

<b>Committee:</b> Community and Children's Services	<b>Dated: 04/07/2024</b>
<b>Subject:</b> Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Services – Options for Domestic Abuse Victim/Survivor	<b>Public</b>
<b>Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?</b>	1, 2, 3,10
<b>Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>If so, how much?</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>What is the source of Funding?</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Judith Finlay – Executive Director, Community and Children's Services	<b>For Information</b>
<b>Report author:</b> Kirsty Lowe, Rough Sleeping Services Manager Lauren Walker, Advice & Homelessness Officer	

### Summary

It is a legal requirement of all local authorities to provide support to those who are fleeing Domestic Abuse (DA). This paper sets out the additional duties placed on the City of London Corporation's (CoL's) Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Team (HRST) by the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (DAA 2021).

The report sets out the CoL's response and available resources when supporting single, homeless individuals fleeing DA, and how this has improved since the introduction of the DAA 2021 and the collaboration and work by the Women's Action Group (WAG).

The report sets out various accommodation and support options available to individuals fleeing DA. Safe accommodation options include the CoL Women's Project, temporary accommodation (TA), refuges, sanctuary schemes and spot purchase placements in specialist women's services. Specialist support services include the Mobile Intervention Support Team, Independent Domestic Violence Advisor, Vulnerable Victims' Advocates, psychotherapy, and more.

The report describes the different options available to the CoL HRST and how, regardless of individual need, protected characteristics or risk posed, the CoL discharges its duties as set out in the DAA 2021.

### Recommendation

Members are asked to: Note the report.

## Main Report

### Background

1. Members were first made aware of the additional duties placed on CoL by the DAA 2021 and the development of the CoL Women's Project (COLWP) in July's Community and Children's Committee in the report titled *City of London's Women Project Update*.
2. The Crime Survey for England and Wales estimated that 2.1 million people aged 16 years and over (1.4 million women and 751,000 men) experienced DA in the year ending March 2023.
3. The Local Government Association set out similar statistics, that victims are predominantly women, with one in four women experiencing a form of DA in their lifetime. DA also significantly affects those children and young people who witness incidents of violence and control. Their experience of DA can lead to intergenerational cycles of vulnerability and perpetration.
4. In 2019, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, now referred to as the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) carried out a review of the funding and commissioning of support for victims of DA and their children, which resulted in a new duty on local authorities to assess the need for, and commission support for, victims and their children in safe accommodation.
5. In addition to safe accommodation, the review also highlighted the need for additional support duties:
  - Advocacy support (personalised safety plans through liaison with other support services)
  - DA prevention advice
  - Additional specialist support (drug and alcohol, mental health)
  - Children's support
  - Longer-term housing support
  - Counselling.
6. The DAA 2021, received Royal Assent on 29 April 2021. The DAA 2021 aimed to enhance the protection and support of victims by establishing a DA commissioner, introducing DA protection notices and orders, and a duty on local authorities to provide support to victims of DA and their children, including providing safe accommodation.
7. The DAA 2021 places statutory duties on local authorities to provide support to victims of DA and their children residing within refuges and other safe accommodation.

This accommodation includes:

- Refuge accommodation
- Specialist safe accommodation
- Dispersed accommodation
- Sanctuary schemes
- Move-on or second stage accommodation.

8. The government has provided the following annual amounts to local authorities to finance the new burdens placed on local authorities to provide better support to those experiencing DA:

- 2021/22: £125,000,000
- 2022/23: £125,000,000
- 2023/24: £127,300,000
- 2024/25: £129.700,000

9. Historic data shows that demand on the CoL Statutory Homelessness Team (SHT) has steadily increased since 2020/21, with the highest number of DA approaches to the SHT being recorded after the introduction of the DAA 2021.

Year	Number of approaches due to DA
2018/19	5
2019/20	3
2020/21	27
<b>JULY 2021 – DOMESTIC ABUSE ACT 2021 INTRODUCED</b>	
2021/22	36
2022/23	53
2023/24	32

10. Prior to the introduction of the DAA 2021, the CoL offer of support to those fleeing DA was proportionate to need but limited in nature. If specialist safe accommodation was needed, the SHT would refer an individual to the National Domestic Abuse Helpline who would attempt to source a refuge. Alternatively, TA in a safe borough could be sourced, however, there was no gender-specific accommodation available.

11. An offer of an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) was in place, however, there wasn't a direct referral route for the SHT, and so access to an IDVA on occasion could be delayed.

12. In early 2023, City officers from various parts of the Department of Community and Children's Services (DCCS) alongside commissioned homelessness services, came together with a common aim to better understand and serve the needs of those experiencing homelessness and DA. The group agreed to work together to identify what could be done to improve the CoL's response to better support those fleeing DA. The CoL WAG was formed. Terms of reference were agreed alongside key ambitions for the year. The group's main focus was to deliver a gender-specialist safe accommodation service for individuals coming

into contact with HRST, particularly those seeking support from the SHT or Rough Sleeping Team.

13. The Rough Sleeping Team identified an underspend in the 2022/23 Rough Sleeping Initiative grant from DLUHC, and with the department's approval, the underspend was repurposed to fund a 12-month pilot to provide safe accommodation – the COLWP.
14. The WAG worked with an existing TA provider to source a small, converted house split into six one-bed studios with a shared kitchen and garden. The building was repurposed focusing on safety and comfort for guests and, most importantly, the property aligned with the safe accommodation regulations identified in the DAA 2021.
15. The Rough Sleeping Team arranged for an existing commissioned service, the Thames Reach Mobile Intervention Support Team to provide gender-specific in-reach case support to those staying at COLWP.

### Current Position

16. A data snapshot on 11 June 2024 showed that the SHT had 20 cases open with applicants fleeing DA as their main reason for homelessness.

Single women	12
Single men	4
Families (female lead applicant)	4
Families (male lead applicant)	0
Trans/non-binary applicants	0

17. The WAG continue to meet monthly to drive this area of work. Regardless of individual needs or risk posed, the group are confident that appropriate placements and support can be sourced.
18. The accommodation available to those fleeing DA and working with the HRST is described in the following paragraphs.
19. The **COLWP** is a small property split into six studios rented to the CoL by a TA. The COLWP opened and had its first resident move in on 3 April 2023. To date, 13 individuals have resided at the COLWP.
20. COLWP is often full and so the SHT operates a waiting list. When the COLWP is full, officers will refer to the [Temporary Accommodation Allocation Policy](#) to identify an alternative safe and suitable placement. This may be self-contained TA or a refuge placement.

21. The table below shows the six individuals currently placed at COLWP, their previous housing situation, the lead referral team, and the person's additional support needs.

Case	Age	Previous housing circumstance	Referral source	Additional support needs
1	39	No fixed abode	Statutory homelessness	Mental health, risk of stalking
2	41	No fixed abode	Statutory homelessness	Non-molestation order
3	41	Privately renting	Statutory homelessness	Mental health – depression/anxiety
4	27	Rough sleeping	Rough sleeping services	Refugee
5	23	Living with family	Statutory homelessness	Mental health – depression/anxiety
6	20	Living with family	Statutory homelessness	Mental health – ADHD/Anxiety, Autism

22. The table below shows to date the seven individuals who have moved on from COLWP. The SHT have identified six successful move-ons (cases A to E and G) and one unsuccessful (case F).

Case	Age	Previous housing circumstance	Referral source	Additional support needs	Duration in COLWP (days)	Outcome
A	32	Colchester refuge	Statutory homelessness	Substance misuse	20	Reconnection – North East
B	29	Waltham Forest refuge	Statutory homelessness	Mental health – PTSD	97	Council housing offer
C	63	Rough sleeping	Rough sleeping services	Physical health issues	95	Direct council housing offer
D	23	Sofa surfing	Statutory homelessness	N/A	132	PRS offer
E	43	Temporary accommodation	Statutory homelessness	Mental health – Psychosis	46	Supported accommodation offer
F	30	Living with family	Statutory homelessness	Mental health – PTSD/Anxiety	74	Reconnected with family
G	29	Ukraine sponsorship property	Statutory homelessness	Sexual violence, mental health	223	Moved back with family

23. **TA** is a term that describes temporary housing for people who are homeless. TA is provided by local government and most common provision is bed & breakfast.

24. The Statutory Homelessness Team have ensured that the [Temporary Accommodation Allocation Policy](#) reflects the duties stipulated by the DAA 2021, as states that all DA victims/survivors will be offered self-contained accommodation and, where possible, female-only or male-only accommodation. Where this is not possible, and the applicant is open to refuge accommodation, we will seek to identify a placement in a refuge using the 'Gold Book'.
25. The 'Gold Book' is an online resource published by Routes to Support and Women's Aid. This enables officers to check live vacancies in refuges across the UK, and to review criteria and specialist support on offer so that referrals are appropriate and personalised.
26. All TA placements will be outside the CoL, as is standard, however, officers will identify safe areas during the full housing assessment to ensure that we do not move a victim/survivor somewhere they will be at risk of further abuse.
27. All current 20 DA statutory cases are in TA. Five of these are placed at COLWP; the rest are in self-contained accommodation in safe boroughs. All DA victims/survivors who aren't able to reside at COLWP are offered self-contained accommodation in a safe borough with no shared facilities.
28. Hotels are not part of the SHT standard offer and are only used in emergency situations for short periods where suitable or safe TA isn't available.
29. **Refuges** are another safe accommodation option for those fleeing DA. Thanks to access to the 'Gold Book' the SHT can now target referrals to specific areas and vacancies that can address any additional support needs the applicant may have.
30. There are currently no CoL applicants placed in a refuge. This is partly due to the team being able to meet the victim's/survivor's accommodation needs through TA and the COLWP.
31. Officers from HRST recently carried out a review of the London-wide refuges that support single adults. These were identified through the 'Gold Book'. There were 32 London refuges who were contacted and asked to complete a brief questionnaire identifying the access criteria and the support offered.
32. Of the 32 refuges contacted, 11 responded. Of these, most confirmed access criteria which allowed for referrals for transgender and non-binary clients, which confirms that the CoL can meet the needs of all potential applicants, however small in number. Half of the refuges contacted did offer accommodation to those with no recourse to public funds. The only exception to this was the provision for men. Only two of the 11 refuges confirmed that they offered specialist provision for men, with the remaining eight refuges confirming that they would provide advice and refer individuals on to services that do accommodate men.
33. The table below shows the responses from the 11 refuges that completed the survey when asked whether they would accept individuals with no recourse to public funds and individuals who identified as transgender, non-binary or male.

Question	Yes	No	Exceptions	Additional comments
No recourse to public funds	6	3	2 If funded by Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse Concession or Adult Social Care	Mental health, risk of stalking
Transgender	7	4	0	Onward referrals to trans services would be offered to those who were declined
Non-binary	7	1	3 If the individuals were assigned female at birth	
Male	2	9	0	Onward referrals to male services would be offered to those who were declined

34. Additional funding has recently been secured through the Safer City Partnership and the Proceeds of Crime Act. This has enabled the team to offer spot-purchased bed spaces for women fleeing abuse whose needs are too high for COLWP, but who require specialist support.

35. Additional, non-accommodation based specialised support services available to those fleeing DA and working with the HRST are outlined in the following paragraphs.

36. The Community Safety Team have expanded existing contracts with Victim Support and Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation, providing **IDVA's and Vulnerable Victims' Advocates** (VVAs) to include COLWP residents. These services also provide counselling/psychotherapy sessions in boroughs to residents at COLWP.

37. The **Mobile Intervention Support Team** provides everyday support at COLWP including workshops at the property to encourage hobbies, interests and creating a mutual support system between property residents.

38. The **Tri-borough Psychotherapy** service has a gender informed therapist who works specifically with women who are currently rough sleeping, or who have done in the past. This service is available to those residing at COLWP, other TA, or in the homelessness accommodation pathway.

39. Officers have access to trans-inclusive support providers such as **Loving Me** and also now have referral access to the **Star Support refuge** through Stonewall Housing for LGBTQ+ victims/survivors who require specific support or IDVA services.
40. Access to a sign-language interpreting service specific for deaf domestic DA victims/survivors is called **SignHealth**.
41. Other contracted partners and local health providers are available to City residents and would be available to this group also.
42. The Statutory Homelessness Officers have also introduced changes to their approach when supporting victims/survivors of DA. Officers can now complete Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment Risk Identification Checklist (DASH-RIC) risk assessments at the point of contact to determine risk straight away. They can also directly refer to the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Co-ordinator (MARAC). Officers can also refer directly to Victim Support services for IDVA/VVA without needing a MARAC referral. In addition, all DA victims/survivors skip the triage stage of making a homeless application and are assessed as soon as possible.

### **Options**

43. There are no options for members to consider.

### **Proposals**

44. There are no proposals for members to consider.

### **Key Data**

45. Any data is included in the body of the report.

### **Corporate & Strategic Implications**

46. Strategic implications – none
47. Financial implications – none
48. Resource implications – none
49. Legal implications – none
50. Risk implications – none
51. Equalities implications – There are no implications to consider under the Equality Duty 2010. The report sets out how all groups under the Equalities Act are assisted through our approach to those experiencing DA.
52. Climate implications – none
53. Security implications – none



## Conclusion

54. Legislative changes through the DDA 2021 and the ambitions of cross-team officers within DCCS to better serve those experiencing DA and homelessness have resulted in an improved and robust service offer for the most vulnerable and underserved in our population.
55. HRST are supporting more DA victims/survivors through the introduction of the first CoL safe accommodation service, through gender-specialised support services such as the Mobile Intervention Support Team, tri-borough psychotherapy, and more. The teams have worked together to develop better internal systems to improve the speed and efficiency of existing services such as IDVAs and VVAs.
56. The different services and referral pathways developed by CoL officers allows for a comprehensive service offer to anyone approaching the CoL for assistance under the DAA 2021.
57. This offer includes dedicated residential services, access to specialist refuges and TA. Additional, non-accommodation-based support is available through a variety of partners, some of which are commissioned by the CoL.

## Appendices

- Appendix 1 – [Temporary Accommodation Allocation Policy](#)

## Background Papers

- City of London's Women Project Update (Fleur Holley-Moore, Interim Rough Sleeping Services Manager, DCCS)

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