of stay or overall or household duty numbers.

- The Government should lift the no recourse to public funds condition and implement a firewall between public services and immigration enforcement to ensure survivors with insecure immigration status can report safely and access safe housing.
- 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.
- The Government should remove the exemption for those aged 35 and under from the shared accommodation rate for housing benefit, and the housing element of Universal Credit, to survivors of rape and sexual assault.
- The Government should commit to a minimum funding settlement of £516 per annum in England for specialist domestic abuse services, including a ringfenced fund for by and for services as recommended by Women's Aid.



Introduction

Political landscape

In July 2024 the Labour Party was elected on a pledge to halve violence against women and girls (VAWG) in a decade. We were promised swift action and a national VAWG Strategy. With one in four women experiencing domestic abuse in their lifetime, we must recognise that most often, the danger exists not on the streets, lurking behind corners or alleyways, but in women's homes. For these survivors, the question that often appears is a simple one: where do I go if my home is not safe?

“

The only thought in my mind was keeping me and my daughter safe. I had no idea where to go.

-Survivor

”

For this reason, domestic abuse is a housing issue. Having somewhere safe and affordable is crucial both for survivors' immediate safety and long-term recovery. Sadly, against a backdrop of fiscal restraint and a housing crisis, current government announcements surrounding VAWG have focused not on sustainable funding or ensuring safe housing for survivors, but on police response and the criminal justice system. Whilst welcome, these announcements will not address the lack of safe and affordable housing, particularly in the context of housing targets for social and affordable homes being watered down. If tackling this epidemic is to be a priority, then we must move beyond awareness, beyond pledges and semantics, to action.

Domestic abuse is the leading cause of women's homelessness. Local authorities have a legal duty to prevent and/or relieve homelessness, and those granted support are categorised as being 'owed' this duty. Following the expansion of Priority Need, the number of households being owed a duty saw a 30% rise between 2022 and 2023, and a further 20% increase the following year. (MHCLG; DLUHC 2023)

For the past four years, domestic abuse has consistently been the second most common reason that local councils across the UK have had to provide homelessness relief duty – that equates to more than 15% of all household applications. The situation in London is comparatively worse than the rest of the country, with 6000 households being owed a homelessness duty due to domestic abuse in 2023. (MHCLG; DLUHC 2023)

While the Government inherited a growing epidemic, without prioritising housing, the number of survivors presenting to local authorities as homeless because of domestic abuse will continue to increase and women will continue to be placed in further harm. Forced into unsafe alternative accommodation, the streets, or seeing no option but to stay with the perpetrator.

Previous research

Housing continues to be a central concern for domestic abuse survivors. 70% of the survivors interviewed for this research confirmed that the challenges of finding safe, affordable and suitable housing were considered before leaving their abusive situation and two-thirds (66%) of the women Solace supports present with a housing issue. (Solace N.D. 2025)

The lack of accommodation options for those fleeing domestic abuse, matched with a lack of local authority resources and funding, can result in local authorities refusing to grant survivors housing, despite their priority need status.

The existence of barriers for survivors seeking housing is not new: its enduring prevalence makes the lack of action and political focus on addressing its limitations all the more frustrating.

Specialist support services, homelessness charities and VAWG providers have long sought to elevate this issue to policymakers and previous governments:

- In 2022, Solace identified that 70% of frontline staff experienced some form of gatekeeping in at least half of all applications made.
- The Centre for Homelessness Impact (2024) highlights local authority capacity constraints and proof of priority requirements as being two key barriers that women face.
- Crisis (2023), Heriot-Watt University (2023), and Imkaan (2023) highlighted how structural racism creates further housing barriers for survivors from minoritised ethnic backgrounds.
- ONS Census data demonstrated survivors regularly face barriers related to the complexity of application systems, and perceived inflexibility towards their needs (2023).
- Research from Women's Aid National Audit shows women who have experienced domestic abuse face financial difficulties, with more than half (53.5%) of survivors in refuge and a third (32.5%) in community-based support services were left unable to afford food (2025).
- Kings College London's Debt Trap research project recently highlighted that local authorities disqualify or deprioritise domestic abuse survivors' access to social housing based on housing-related debt. The research calls for change to housing allocation policies so that pre-existing housing debt is not a barrier for survivors to access housing (2024).

The findings in this report build on this existing research by outlining the ways in which these barriers appear, manifest and are experienced by survivors in London. Our research sought to determine whether these barriers had subsided in the years since the expansion of priority need, with local authorities' increased awareness and knowledge of domestic abuse, or whether survivors continue to face avoidable and unjustified challenges when seeking safety.

This report sets out:

- 1. The systemic and embedded barriers that survivors face;**
- 2. The types of gatekeeping practices in the housing application process;**
- 3. The consequences of a lack of trauma informed training on domestic abuse**
- 4. The lack of safe, suitable, and accessible accommodation for women in need of temporary or permanent housing.**
- 5. The impact of a failing housing system on survivors' ability to move on from the abuse they experienced, heal and thrive.**

It will subsequently propose local and central Government solutions to these practices on an operational, cultural and political level.

Barriers to housing

Both frontline staff and survivors described systemic barriers when first approaching local authorities for housing or homelessness support. Barriers include inaccurate prerequisites to being granted any housing, such as having to stay in a refuge, a lack of information regarding the housing application process or failing to provide a translator.

“
[It's] a little bit complicated, I'll be honest. The terms that they use are pretty legal. It was a little bit difficult for me to understand.
-Survivor
”

40%

of survivors described difficulty in getting hold of officers.

50%

of survivors said the information provided to them was unhelpful.

50%

of survivors said the boroughs they presented to did not offer in-person support.

Unclear application processes

Half (50%) of survivors described a confusing or inconsistent application process, including where to begin, whom to talk to, and how.

Survivors commented on how many of the terms used during the process were overly legal or complex, and difficult to therefore understand.

While others described the process as rigid – not allowing them the opportunity to comprehensively explain their circumstances or being unsure how much detail is needed.

Our frontline staff also described the difficulty in supporting survivors with applying for housing when each local authority seemingly followed different processes. For example, some local authorities only allow for online applications, while others do not offer this functionality at all.

Applications that rely on online applications are placing a disadvantage on women without access, or the skills, to use digital devices, whether this is through poverty, digital exclusion or because of an abuser restricting their access. There is a high level of digital exclusion restricting certain

groups from support, such as older women, disabled women or those with limited English. Routes to making housing applications should be available across multiple platforms, including non-digital and non-phone methods so that routes to support are equitable.

Frontline staff also highlighted that information was not always publicly available on their websites or available when calling housing offices, resulting in survivors left in the dark about navigating the application process, adding to the emotional and administrative burdens on survivors already facing difficulties when seeking safety.

“

Speaking [to the council] was in itself a nightmare because one day I was on the phone for an hour just trying to get through to someone and then they said, ‘Oh, if you’re applying for DV, you need to contact this [different] number’

-Survivor

”

“
The survivor and I stayed there all day, then we were told to call emergency out of hours, so we just stood on the side of the road, but the line wasn't working.
-Multiple Disadvantage Advocate, Solace.
 ”

Lack of communication

Uncertainty around application processes are exacerbated by a broad lack of communication from housing officers.

Survivors and frontline staff alike reported councils' lack of responsiveness to queries, with services ignoring emails and phone calls, despite survivors and staff chasing and following up.

- More than a third (36%) of frontline workers reported that women seeking housing support often receive little to no communication, and no explanation for any delays.
- More than 60% of survivors said their attempts to contact housing officers were ignored.
- Nearly 85% of survivors described minimal contact with housing officers following their initial applications.
- 45% described not getting information about the length of time they can expect to be in accommodation.
- 35% described housing officers trying to offload their responsibilities such as downplaying the level of support that should be offered.

This lack of communication is then heightened by a lack of physical presence at housing offices, limiting contact options for survivors. Staff interviews demonstrated the frequency in which IDVAs and survivors present at local authorities either for initial assessments or for support, and are often left waiting all day without speaking to somebody.

Failing to respond to survivors seeking housing is not just an administrative delay, nor is it an acceptable consequence of a lack of resource and high demand - it puts survivors back in harm's way.

Each delay increases the risk of further abuse and with each response that goes ignored, services are reinforcing a belief that help is not available.

“ There was no application form online or anything like that and when I called, they didn’t even know the answer. It’s just the fact that it’s so unclear for people who need it.

-Survivor

”

Being told to access refuges first

Forty percent of survivors described housing officers saying that staying in a refuge was a prerequisite to having a housing duty granted, or that refuge would increase their chances of securing housing.

In fact, despite already spending time in a refuge, one survivor said they were told to spend another six months in a new refuge in the city in which they were seeking to find long term housing.

This reiterates further the inconsistency in which local authorities process applications.

“ They said I had to go to a refuge for six months and then apply for housing. I already spent six months in a refuge in another area, but they said I had to start again.

-Survivor

”

During focus groups with housing IDVAs, staff spoke of how they are regularly encouraged by housing officers to find a refuge space on behalf of the survivor, asked whether they have tried to do this before calling and asking for other forms of accommodation.

Mandating or encouraging refuge as a first step for survivors seeking housing creates unsafe, unfair, and, in many cases, insurmountable barriers.

While refuge accommodation is a vital route to safety for many survivors, it is not always appropriate or available for everyone: research and local needs assessments find that for some women – particularly those with older male children, complex needs or those living with disability – there is a lack of suitable refuge spaces.

Moreover, due to consistent under-funding, there is a chronic shortage of refuge beds, with Women's Aid's Nowhere to Turn finding more than 60% of refuge referrals being rejected (2025).

Such a prerequisite would set many survivors up to fail, and that is why local authorities are expected to look at a spectrum of different accommodation formats.

A survivor does not have to enter a refuge before they can be offered more permanent forms or alternative temporary accommodation; by the same token, women who have been in a refuge should not be fast-tracked through the application process.

Furthermore, the [MHCLG Homelessness Code of Guidance for local authorities](#) makes it clear that refuge placements will usually require the applicant to indicate that they want and need refuge accommodation (16.40; 21.42, 2025).



‘Demonstrating homelessness’

Another barrier survivors reported was the difficulty in being granted eligibility without proof of homelessness. This is rooted in the fact local authorities define and interpret homelessness as having no form of accommodation. This definition is insufficient for domestic abuse survivors, who may legally have a home, but not one that is a safe or a viable accommodation option.

- 30% of survivors said they were told that having a current tenancy agreement or a mortgage in their name meant they were not considered homelessness and therefore eligible for housing support.
- The same 30% of survivors also had their application for priority need delayed or initially rejected for this reason.

Survivors and their perpetrators being treated as a single legal entity for claiming homelessness – due to having a joint tenancy or mortgage – can force survivors into staying or returning to their perpetrators through sheer lack of alternative options.

Local authorities must recognise that unrealistic or unjust expectations to prove homelessness force survivors to produce evidence they cannot safely achieve, delaying their access to safety and support.

“

Because my name's on a mortgage, there's nothing that they can do. If I want to leave, I need to sell.

-Survivor

”

This barrier also risks forcing women into forms of hidden homelessness or rough sleeping, with one survivor saying she had to be identified by rough sleeping outreach teams before being categorised as homeless.

However, Solace's Women's Rough Sleeping Census has consistently demonstrated that women are far less likely to bed down than their male counterparts, due to the inherent dangers of being visible on the streets (2024). If women are told that the only way for them to access housing is to be seen sleeping outside, services are directly advising them to put themselves at risk of further violence.

This also artificially reduces their likelihood for support because, as our Census states, they are systemically missed by outreach teams.

Staff also informed us that difficulties arise when survivors are expected to have multiple forms of ID and documentation, despite the fact that survivors very often flee with nothing and are unable to return to their home safely or access the relevant documentation without risk.

Discretion must be given by housing officers, recognising they face unique challenges comparative to others who might be applying for housing.

“

You can't be accepted as homeless until Street Link actually finds you.

-Survivor

”

Language barriers and discrimination

Another barrier cited by our frontline staff and survivors was a lack of consideration for language needs. For example, staff noted multiple examples of services failing to provide survivors with translators or providing translators without knowledge of the relevant language.

This occurred even after multiple verbal and written requests. One survivor interviewed said she found it particularly challenging to explain her situation during a screening interview, due to English being her second language.

“

Without the support from the refuge, I couldn't make it through, honestly. Simple questions like, 'Where is the passport?', I start to cry, I don't know how to speak your language, it was really, really hard.

-Survivor

”

Failure to provide an effective translator is yet another way these women are silenced, given no opportunity to tell their story or receive the support that they need.

Too often, those from different ethnic backgrounds not only faced cultural or language barriers but also experienced xenophobia and racism.

One survivor described initial positive engagement with a housing officer but said the officer 'totally changed' and became 'mean [and] moody' when discovering the survivor was of a certain religious background.

Similarly, housing IDVAs described repeated mispronunciation and forgetting of survivors' names.

“

She was called thingy.

-Housing IDVA

”

Addressing these barriers

Whether it is an unclear application process, a lack of communication, failure to provide translators, or inaccurate prerequisites for applications, local authorities are inconsistent in their support of survivors with housing needs.

Clear communication about the application process and improved MHCLG oversight of local authorities would help ensure survivors get the consistent, reliable support that they need.

Local authorities must provide essential information across multiple platforms and channels; online as well as in paper form on what is needed to make an application, including the type of evidence they might be asked to present at all stages of the application.

Local authorities must also be transparent about survivors' rights when applying for housing, such as their exemption from local connection, or their right to a translator.

This would serve to dismantle the barriers that seek to shut these women out from support.



MHCLG guidance and local guidance should also set clear expectations for communication, with local authorities being required to provide multiple methods of application (online, by phone, and in person), with the additional expectation that there must be a physical presence in the housing office during working hours.

Likewise, we would encourage MHCLG to hold local authorities accountable for appropriate and timely responses through these channels, so that survivors receive responses without delay. Escalation routes for Housing IDVAs would support this.





A lack of understanding of domestic abuse

Miscategorisation of Risk

100% of staff interviews and focus groups reflected on a distinct lack of understanding around domestic abuse within local authorities and among individual housing officers.

Such knowledge gaps often result in housing officers failing to identify or recognise the spectrum of abuse to which survivors are subjected, such as economic abuse or coercive control.

Housing officers' lack of knowledge and understanding of domestic abuse is often clear to Solace's frontline staff:

- 45% of staff said that domestic abuse was misunderstood in the majority (75-90%) of applications.
- A further 20% of staff said this happened in around half of applications.

Many staff members spoke about housing officers rejecting women for priority need because the client spoke of a 'relationship breakdown' rather than explicitly mentioning domestic abuse, or where survivors were told their abuse is not 'risky enough'. This lack of knowledge and understanding of domestic abuse or at times a wilful ignorance puts survivors in greater harm.

Our research demonstrates that very often it is a postcode lottery as to whether survivors will be supported, not just at housing office level but individual housing officer level. This is also demonstrable in our survivor interviews.

- Over 40% (42%) of survivors noted their treatment by housing offices was inconsistent.
- More than half (57%) of survivors felt their circumstances were not taken seriously, including being made to feel like they were lying, or that their situation did not warrant a housing response.
- 14% of survivors felt there was bias or discrimination in the way they were treated.

“
If you phone up, it's just like a toss-up of whether they know what you're talking about.
-Survivor
”

Local authorities are encouraged to ensure housing officers are adequately trained on domestic abuse. Homelessness Guidance states that a factor in ensuring ‘an authority develops a strong and appropriate response to domestic abuse is understanding what domestic abuse is’, and that ‘specialist training for staff and managers’ (which it later encourages to be by specialist DA organisations) ‘will help them provide a more sensitive response and to identify housing options that are safe and appropriate’ (21.11, 2025).

It adds that ‘by understanding the indicators of domestic abuse through training and professional development, housing officers can increase their confidence to speak to people experiencing abuse, risk assess and safety plan alongside them (21.14, 2025).

The decision to encourage domestic abuse training as opposed to mandating it has allowed for knowledge gaps to remain.



Jasmine's story

Jasmine was supported to present to the local authority for housing: but was not provided with the support she needed when she presented during the day. Jasmine and her advocate were told to call emergency out of hours to ask for an emergency accommodation. Jasmine and her advocate stood on the side of the road by the local authority building as they phoned the LA out of hours for emergency bed space. The out of hours phone wasn't working.

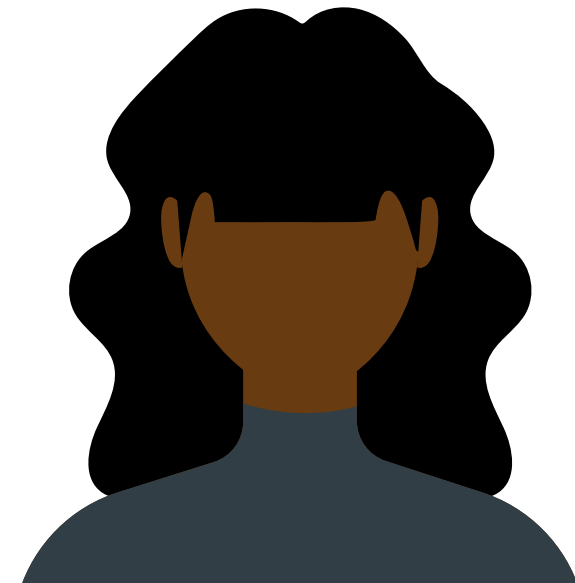
Another Solace advocate meanwhile also called around to look for refuge space as an emergency. When they found one, it was on the wrong side of London for the woman and far away. She was supported by a Solace advocate to travel to the refuge. Unfortunately, she left the refuge the same evening she was taken there. It was far away from everything she knew, given her disabilities. Jasmine returned to the perpetrator as he was also essentially her carer.

Jasmine's advocate supported her to present to the local authority again and advocated for an appropriate temporary placement, considering her disabilities.

She was offered a temporary accommodation in an accessible distance.

However, the accommodation itself was not suitable for Jasmine's needs as it was on the top floor with narrow steep stairs. Jasmine decided to stay in the TA as she felt it was better than living with her perpetrator. On one occasion, Jasmine had a seizure and fell on the stairs which led to an ambulance attending and she was taken to hospital.

Despite this Jasmine has not been offered alternative accommodation and remains in this accommodation to date despite ongoing advocacy from the Solace team.



Treatment by officers

Negative treatment

Lack of trauma informed training also shows in the lack of empathy and understanding of survivor's experiences.

Many survivors reported that the process of applying for housing was traumatic, with 70% citing negative treatment from officers.

Survivors described experience of dismissive and insensitive questioning during the assessment stage, with many saying they were asked why they did not leave sooner.

- More than half (57%) of the survivors we spoke to described intimidating and hostile behaviour.
- 50% described officers as unempathetic and insensitive
- 15% described feeling pressured into housing decisions

Negative experiences and a lack of empathy was more common in cases where the survivor had rejected a property, or complained about the housing offer, which, as this report has demonstrated, is often because the property offered was inappropriate.

“
She was talking to me, doubting my story, even when I was in hospital [because of the abuse]. She said, ‘Why you get married to him?’
-Survivor

“
When I declined the property, I got a very threatening phone call from the housing officer the next day. He said, ‘Why did you decline that? You’re lucky.’
-Survivor
”

Positive treatment

It is noteworthy however, that positive experiences were also experienced. 55% of survivors cited being treated positively by an individual housing officer. 60% of which also reported negative experiences, demonstrating once again to the inconsistencies between different housing offices in treatment, as well as their knowledge of the process.

Positive treatment included:

- 5 of 11 survivors described positive experiences being a consequence of having officers that kept in contact with them throughout their application process
- 10 survivors described their positive interactions were because officers had showed kindness to them, or been helpful.



The person who attended me in the council was really gentle, was really kind. He didn't go through the details.

-Survivor



It is evident therefore that good practice exists, but is not embedded. Some housing officers are clearly responding in a trauma-informed and survivor-led manner, while others are not.

Survivors' experiences are too heavily dependent on who a survivor happens to be speaking to, rather than a reliable standard of practice – demonstrating a clear need for consistent and regular trauma-informed training on domestic abuse. Having a domestic abuse lead within their offices, to ensure effective and accurate oversight of more complex or high-needs/risk cases would also ensure better oversight of decision making.



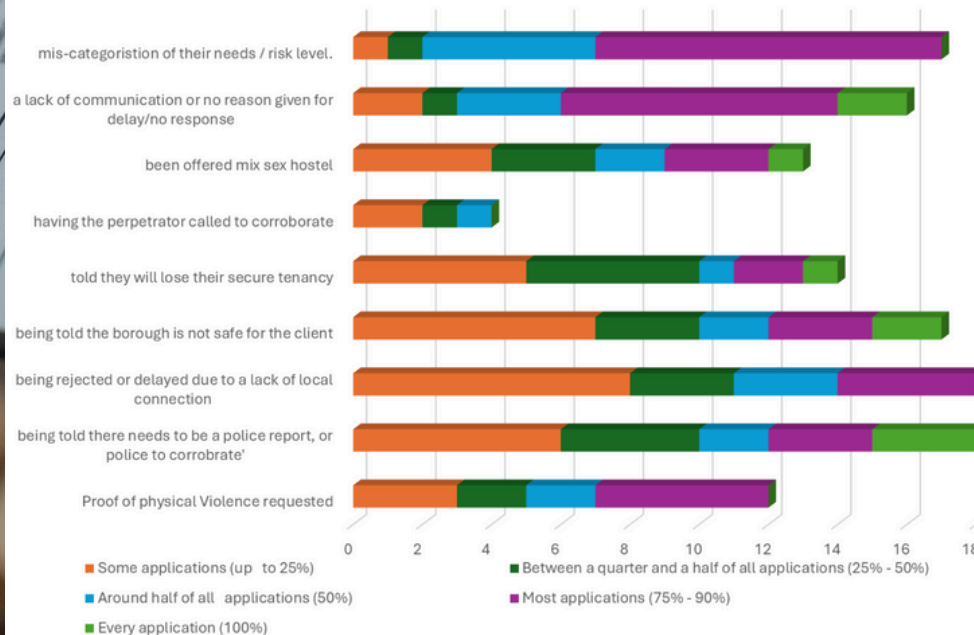


Gatekeeping

Current levels of demand, along with the cost of housing homeless families, continue to outpace the supply of housing and government funding to support it.

With pressure to reduce the over reliance on temporary accommodation and local authority overspend it is feasible housing officers are pushed to block or delay access to housing applications (gatekeep). Often, this gatekeeping goes directly against statutory MHCLG guidance.

Types of Gatekeeping experienced in the last three months



From our staff survey and interviews with survivors, it is clear that gatekeeping remains prevalent across services, in particular at the beginning of the application process.

Local connection

One of the most seen forms of gatekeeping by our frontline staff was in relation to a survivor's local connection to the area in which she wishes to live. Under [Section 199 of the Housing Act 1996](#), a person is required to have a connection to the local authority, often through residence, employment, family associations. Yet for many survivors, remaining in their home borough would be dangerous, due to proximity to their perpetrator.

Following the Domestic Abuse Act, guidance issued to local authorities advised that discretion should be given to cases in which there is a risk of violence, recognising that survivors must often flee their local area to escape ongoing danger (2021).

We found however:

- More than 80% of Solace frontline staff respondents confirmed that housing officers had rejected or delayed a survivor's housing application in the last three months, due to a lack of local connection to an area.
- 20% of survivors confirmed that they were told they needed links to the area to get housing.

Thanks to campaigning from the sector, it was recognised that survivors might not be able to meet local connection tests, and staying in their area puts them at risk of further harm. Updates to [Allocation of Housing Regulations 2025](#), legally prohibited local authorities from applying local connection requirements to survivors in this situation (2025). This exemption also allows for survivors to relocate to an area where a support network or support services might be available.

Whilst this was a welcome step, there is a concern that areas are still using the local connection requirement to block survivors, failing to follow their statutory obligations.

Nearly 20% of our staff said local connection gatekeeping happened in 'most applications' (75-90%) since August 2025, a month after the legal exemption for survivors was brought into legislation.

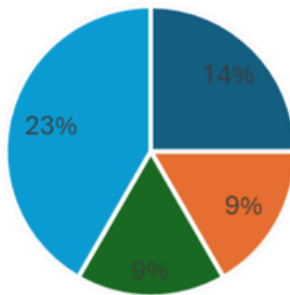


Physical evidence of abuse

Nearly a quarter of frontline workers (23%) reported that proof of physical abuse is requested in most housing applications, a requirement that can be difficult or unsafe for survivors to evidence.

This is an increase from our findings in 2022, which identified that only 13% of staff had experienced housing officers asking for proof of physical violence, demonstrating that the issue lies not with legislation or guidance, but implementation and oversight.

Proof of physical violence
requested



- Some applications (up to 25%)
- Between a quarter and a half of all applications (25% - 50%)
- Around half of all applications (50%)
- Most applications (75% - 90%)

More importantly, holding survivors to this requirement is incorrect. As defined in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, domestic abuse is not limited to physical violence, and under current Codes of Guidance from the MHCLG, local authorities cannot require proof of physical abuse in order to authorise priority need and/or issue housing (2025).

In many cases, abuse leaves no visible injury and demanding physical evidence shuts survivors out of support.

Domestic abuse encompasses behaviours all aimed at controlling, manipulating or harming someone, and it is a dangerous misconception that other forms of abuse such as controlling or coercive behaviour or psychological/emotional abuse are not equally as dangerous.

These forms are also often far more prevalent. 85% of the survivors we support experience emotional abuse, 71% controlling behaviour, and 43% experience economic abuse.

The impact of these more silent or invisible forms of abuse are insidious, and as such must be granted the same level of protection.



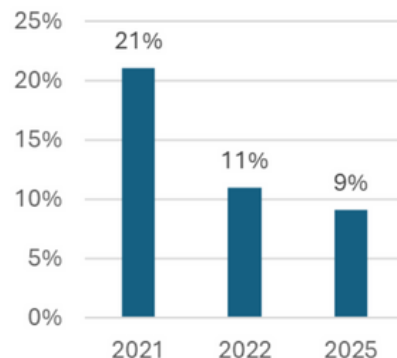
Calling the Perpetrator

Another gatekeeping practice used by housing officers is contacting the perpetrator to verify a survivor's story.

- 18% of frontline staff reported that housing officers have called the perpetrator in the last three months,
- 5% reported this happened in half of all homelessness applications and 9% said this happened in a quarter of applications.

Frontline staff also said that calling the perpetrator remains more common in cases of domestic abuse that involved the wider family rather than the intimate partner, including in cases of honour-based abuse.

Percentage of respondents who reported housing officers calling the perpetrator in at least least some applications over five years



Disappointingly, the prevalence of this tactic is a small decrease from our previous research in 2022, indicating a disappointing lack of progress despite clear expectations from MHCLG.¹³ Government guidance states that 'housing authorities should not approach the alleged perpetrator, since this could generate further violence and abuse' (21.24, 2025)

Housing officers who continue to go against government guidance not only put survivors at risk of further abuse but also discourage survivors from coming forward for support in the future

Police reports

Other common forms of gatekeeping tactics included housing officers telling survivors that police report or police corroboration was required in order to access housing or giving the impression that it would improve survivors' chances of success.

I'm not sure they take it seriously if the police haven't been called. That's the impression I got.
-Survivor

- More than a quarter (28%) of frontline workers reported that a police report or police corroboration was required or requested in most (70-90%) or all (100%) housing applications they have supported survivors in the last three months.
- 10% of survivors were asked in their interviews whether they had reported abuse to the police.

This tactic places an undue responsibility on the survivor; while neglecting the fact many abusers can escalate their behaviour when survivors seek help or try to leave.

This also disregards the fact that police response to domestic abuse is inadequate. Research has found that nearly a quarter (24%) of survivors had to report domestic abuse to police three times before any appropriate action was ever taken, with black and ethnic minority victims being dismissed even more.

If a survivor is forced to report their experiences to the police but then does not receive adequate protection – including immediate housing relief – they are at risk not only of further traumatisation, but also of exposure to potentially greater danger. Furthermore, this requirement places a greater barrier for certain groups that are understandably more reluctant to seek support or report to the police due to discrimination, such as migrant or LGBTQ+ survivors (Imkaan, 2018, Victim Support, 2022, Stonewall, n.d.).

Most importantly, the Codes of Guidance from MHCLG states ‘housing authorities should not have a blanket approach toward domestic abuse which requires corroborative or police evidence to be provided’ (21.24, 2025). This demonstrates a clear failure by housing officers to follow statutory guidance.

Tackling gatekeeping

These examples of gatekeeping – including ignoring local connection exemptions, requests for police reports, calling the perpetrator and demanding evidence of physical abuse – demonstrate that housing services are failing to follow MHCLG statutory guidance, the same guidance that in July 2021 set the same expectations - leaving little justification for their continued lack of implementation.

It is clear that, in addition to ensuring housing officers are aware of the statutory guidelines, increased and improved centralised oversight and accountability of these guidelines' implementation is needed.

Such measures are especially pivotal as the government moves towards greater devolution, with far more responsibility and funding for domestic abuse and homelessness set to sit with local government in the coming years. Funding without accountability will not deliver safety.

Inappropriate housing options

The prevalence of women being offered or placed in inappropriate, unsafe or poor-quality temporary and permanent housing was rife within our research. While a lack of supply is somewhat to blame, there are instances of a clear lack of thought and consideration that puts survivors' immediate safety and long-term recovery at risk.

Safety

The safety levels of housing offers emerged as a key theme throughout our discussions with staff and survivors. Of the 10 survivors placed in temporary accommodation to whom we spoke, 50% reported feeling unsafe where they were placed.

- 40% of survivors explicitly mentioned feeling unsafe in the context of being in shared housing and/or being in close proximity to men.
- 60% described difficulties resulting from close proximity to substance users.
- 30% described feeling unsafe until either granted security measures such as security doors or additional locks were provided, or they were moved to alternative accommodation.

Survivors also described not just feeling unsafe but also having a direct risk of harm and abuse from neighbours.

“

The neighbours all the time try to break my door and call me a prostitute... It's so scary, in the middle of the night, two or three different men will do this.

-Survivor

”

Frontline staff echoed similar concerns, with survivors placed in temporary accommodation near large groups or men who congregate in shared spaces such as corridors and entryways.

Safety concerns were also tied to mixed accommodation.

- More than 50% of staff confirmed that survivors had been offered or placed in mixed sex hostels in the last three months,
- 20% stated this happens in most applications.

These situations occur despite statutory guidance from MHCLG on the Delivery of Domestic Abuse Services, stating that authorities should not provide support for survivors in any shared, mixed gender accommodation, as this would not be in line with the descriptions of safe accommodation (331, 2025).

Offering mixed-sex hostels to survivors of domestic abuse risks re-traumatisation, with survivors often feeling unsafe sharing facilities and spaces. Furthermore, it risks further exploitation or abuse. Moreover, for many survivors, religious obligations or cultural norms then intersect with this living situation, making it even more unsuitable.

Significantly, none of the women placed in permanent accommodation spoke of feeling unsafe, and 80% actively spoke of feeling safe and settled once they got accustomed to the area. These figures reiterate that the issue of safety lies with the suitability of temporary accommodation provision for survivors of domestic abuse, rather than the overall perception of safety by the survivors.



Location

Seventy percent of survivors placed in temporary accommodation also said the location in which they were placed was unsuitable. Reasons for this included long distances from support networks, children's schools, work or other amenities.

For the whole of year 5, he did not go to school because the distance.

-Survivor

Survivors also reflected on how the unsuitability of the location intersected with the feelings of safety, with one survivor describing how the area was very 'rundown' and saw many 'drunk people at night, fighting, shouting'.

It was a horrible place; I almost got raped and everything.

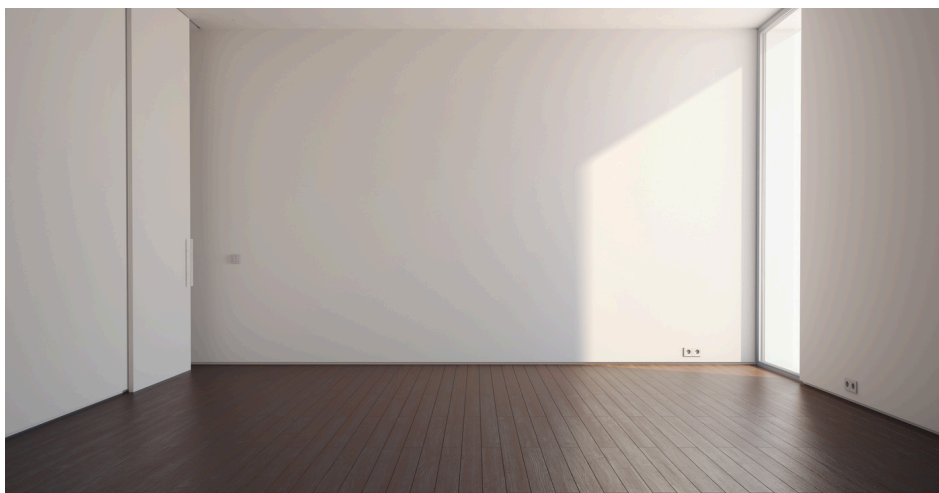
-Survivor

In comparison, only 20% of survivors interviewed that were placed in permanent housing, cited unsuitability of a location – again reflecting a clear contrast between provision and suggesting that allocation of permanent housing for survivors is far more suitable for their needs.



It's quiet, it's safe for me and my daughter

-Survivor



Suitability for survivor's needs

This report also found that survivors are often being placed in accommodation unsuitable for their needs, with many lacking basic necessities.

- 50% described their temporary accommodation as being too small in size and not having enough bedrooms for the family.
- 50% of survivors reported that their temporary accommodation was completely unfurnished – including white goods.
- 30% of survivors reported having no electricity or heating when moving into their accommodation
- 40% of survivors described that their property was unclean when they arrived, with 20% citing there were mice problems.



When I came, I didn't have anything, floor, nothing, no bed, no fridge, nothing.

-Survivor



While options of accommodation are limited, steps must be taken to ensure that accommodation offered to survivors is, at the very least, habitable and accessible.

For example, one survivor spoke of being placed in accommodation with lots of stairs, which was ‘tricky with the buggy because [she needed] to leave it downstairs and it is really narrow’. At the same time, a frontline member of staff described a wheelchair survivor being offered a top-floor apartment that failed to have a lift.

Women are therefore having to decline accommodation that should never be offered to them, often to be then told they are making themselves deliberately homeless.

Addressing accommodation provision

These experiences demonstrate that guidelines are not being followed under the Housing Act 1996 and Domestic Act 2021. Statutory guidance on supporting survivors to access housing ‘strongly encourages local authorities to consider additional needs and circumstances for the household’ such as ‘appropriate security measures’ and also their ‘preferences’ where possible.

It adds that survivors should not be put under pressure to accept accommodation which is inappropriate 11.10;17.6;21.41; 26.32,2025)

Systemic under-funding, and a lack of housing alternatives have no doubt contributed to housing officers’ inability to take into account all preferences of survivors.

However, survivors must be able to live safely and in an area that allows them and their children to recover. The sharp contrast between the experiences of those in permanent housing versus temporary housing reflects a culture of dismissal: where the (assumed but inaccurate) short-term nature of temporary housing has tolerated low, and often dangerous standards.



Of the 20 survivors we interviewed, the average number of accommodation options they were supported into was 1.9, with the average duration of temporary accommodation being 14.5 weeks.

Each time a survivor is placed in unsuitable accommodation and needs to move, it incurs further delay at a financial cost to the local authority, an emotional cost to the survivor: women can experience further abuse and trauma in accommodation, such as mixed hostels, resulting in more demand for health and VAWG support and expenditure on services such as therapy. The impact of not prioritising suitable accommodation offers exacerbates these often preventable consequences.

Such inconsistent and poor-quality provision is perhaps not surprising given the over-reliance on the private rented sector, leaving survivors dependent on landlords. Reforms to the private rented sector within the Renters Rights Act should improve these standards, but without oversight and accountability – such as through the proposed licensing scheme of the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act – there is a risk that sub-standard properties will remain (2023).

Similarly, with government commitment to building 300,000 social and affordable homes, these must be built in a way that is appropriate, accessible and safe for women. This is far more cost-effective in the long term, given the fiscal restraints central and local governments are operating within.

The impact on survivors

As well as examining the barriers and gatekeeping practices that stop survivors from accessing housing, it would be remiss not to give space to the impact these obstacles have on survivors' lives. Our interviews with survivors explored how the housing application process impacted women emotionally, physically, financially, socially, and in other aspects of their daily lives. A better understanding their experiences in accessing housing is essential to designing a system that does not cause further trauma and promotes recovery in the long term.

Emotional and physical impact

Sixty percent of survivors interviewed stated that the process of accessing housing had created stress, in particular due to the lack of communication and uncertainty around their applications. Survivors said this stress caused further impacts including low mood or sadness, and suicidal thoughts.

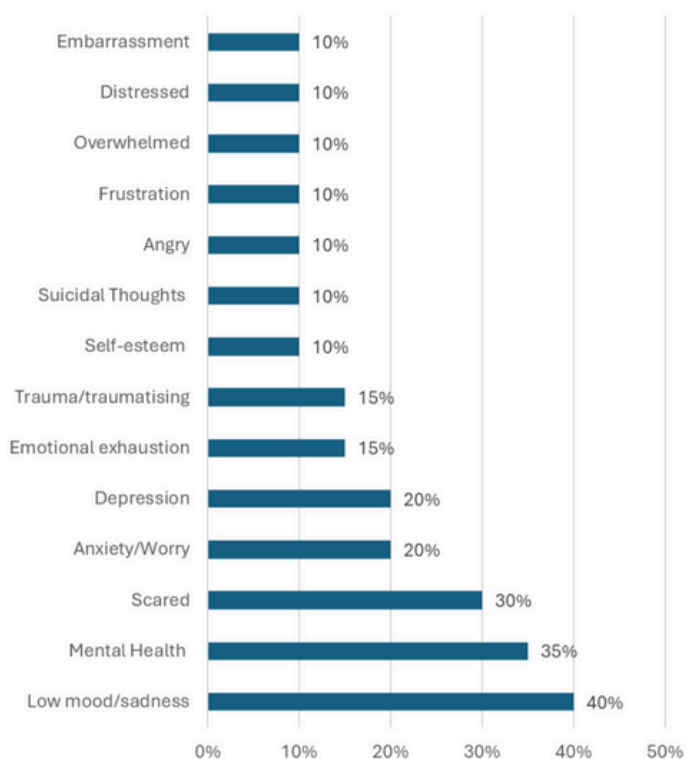
It's been extremely stressful, and it does get depressing, and it does make you angry.

-Survivor

I had that phone call with the housing officer and was in bits. I was a mess – crying, snot coming out.

-Survivor

Emotional Impact on Survivors



Physical impacts were less common. Thirty-five percent of women described difficulties around exhaustion, losing weight, and having difficulty sleeping, alongside other physical symptoms such as chronic pain and high blood pressure.

My mind, my body, my soul – I was just fg exhausted of life and this s**t.**

-Survivor

I couldn't even tell you how much weight I lost...I couldn't eat most of the time. I just felt sick.

-Survivor

Financial impact

Survivors also described financial impacts, including their ability to work.

- 15% described having to make financial restrictions on food choices and 10% said they were unable to afford new things or do leisure activities.
- 25% described not being able to work or study due to the emotional or physical impact of fleeing domestic abuse
- 10% described being unable to find a job due to their circumstances, such as the location of the accommodation offered or the lack of childcare.
- 10% described student loan implications, causing financial difficulty, being unable to claim benefits while in receipt of a student loan.

How am I going to find work when I don't have the childcare?

-Survivor

“

My boss had had to be extremely flexible with me. I've had to have a lot of time off. I was signed off sick for the whole of the summer after I moved.

-Survivor

”



Impact on children

Survivors also described the enormous impact on their children. Of the 14 women who were living with their children, 12 (85%) reported a negative impact on their child.

- 30% described concern around the children's well-being or mental health.
- 15% described witnessing an impact on their children's behaviour.
- More than 40% described an impact on their child's schooling.

“

Your only choice is to rip you and your children away from their whole lives. Everything that they know: their mates, their school. My child is traumatised.

-Survivor

”

Postive impacts

Negative experiences were not universal, and it is clear that good practice makes a fundamental difference to the women's wellbeing.

- 20% of survivors spoke of gained independence once they have secured safe housing.
- 10% of survivors described an increased sense of safety for them and their children.
- 10% described feelings of hope after being housed in suitable accommodation.

“

It gave me a sense of safety because it's far from where he lives.

-Survivor

”

Significantly, positive impacts were reported by women who have obtained a housing outcome and are now settled either in temporary or permanent accommodation;

negative impacts are far more prevalent during the application process. This contrast demonstrates the critical importance of ensuring safe, effective and timely support for domestic abuse survivors.

The disruption and negative impact the process of accessing housing has on survivors' lives, as well as their children's lives, further highlights the challenges and barriers survivors experience as they navigate this process. It is clear that the system is not incapable of supporting women: it is too inconsistent to do so. When officers are responsive and well trained, and accommodation options are suitable, survivors have better outcomes and can begin their road to recovery.



Not making it through the door

While the existence of obstacles for those entitled to priority need is crucial to address, many survivors remain who are excluded from accessing housing altogether.

Migrant women

Migrant women with insecure immigration status, and those with no recourse to public funds, remain some of the most vulnerable groups of survivors of domestic abuse. Insecure immigration status makes women vulnerable to exploitation, as perpetrators may exploit circumstance like being on a spousal visa as a weapon of control and form of coercion. Campaigns such as [Step up Migrant](#) have found that more than 60% of migrant women have said they've faced threats of deportation from perpetrators (2024).

Migrant women are also disincentivised from going to the police, due to fears of discrimination, dismissal or facing legal challenges regarding their status themselves. Under current legislation and guidelines, social services and UK police forces are expected to share migrant survivors' data with immigration enforcement if they expect this person does not possess a permanent visa. This practice is actively encouraged by guidance from the National College for Policing (2025). With increasingly hostile asylum policies, and proposed changes to make refugee status we risk further restricting this group's

already limited ability to escape violence and exploitation.

Difficulties for migrant women achieving safety and security are amplified by the fact that, not only are they not eligible for priority need despite their experiences of abuse, but they also lack recourse to public funds, meaning they are not eligible for housing support at all. Very often, refugees must turn away those with no recourse to public funds as they cannot afford to support these women without the necessary housing benefit.

Women's Aid's Nowhere to Turn report found that for nearly a quarter (23.7%) of survivors, no suitable refuge vacancies were available on at least one occasion when practitioners searched the UK VAWG Directory of Services (2025).

Revoking the no recourse to public funds policy would improve migrants' ability to leave their perpetrators and seek support in temporary or permanent accommodation.



Survivors of Rape and Sexual Violence

Sexual violence and rape cause homelessness and housing insecurity for many survivors.

An average of 15% of survivors supported through the North London Rape Crisis Centre each year have a housing-related need.

However, survivors of rape or sexual violence are not entitled to priority need for housing under the Domestic Abuse Act, unless they are 'personally connected' to each other, such as being related or in an intimate relationship.

Assuming priority need is only applicable where a personal connection is present disregards survivors who experience sexual violence by flat-mates, neighbours or even strangers in the local area for example.

Under current definitions, these survivors are left unsafe in their own homes.



Ruby's story

Ruby was supported through Solace's North London Rape Crisis (NLRC) centre, to present at the council office multiple times in person for support in moving to alternative accommodation.

She was raped by a stranger, and despite seeing him frequently in the area, police could not identify him.

Because of this situation, Ruby would often experience panic attacks and feelings of anxiety that would last for days on end.

Ruby had evidence from her GP and her advocate for mental health support, but this case was not considered for housing during her assessment of vulnerability.



Sexual violence survivors' ongoing exclusion from priority leaves them without adequate housing support, placing them in unsuitable and unsafe accommodation.

Even if survivors of sexual violence are provided with temporary accommodation, it can be in remote, isolated areas that result in long walks home from transport links after dark, which can be particularly distressing for survivors who have experienced rape by a stranger.

Staff also informed us that local authorities often discount medical considerations for this group of survivors, such as chronic pain as a result of sexual violence, leaving victims with the feeling that councils only care if something happens to them in a safeguarding context, as opposed to the long-term wellbeing.

Risks for this cohort of survivors are compounded by the fact that women under 35 without children are only eligible for the amount of housing allowance that is meant to cover shared accommodation such as flat-shares or hostels. This means victims of sexual violence are regularly placed in mixed-sex accommodation which, as we have described, is not only inappropriate for those with a history of trauma but places women at risk of further violence and exploitation.

Without priority need, local authorities have no statutory obligation to consider these survivors' needs, and without ensuring they are entitled to housing benefit for self-contained accommodation, we risk putting victims in further harm's way.

Conclusion

Four years on from the Domestic Abuse Act, survivors continue to experience systemic barriers and forms of gatekeeping when applying for housing. Underpinning all of the issues presented in this report is, of course, a fundamental lack of accommodation of all types. Without significant action from the government to address the experience of domestic abuse survivors, this situation is likely to worsen.

Rising costs in the private rental sector, poor quality of housing at the lower end of the market, the continued cost of living crisis and insufficient income from benefits, risk a greater number of survivors returning to perpetrators or not having the safe and affordable housing they need to recover from abuse. At the same time, we cannot continue to blame poor practice on housing supply alone.

Many of the findings of this report are a consequence of cultural attitudes, a lack of training, and failures to ensure legal requirements are being met.

Systematic barriers to applying for housing remain prevalent, such as a lack of transparency on the housing application process, not providing sufficient digital or in-person channels for those trying to present as homeless, or giving information about what evidence might be needed to be granted priority need. There is no obvious reason why local authorities would not be able to make this information publicly available.

In fact, transparency and clarity around the process of housing applications would likely prevent unnecessary calls and queries that could be answered pre-emptively.

Likewise, it would prevent inconsistent responses from different housing officers and streamline processes.

As we move towards increasingly digitalised service delivery, local authorities must make their services far more accessible and responsive. At the same time, housing application processes must have robust oversight to ensure accountability.

This report has also demonstrated consistently that whether due to a lack of empathy and dismissiveness, or a lack of understanding around domestic abuse, survivors' voices are not being heard.

For this reason, mandatory and regular training on domestic abuse, designed and delivered by specialist support services, should be an embedded part of housing officers training programme, including for onboarding, where relationships with IDVAs should also be addressed.

Having a dedicated domestic abuse lead within each housing office to ensure an escalation route would also help to minimise a postcode lottery of support for survivors – where seemingly their ability to gain support is dependent on whether the person at the end of the phone knows anything.

Survivors and frontline staff have also demonstrated the recurring use of gatekeeping practices to manage the ever-growing demand of housing applications under domestic abuse. In doing so, however, services demonstrate a clear disregard for statutory regulations, official guidance and the wellbeing and safety of survivors.

Local authorities and housing officers must be fully aware of the expectations and requirements for domestic abuse survivors, such as their exemptions from local connection rules, and the clear risks in contacting perpetrators.

Disregard for MHCLG guidance cannot continue and it is imperative that both the Home Office and MHCLG hold local authorities to far greater account. Such scrutiny is particularly crucial following the decision to phase out the use of Police and Crime Commissioners, as these roles often held responsibility for oversight of domestic abuse expenditure.

An appropriate replacement for this role must be determined as soon as possible. If Tier 1 local authorities (which in the case for London is the Mayor's Office for Police and Crime) are going to have greater oversight and power for the distribution of funds related to their duty to provide accommodation under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act, then the allocation of these funds must be matched with metrics and feedback loops to ensure guidelines and legal obligations are being met. In the same way the proposed Supporting Housing Licensing Scheme seeks to hold supporting housing providers to higher standards and use financial penalties as repercussions, local authorities

should also be held to account for how they provide care and support to those in need.

Disregard for government guidance and survivor wellbeing is apparent in survivors' experiences of being placed in unsafe, inappropriate accommodation – an ongoing challenge that has long been echoed by frontline staff. A lack of supply will limit local authorities' ability to prioritise the preferences of survivors, but their risk level and safety must be prioritised.

We encourage local authorities to consider all the consequences of failing to provide appropriate accommodation at first offer, adopting a more long-term strategic plan for survivors as opposed to short-term crisis thinking. The November 2025 Budget saw the first multi-year financial settlement in over a decade, with local authorities to receive a ring-fenced £2.4bn of grant funding over three years for homelessness, rough sleeping and domestic abuse.

This funding is explicitly for councils to invest in prevention and move away from an over-reliance on temporary accommodation. It is imperative, therefore, that councils utilise this opportunity and provide accommodation that is safe, accessible and sustainable.

This report makes the following recommendations at a local and central level.

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, streamlining applications, making better use of specialist Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVA), and ensuring a trauma-informed approach is adopted.
- 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 whose first disclosure is to the housing authority.
- 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.
- Publish clear guidance, guidelines and requirements regarding applying for priority need or presenting as homeless on their websites and at the office, to maximise survivors' access to information and minimise confusion. This should include FAQs and multiple forms of contact details.

- Ensure timely responses to survivors' applications, with clear escalation routes in place. Local authorities should set expectations around swift and efficient communication as a performance metric for staff.
- Ringfence 5% of all new social housing built for survivors of domestic abuse.

Central Government should:

- Update MHCLG Statutory Guidance to:
 - Reflect the need for mandatory and regular domestic abuse training – designed by, and given by, specialist organisations for housing officers.
 - Reflect the need for transparency on processes and eligibility criteria for housing officers
 - Mandate the expectation for a physical presence in housing departments during business hours.
- Ensure at least 20% of the Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse Grant is allocated to Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation.
- Ensure Fair Funding streams and the Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse grant are directly linked to performance metrics that measure sustainability of housing outcomes, including intra-temporary accommodation moves, not just length of stay or overall or household duty numbers.

- Lift the no recourse to public funds condition and implement a firewall between public services and immigration enforcement to ensure survivors with insecure immigration status can report safely and access safe housing.
- 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.
- Remove the exemption for those aged 35 and under from the shared accommodation rate for housing benefit, and the housing element of Universal Credit, to survivors of rape and sexual assault.
- Commit to a minimum funding settlement of £516 per annum in England for specialist domestic abuse services, including a ringfenced fund for by and for services as recommended by Women's Aid.

The actions above would see the government on its way to halving violence against women and girls. Sufficient levels of safe and appropriate accommodation increase women's ability to leave a perpetrator or unsafe environment, reducing the risk of continued experiences of abuse.

Similarly, holding local authorities to account on ensuring temporary accommodation offers are suitable reduces the risk

of revictimisation that can happen through inappropriate offers such as mixed hostels.

With housing so crucial for those experiencing abuse, it is absolutely essential to design a system that prioritises survivors' needs, removes them from danger, and allows them to take back their lives.

However, action on VAWG is not hierarchical, and action must be carried out holistically.

Support services will continue to advocate for those too often silenced and marginalised – the victims and survivors who ask for help and are ignored. But specialist support services are struggling (DAC, 2022). Women's Aid's Census found that 35% of domestic abuse services were providing a service without dedicated funding, and more than 70% rely on organisational reserves to cover costs (2025).

Sustainable, long-term funding for community-based services and accommodation services are essential to effectively prevent and respond to VAWG, ensuring consistent support and protection for survivors.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Acaster Lloyd for conceptualising and designing the qualitative interview study, conducting the interviews, and analysing and reporting the data.

Together, Solace and Acaster Lloyd extend our deepest gratitude to the survivors who took part and bravely shared their experiences. Your voices are at the heart of this report and continue to guide our work toward safer and fairer housing responses.

We also thank our frontline staff, whose insights and daily dedication to supporting women were vital to understanding the systemic issues highlighted here.



Katie's story

Katie had been experiencing domestic abuse for many years from her husband, and fled her house after he made threats to kill her. She was homeless and had been sleeping in her car for three months before being referred to a Solace specialist refuge.

After being declined for Housing Benefit due to her tenancy, she was supported by Solace staff to apply instead for a direct let of a Housing Association property.

Without the support from Solace and the Resettlement Service, Katie would not have been able to flee safely and maintain her employment and move to settled and safe accommodation.



Tables

Table 1. Characteristics of the women interviewed(N=20)

Characteristic	Mean (range)
Age (years)	36.8 (18-58)
Characteristic	Mean (range)
	N (%)
Ethnicity¹	
White	9 (45%)
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	3 (15%)
Asian	2 (10%)
Mixed/ Multiple ethnic groups	4 (20%)
Other	1 (5%)
Region	
London	16 (80%)
South East England	1 (5%)
East England	1 (5%)
West Midlands	1 (5%)
Yorkshire and the Humber	1 (5%)
Occupation	
Employed or self-employed, part-time	10 (50%)
Unemployed or seeking work	4 (20%)
Homemaker or full-time carer	2 (10%)
Student	2 (10%)
Long term sick leave	1 (5%)
Current accommodation type	
Social housing	6 (30%)
Temporary Accommodation	5 (25%)
Private Rented Accommodation	4 (20%)
Living with friends/family	2 (10%)
Refuge	1 (5%)
Home office accommodation	1 (5%)

Number of times presented as homeless	
1	12 (60%)
2	4 (20%)
3	3 (15%)
4	1 (5%)
Living with children	
Yes	14 (70%)
No	6 (30%)
Age of children living with survivor³	
Under 2	1 (5%)
Characteristic	Mean (range)
2-5 years	6 (30%)
6-11 years	10 (50%)
12-18 years	1 (5%)

¹ n=1 survivor preferred not to answer

²N>20 because some survivors received more than one type of financial support

³Out of N=14 survivors living with children

Annex – data sources

This report brings together three sets of data.

The first, a cross-sectional qualitative interview study with survivors of domestic abuse in England who have presented as homeless. Survivors who met the criteria were identified and recruited by Solace, offering financial compensation for their time.

They were then asked about their experiences and the impact of accessing housing in their own words, in a 1-hour semi-structured interview conducted by research organisation Acaster Lloyd. Participants were recruited by Solace and offered financial compensation for their time.

Twenty women aged 18-58 participated in interviews. All were survivors of domestic abuse in England who had presented as homeless within the last 24 months. The majority of survivors were located in London (n=16). Full demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1. Survivors were at various different stages of the housing process, including in a refuge, in temporary accommodation or in private rented accommodation.

The interview looked at (1) the pre-application process; barriers encountered before beginning the formal process, (2) the experiences of applying for housing, (3) the experience of being offered housing if applicable and (4) the impact of the process on their quality of life.

While the second and third are a combination of qualitative and quantitative responses from our frontline staff. Solace surveyed its frontline staff to determine how frequently they, or the clients they supported with homelessness applications, experienced barriers and/or gatekeeping over the previous three months (August, September and October 2025), and if so, how this manifested itself.

Responses spanned across our services, including refuge, community-based services, our north London rape crisis line and Pan-London advice line and between them, they supported over 250 homelessness applications, with an average of 10 per service in the last three months.

Roughly how many homelessness applications have you supported clients with in the last three months?	Number
Average	10
Total Sum	258

Thinking about the last three months, roughly how many times would you estimate you or your clients have experienced gatekeeping from housing departments?	Number
Average	9
Total Sum	191

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