



Sefton Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy

DRAFT

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1. Foreword



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**Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing
Chair of Sefton Domestic Abuse Partnership Board**

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This strategy outlines how Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council will work with partners to provide safe accommodation and support for adult and child victims of domestic abuse in Sefton as part of the Council's statutory requirements within the new Domestic Abuse Act (2021).

Having safe accommodation is an essential priority for victims of domestic abuse and we will work to ensure we have a range of options that meets the need of our local communities. This includes options to remain safe at home and having access to suitable alternative safe accommodation and support where this isn't possible.

It is important we continue to work together across the different Sefton partnerships to ensure our approach to tackling domestic abuse is joined up and has the voice of victims at the heart of what we do. This draft strategy is part of a wider piece of work being led by the Sefton Domestic Abuse Partnership Board which has been established as part of the new Domestic Abuse Act legislation. To ensure we have a full picture of the current services across Sefton and the needs of victims, children and perpetrators to inform future commissioning, we have commissioned a Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment which will be completed later this year. The outcomes from this will be used to inform this Safe Accommodation Strategy which will then be integrated into a wider Sefton Domestic Abuse Strategy early next year.

2. Introduction

What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse causes significant harm to individuals, children, families and communities. It is not an uncommon issue. In the year ending March 2020 an estimated 2.3 million adults aged 16 – 74 experienced domestic abuse in the last year (1.6 million women and 757,000 men) ¹

The Domestic Abuse Act (2021) defines domestic abuse as where the behaviour of a person towards another person is abusive and where both individuals are aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other.

Behaviour is “abusive” if it consists of any of the following:

- physical or sexual abuse
- violent or threatening behaviour
- controlling or coercive behaviour
- economic abuse (see subsection
- psychological, emotional or other abuse

It does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.

Behaviour can also be classed as abusive where it consists of conduct directed at another person eg the victim’s child.

In most case domestic abuse is perpetrated by a partner or ex partner. It can also be experienced by family members. Individuals do not need to live in the same household for the definition of domestic abuse to apply.

The Domestic Abuse Act

The Domestic Abuse Act was signed into law on 29 April 2021 and introduced a number of measures to improve the response to domestic abuse and the victims it affects. The Act seeks to:

- Raise the awareness and understanding of the devastating impact of domestic abuse on victims and their families.
- Improve the effectiveness of the criminal justice system in providing protection for victims of domestic abuse and bringing perpetrators to justice.
- Strengthen the support available to victims of abuse by statutory agencies.

Part 4 of the Act places a statutory duty, known as the Safe Accommodation Duty, on tier 1 local authorities in England to provide support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other safe accommodation.

3. The Safe Accommodation Duty

The Government's statutory guidance defines Safe Accommodation⁽²⁾ as:

Refuge accommodation

Single gender or single sex accommodation and domestic abuse support which is tied to that accommodation. The address will not be publicly available. Victims, including their children, will have access to a planned programme of therapeutic and practical support from staff. Accommodation may be in shared or self-contained housing, but in both cases the service will enable peer support from other refuge residents.

Specialist safe accommodation

Single gender or single sex accommodation, alongside dedicated domestic abuse support which is tailored to also support those who share particular protected characteristic(s) and / or who share one or more vulnerabilities requiring additional support. Accommodation may be in shared or self-contained housing, and the address will not be publicly available.

Dispersed accommodation

1. Safe (secure and dedicated to supporting victims of domestic abuse), self-contained accommodation with a similar level of specialist domestic abuse support as provided within a refuge but which may be more suitable for victims who are unable to stay in a refuge with communal spaces, and/or where peer support from other residents may not be appropriate, due to complex support needs, or where older teenage sons cannot be accommodated in a women only refuge, for example. Where two or more units share any part of the accommodation, including shared hallways or access routes, provision should be single gender or single sex.
2. Safe (secure and dedicated to supporting victims of domestic abuse), self-contained 'semi-independent' accommodation which is not within a refuge but with support for victims who may not require the intensive support offered through refuge, but are still at risk of abuse from their perpetrator/s. Where two or more units share any part of the accommodation, including shared hallways or access routes, provision should be single gender or single sex.

Sanctuary Schemes

Provision of enhanced physical security measures to a home or the perimeter of the home. A Sanctuary Scheme is a survivor centred initiative which aims to make it possible for victims of domestic abuse to remain in their own homes, where it is safe for them to do so, where it is their choice, and where the perpetrator does not live in the accommodation.

Second stage accommodation

Accommodation temporarily provided to victims, including their children, who are moving on from other forms of relevant accommodation and/or who no longer need the intensive level of support provided in a refuge, but would still benefit from a lower level of domestic abuse specific support for a period before they move to fully independent and settled accommodation. Where second stage accommodation is in shared housing it should be single gender or single sex.

Other forms of domestic abuse emergency accommodation

A safe place (single gendered or single sex, secure and dedicated to supporting victims of domestic abuse) with domestic abuse support tied to the accommodation to enable victims to make informed decisions when leaving a perpetrator and seeking safe accommodation. For example, short term (e.g. 2-3 weeks) accommodation providing victims with the space and safety to consider and make informed decisions about the options available to them.

Accommodation such as Bed and Breakfast accommodation is not considered relevant safe accommodation and for this reason are specifically excluded in the Regulations.

Domestic Abuse Support in Safe Accommodation

The Domestic Abuse Act statutory guidance⁽²⁾ describes Domestic Abuse Support within Safe / relevant Accommodation as:

- Overall management of services within relevant accommodation – including, the management of staff, payroll, financial and day to day management of services and maintaining relationships with the local authority.
- Support with the day-to-day running of the service, for example scheduling times for counselling sessions, group activities (such functions may often be undertaken by administrative or office staff)
- Advocacy support – development of personal safety plans, liaison with other services.
- Domestic abuse prevention advice – support to assist victims to recognise the signs of abusive relationships, to help them remain safe (including online), and to prevent re-victimisation.
- Specialist support for victims:
 - Designed specifically for victims with relevant protected characteristics (also known as by and for), such as faith services, translators and interpreters within BAME-led refuges, immigration advice, interpreters for victims identifying as deaf and / or hard of hearing, and dedicated support for LGBTQ+ victims [not limited to].

- Designed specifically for victims with unique and / or complex needs such as, mental health advice and support, drug and alcohol advice and support, including sign posting accordingly.
- Children’s support – including play therapy and child advocacy.
- Housing-related support – providing housing-related advice and support, for example, securing a permanent home, rights to existing accommodation and advice on how to live safely and independently.
- Advice service – financial and legal support, including accessing benefits, support into work and establishing independent financial arrangements; and,
- Counselling and therapy (including group support) for both adults and children, including emotional support.

Safe Accommodation Duty Funding

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) (previously Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has committed to providing a three-year settlement for the delivery of the Safe Accommodation duty. Sefton has been allocated £605,595 for 2021/22. Future years funding will be announced following the Government’s Comprehensive Spending Review.

4. Strategy scope and aims

Scope of the Safe Accommodation Strategy

The Safe Accommodation Strategy outlines how Sefton will implement the statutory duties that relate to safe accommodation included within the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

This Strategy is part of a wider approach to tackling domestic abuse in Sefton. This is to ensure all domestic abuse work is joined up and separate silos are not created. As part of the Domestic Abuse requirements, Sefton has established a Domestic Abuse Partnership Board which met for the first time on 23 September 2021. This Board will be responsible for overseeing the development of Sefton's Domestic Abuse Strategy following the completion of a full domestic abuse needs assessment which is currently underway. It will also ensure learning from Domestic Homicide Reviews is integrated into action plans and future commissioning.

Sefton Domestic Abuse Partnership Board is made up of the following representation:

- Sefton Council (Children's Social Care, Adult Social Care, Early Help, Public Health, IDVA & MARAC, Strategic Housing)
- Merseyside Police
- Merseyside National Probation Service
- South Sefton and Southport and Formby Clinical Commissioning Groups
- Southport and Ormskirk NHS Hospital Trust
- Sefton Women's and Children's Aid
- RASA Merseyside
- Venus
- One Vision Housing
- Merseycare
- Sefton Council for Voluntary Service (CVS)

The Chair of the Board is Sefton Council's Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, who is also Chair of Sefton Safer Communities Partnership. This will support having a coordinated approach and will enable close links with other partnership groups, such as the Sefton Safeguarding Children Partnership and Sefton Adults Safeguarding Board.

The Safe Accommodation Strategy will be integrated within Sefton's refreshed Domestic Abuse Strategy once the domestic abuse needs assessment has been completed. This has been commissioned as a comprehensive piece of work which will provide a full picture of current domestic abuse services, gaps and future needs across Sefton, including the statutory safe accommodation requirements set out in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities guidance. The Domestic Abuse Strategy will be

agreed for a 3 year period but will be reviewed annually it is responsive to emerging needs. A delivery plan will be developed outlining how the objectives within this strategy will be met.

The Strategy will also take note and link with other relevant local strategies such as Sefton Safer Communities Partnership priorities and Plan and Sefton Homelessness Strategy.

Strategy aims

It is essential we listen to and understand victims' views about what they want and need from services. This needs to be at the centre of service design, commissioning and delivery and is a key element of our domestic abuse needs assessment.

This strategy set outs how we work in partnership towards providing a range of appropriate services for victims which will include options around safe accommodation, crisis and move on support, whilst also challenging and holding perpetrators to account.

We will do this by focusing on:

- Early intervention and prevention: ensuring victims (adults and children) are supported at an early stage and provided with options to remain safe at home to prevent homelessness. This includes holding perpetrators to account for their behaviour.
- Accessible services: ensuring victims and professionals know how to access safe accommodation options, both in Sefton and beyond.
- Safe accommodation provision: ensuring there are a range of accommodation options with appropriate support in place to meet the needs of all victims that need it.
- Multiagency delivery: ensuring victim needs are met by effective, collaborative multi-agency support
- Support to return home or move on: victims are supported to return home safely and/or move into alternative permanent accommodation

5. Current safe accommodation and support provision

There is already some provision in place that provides safe accommodation to victims of domestic abuse in Sefton and beyond, as well as a range of support services which are outlined below.

Refuge run by Sefton Women and Children's Aid.

- Sefton's refuge is open to women and children.
- It is open to Sefton and non Sefton residents as per the Domestic Abuse Act.
- It includes wraparound support from Domestic Abuse Support Workers

Merseyside Domestic Abuse Rapid Accommodation project

- This is a dispersed housing programme specially for victims of domestic abuse which provides support with managed moves to safe accommodation.
- It is managed and run by Liverpool and Sefton YMCA.
- It is open to any adult victim (and their children) living in Merseyside.
- Dedicated Empowerment practitioners provides support to victims to provide practical advice and guidance to help them make a fresh start.

Sanctuary Scheme provision

- Providing home security measures for victims of domestic abuse so they can stay safely in their own homes.
- Available as part of a package of support for service users accessing the Sefton IDVA service or the Merseyside Domestic Abuse Rapid Accommodation project.
- Domestic abuse victims who are One Vision Housing tenants can also access support for home security measures when needed which can be offered alongside victim support services such as IDVA support.

Community based domestic abuse support services

- 1:1 support for adults 16+ Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs).
- 1:1 and group support for women victims 16+ by specialist Domestic Abuse Workers at SWACA
- 1:1 and group support for children victims by specialist domestic abuse workers at SWACA
- Counselling sessions by SWACA and SWAN.
- Freedom project pilot in Southport, an educational programme which supports victims of domestic abuse to recognise the signs of abuse to help build resilience and prevent re-victimisation.

Sefton MARAC

- Sefton has strong partnership arrangements in place to share information and develop joint plans to protect victims and hold perpetrators to account. Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) meetings take a joint approach to risk assessment and safety planning Agencies work together to

consider the wishes of the victim, options for keeping individuals safe in their own home and powers that can be used to hold perpetrators to account for their behaviour.

- All high risk domestic abuse cases and those meeting the repeat threshold are referred to MARAC.

Sefton ACES programme

- Educational trauma informed group programme exploring the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (including domestic abuse); providing practical tools to develop resilience and improve future parenting.
- The programme is delivered by trained facilitators as part of Sefton Council's early help offer.

Criminal justice measures to hold perpetrators to account

- Merseyside Police and other criminal justice agencies use a range of tools, including Domestic Abuse Protection Orders and Notices which help support victims to stay safely in their in their own homes and provide time for them to access support services without the perpetrator being there.

6. Priority areas for improvement and development

Sefton's Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment will provide comprehensive information on the needs, gaps and priority areas for development in Sefton going forward, including in relation to safe accommodation provision. However, in the meantime there are number of key areas we already know need some focus. These will be incorporated into the wider Sefton Domestic Abuse Strategy once this has been refreshed following the outcome of the needs assessment.

- Victims of domestic abuse can present as homeless at Sefton's Housing Options Team and are housed in temporary accommodation. They will be considered a priority for accommodation, however most, if not all, of the temporary accommodation provided would not meet the Domestic Abuse Act definition of "Safe Accommodation" eg bed and breakfast accommodation. Therefore, this is a key priority that requires development and investment moving forward.
- We will work to ensure that all victims in Sefton accessing temporary accommodation are automatically also referred to domestic abuse support services.
- We will consider what further early intervention and prevention offer is required in Sefton to:
 - Encourage and assist families to access support early.
 - Support children, young people and adults to recover and move on from their experience of witnessing or being in a household where abuse is occurring.

This could include increasing specialist support for 'lower risk' victims, developing therapeutic and wellbeing support for children and young people, and educational programmes and information on healthy relationships and domestic abuse awareness to prevent / reduce the escalation of domestic abuse.

- We will ensure information related to safe accommodation for victims of domestic abuse is clear and is made easily accessible to members of the public and professionals.
- We will commit to working with other local authority areas to enable the continuation of the Merseyside Domestic Abuse dispersed accommodation programme beyond March 2022.

References

- 1 Domestic Abuse Act 2021: overarching fact sheet, Home Office July 2021
- 2 [Dept for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Statutory Guidance October 2021. Delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse in domestic abuse safe accommodation services - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/101222/20211027-Domestic-Abuse-Safe-Accommodation-Service-Guidance.pdf)

