



Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment Refresh 2024

Summary Document

Introduction

Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, enacted in October 2021, places a duty upon Torbay Council as a Tier 1 Authority to undertake a Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment to examine the needs of adults and children placed in designated safe accommodation as a result of fleeing domestic abuse.

The full Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment was completed in 2021/22. The first refresh was due in 2023 however we have delayed the completion of the updated needs assessment so that we could have 2 full years of data since the inception of Safe Accommodation Duty.

This document is the summary version outlining the key findings from the refreshed Needs Assessment and an updated action plan to address those needs.

Progress Against the Safe Accommodation Strategy Action Plan 2021-24

What has been achieved



It is important to note that the Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment has informed how other grant funding in addition to the Domestic Abuse Act New Burdens monies has been used to respond to the gaps identified.

Ongoing Priorities

- Improving pathways into and between services including voluntary sector – this is part of the Growth in Action Alliance service development workstream which involves co-production with staff and people using services
- Improving safe accommodation provision for people with mobility needs
- Improving access to safe accommodation for people from minoritised communities and those with multiple needs
- Balancing length of stay in safe accommodation against challenges of moving on to an affordable long term home in the current local housing market
- Cross border referral pathways and processes

Key data from 2024 Needs Assessment

- **91.7% of people in safe accommodation are female**, and in the 21 to 44 years age range. This is supported by the national prevalence data and Devon and Cornwall Police data.
- Over the last two years there has been a small increase in **females over the age of 55** placed in safe accommodation, however the numbers are not representative of the local population (35% of females are over 60 years of age)
- **Low number of people with learning disabilities, Autism, Aspergers or other neuro-diverse conditions**, when ONS 2022 data shows that among women with disabilities, women with learning and understanding impairments are even more likely than women with physical impairments to experience these forms of abuse
- Small increase in referrals from the LGBTQ+ community, possibly connected to the Safer Rainbow LGBTQ+ IDVA service provided across Devon by the Intercom Trust funded by the National IDVA/ISVA Fund.
- **Increase in referrals and numbers placed during 2023/24 and increase in those on additional benefits**, possibly a sign of the impact of the cost of living crisis.
- Similarly, there is an **increase in people needing financial advice and support**
- **Increase in numbers presenting with poor mental health**
- **Low numbers of people with disabilities** although ONS data in 2022 shows they are three times more likely to experience domestic abuse
- **The number of children entering safe accommodation increased by 57% in 2023/24**
- **No children have been denied** access to safe accommodation

Headline Findings

Domestic abuse **was the third main reason** for loss of accommodation in 2022/23.

Increase in supported **safe accommodation units from 15 to 23** properties across Torbay

Improved pathways between Housing Options and Safe Accommodation Service

Virtual Safe Accommodation Panel is in place acting as a conduit for information sharing, unblocking obstacles and problem solving

Flexible Funding Pot in place to support access and move on

Majority of people leaving safe accommodation move on to long term accommodation

More single people fleeing DVA are in temporary accommodation than accessing safe accommodation

Move on is challenging generally but especially for single person households

Challenges with move on due to the local housing market means some people stay longer in safe accommodation

There is a lack of referrals from Adult Social Care

Better understanding of the needs of some minoritised groups – LGBT+ and people with learning difficulties or neuro-diverse conditions to inform future commissioning

Co-produced the development of a Learning Disabilities Toolkit and training to improve service responses and access to safe accommodation for people with learning difficulties and neuro-diversities across the SW Peninsula

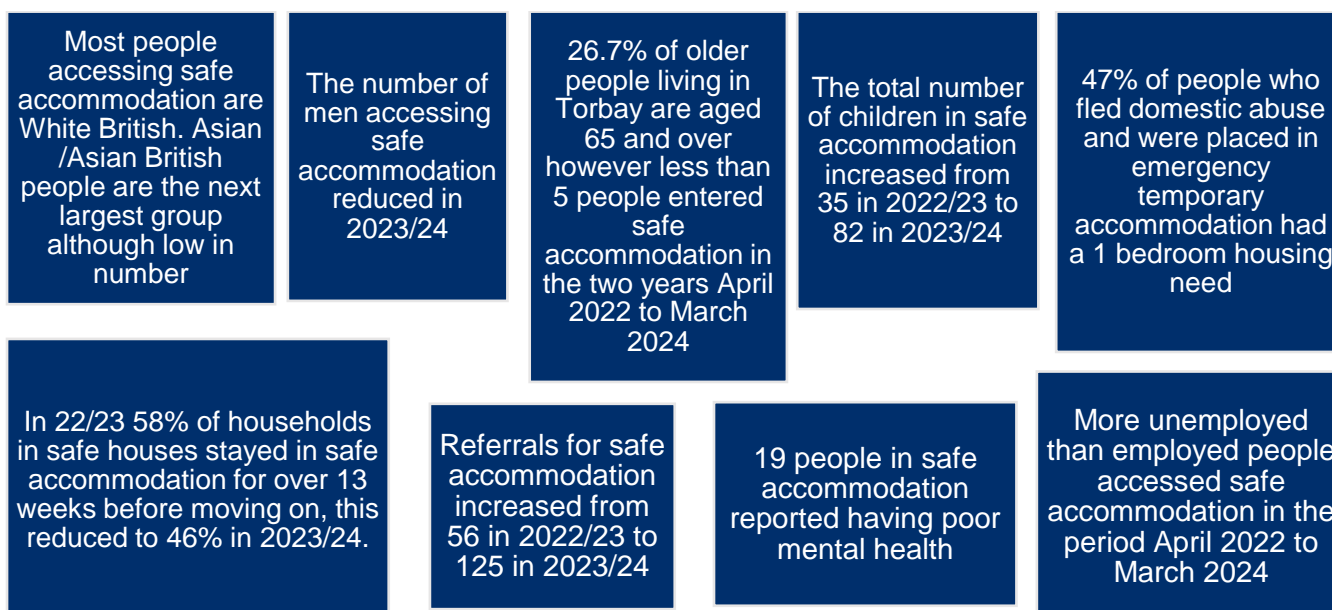
Peninsula collaboration and joint commissioning activity to meet shared gaps

Growth in Action Alliance in place comprising domestic abuse, adult treatment services and the homeless hostel that will facilitate improved identification and support for people with intersectional needs

Co production and trauma informed practice is central in the new Growth in Action service

New specialist domestic abuse Housing Officers planned during 2024

Improved monitoring of protected characteristics and socio-economic factors



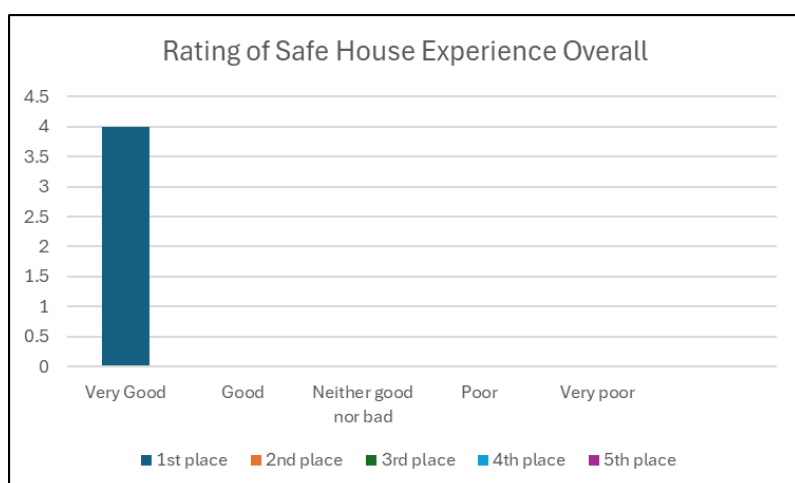
Gaps:

- Safe accommodation for single person households
- Some specific groups with a high prevalence in the local population are not accessing safe accommodation – particularly older people, young adults under 25, men, people with learning difficulties and neuro diverse conditions, LGBT+, people with care needs and people with complex needs
- Therapeutic Emotional support for both adults and children at a time that suits them
- Lack of wheelchair accessible units
- Improved understanding of economic abuse
- Alternative sources of funding (time limited grant funding) have been used to put in place support for some identified needs – for example LGBT+, women with complex lives.

What people told us

A survey of safe house residents took place in February 2024. They were asked about their experiences in safe accommodation and also what they would find most useful and helpful during their stay in safe accommodation, and in responding to the trauma they had experienced.

A small number (23%) responded however expressed satisfaction with their safe house experience overall.



When asked the best thing about moving into a safe house- responders mentioned safety, reduced anxiety, children able to be themselves, freedom from abuse.

When asked the worst thing about moving into a safe house – responders mentioned leaving pets, feeling isolated from family and friends, confronting their abusive experiences and realising it was not their fault.

When asked what could improve staying in a safe house people responded that they would like more opportunities to meet others and make friends, to reduce social isolation.

Conclusions

Whilst good progress has been made to improve capacity and provision for people needing support in safe accommodation, there are some continuing gaps that were identified in the original needs assessment that remain unaddressed, as well as new challenges emerging. Changes to the local housing market resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on the availability of affordable private rented accommodation, in an area where this sector was already a key part of the solution to homelessness. This in turn is leading

to longer stays in safe accommodation for some people. For single people, if they are lucky enough to access a safe house (and even if they do not), they will wait a protracted length of time to move on.

The economic climate and cost of living crisis is also playing a role in the affordability of long term housing solutions, and this could be a contributory factor in the reduced numbers of people fleeing DVA accessing safe and emergency accommodation in the latter part of 2023 and into 2024.

The budget for the New Burdens duty ends in March 2025. Although not examined here, the amount provided for safe accommodation support is just about adequate however the needs identified exceed the funding available to provide an effective therapeutic offer that can be commissioned on a sustainable basis.

Torbay must continue to work collaboratively with its local statutory partner agencies and neighbouring Peninsula Authorities to use a combination of different funding routes to supplement Domestic Abuse Duty monies; thus enabling delivery of service responses to the gaps identified in the Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment. There is a risk however when most of the funding currently in use is short term time limited grant monies, and there is uncertainty about future funding in the current economic and new political climate that is creating a “cliff edge” of support. This is not unique to the domestic abuse sector.

Recommendations for future focus:

1. Increase safe accommodation provision for single people and initiatives to improve move on
2. Raise awareness of domestic abuse among and improve access to safe accommodation by older people
3. Provide the right offers of emotional support for people living in safe accommodation, particularly their children. Exploring broader co-commissioning opportunities with the South West Peninsula commissioners in this regard may well provide a way forward once needs are better understood.
4. Promote the safe accommodation service as a non-gendered service offer in targeted locations
5. Replace a 2 bedroom safe house with a 2 bedroom wheelchair adapted safe house
6. Explore peoples’ experiences of accessing Alliance services to improve pathways
7. Continue collaboration and co-commissioning with SW Peninsula colleagues and ensuring visibility in the proposed Collaboration Forums as required by the emerging Victims and Prisoners Bill (Duty to Collaborate).
8. There should be more effort to proactively identify and address domestic abuse at an earlier stage, providing support before the need to access safe accommodation. The Co-ordinated Community Response¹, Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance and Whole Housing Approach² are models that Torbay should consider.

¹ <https://www.standingtogether.org.uk/what-is-ccr>

² <https://www.dahalliance.org.uk/innovations-in-practice/whole-housing-approach/>

Safe Accommodation Action Plan 2024 to 2026

		Target Date
1	Reduce Barriers and Improve Access to Safe Accommodation	
	Establish specific DA practitioners in Housing Options	October 2024
	Continue working with Peninsula partners to address barriers to accessing safe accommodation for minoritised groups and communities including:	
	a) Promote the Learning Disability toolkit	November 2024
	b) Launch of Older Peoples Charter	November 2024
	c) Promote Safer Rainbow and seek funding for continuation	March 2025
	d) Explore opportunities for co-commissioning offers for black and minoritised ethnic and other minoritised groups including supporting VCS providers with funding bids	In progress
	Continuation funding for Complex Lives Navigators	March 2025
2	Provide Safe Accommodation to Meet Needs	
	Source 1 x family size wheelchair adapted safe house through additional unit or re-provision of a current unit.	March 2025
	Source an additional 2 units of one bedroom safe accommodation on a phased approach	March to June 2025
3	Support with Trauma and Emotional Wellbeing	
	Map existing landscape for emotional and therapeutic support for adults and children	March 2025
	Explore opportunities to add to or enhance existing provision including grass roots support provided by VCS	September 2025
	Explore co-commissioning a Peninsula wide therapeutic offer	March 2026
	Domestic Abuse professionals and practitioners to receive Trauma Stabilisation training	March 2026
	Explore and embed initiatives to address domestic abuse at an earlier stage to avoid the need to enter safe accommodation	March 2026
	Delivery of Economic Abuse training to key agencies and staff	March 2025
4	Listen and Respond to Lived Experience	
	Work alongside people with lived experience to continue to understand their experiences and develop a lived experience network to inform, advise and influence decision making of the Partnership Board.	September 2025