

Domestic Abuse

Safe Accommodation Strategy

2021- 2024

Supporting victim survivors and their children to be safe, recover and thrive



Version control

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Executive Summary

This Strategy has been developed in response to Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, which requires Tier One Authorities to undertake a needs assessment of safe accommodation and support provision for victims of domestic abuse, and their children; and prepare a Strategy to meet the needs identified.

Torbay's Safe Accommodation Strategy will form part of a new Domestic Violence Strategy to be published in 2022, following a comprehensive strategic review which includes a review of the Torbay Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC).

This Strategy follows the safe accommodation journey of victim survivors in three parts - finding a safe place to stay, getting support in safe accommodation, and moving on to a new, permanent home. It has been informed by:

- A desktop literature review and analysis of local regional and national data
- Data collection across range of agencies - including the commissioned service, the police, homelessness and housing options, and Children's services - with a focus on referrals for safe accommodation, specialist domestic abuse support, and moving on
- Analysis of findings from the Are You OK survey undertaken by Torbay Council earlier in 2021
- Interviews with people with lived experience of domestic abuse using services in Torbay

"the one thing that seems so hard at first was actually housing. It was literally one thing is you have nowhere to go. And first, obviously when I walked down that road, the first day, the hardest bit was walking and realising my children were still there. And so it was 'where am I gonna go?'"

- Victim in Torbay

Main findings

- Prevalence of domestic abuse in Torbay does not match local demographics- especially regarding older people and minoritised groups
- Inconsistent and inadequate data collection across agencies, particularly in respect of protected characteristics and intersectionality, meaning that we cannot be clear on the needs and demand for "by and for" services and commission to meet those needs
- Victims and survivors consistently tell us that the process for accessing a safe place to stay and applying for housing is daunting and overwhelming

Disturbingly the conclusion drawn from the feedback of people with lived experience is that the system, and the processes within it, are inadvertently contributing to creating increased risk; and undermining efforts to prevent domestic violence and abuse and to support and encourage victims to leave abusive relationships.

Summary of actions and commissioning plan:

Supporting victim survivors and their children to be safe, recover and thrive by:

- Increasing safe accommodation capacity
- Increasing safe accommodation accessibility particularly for those under-represented/less visible according to Torbay's demographic profile
- Developing new pathways for safe accommodation support according to the urgency of the victim's situation, with support options tailored to their circumstances
- Adopting aspects of The Whole Housing Approach to prevent victims needing to access safe accommodation, including those experiencing economic abuse
- Developing support in Safe Accommodation and to move on including elements of The Whole Housing Approach
- Developing skills in the workforce including trauma informed approaches
- Working with the Peninsula DASV Commissioners Group to devise a regional commissioning plan to address specialist needs and priorities identified from all the Peninsula safe accommodation needs assessments, including developing cross border referral pathways.

Introduction

Purpose of this Strategy

This Strategy sets out how Torbay Council will respond to its statutory duty to provide support to victim survivors of Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA) and their children in safe accommodation.

The Strategy has been informed by the Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment and the voices of those with lived experience of using domestic abuse services in Torbay. We would like to express our thanks to all those who took part in the surveys and lived experience interviews, for sharing their stories and reflections on their experiences. This document could not have been written without them.

The Safe Accommodation Strategy is part of Torbay's wider Domestic Violence Strategy however it is intended that this document can serve as a sub-strategy in support of the wider parent document.

The Needs Assessment has been developed alongside a broad review of the system response to domestic violence and abuse in Torbay, and the operation of the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC). Some findings and recommendations from the Needs Assessment require partnership and/or systemic actions that cannot be achieved in isolation. To this end full public consultation on the Safe Accommodation Strategy and the relevant links to the wider parent strategy will take place once the full strategic review has been completed and the parent strategy drafted. It is expected that this will be completed by Summer 2022.

Consultation on this emerging Safe Accommodation Strategy has been undertaken with:

- Torbay Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Operational Group
- Torbay Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group (which holds the function of the Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board as required by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021)
- Torbay Council internal governance procedures (Senior Leadership Team and Cabinet)
- Publication of the draft Strategy on Torbay Council's "Are You OK" website from 26th October 2021 to 23rd November 2021 prior to finalising the document for submission to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) by 5th January 2022.

This document supports the Council’s strategic aims to “work with partners to tackle domestic abuse and sexual violence and its effects” and to Protect and involve children and young people”.

Background

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 received Royal Assent in April 2021. Part 4 of the Act established a new duty upon Tier 1 local authorities in England to provide support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other safe accommodation. This is referred to as the Safe Accommodation Duty, although the duty itself is not a requirement to provide “safe accommodation”, but instead to assess the needs of and provide support to victim survivors and their children within safe accommodation. The Act sets out definitions of what is meant by the terms “safe accommodation” and “support”. These can be found in the section “Finding a Safe Place to Stay” below.

Part 4 of the Act is accompanied by statutory guidance to assist Local Authorities in their interpretation and delivery of the new duty.

Summary of the Safe Accommodation Duty

- The new duty requires Tier 1 LAs to provide support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other safe accommodation. This is the first time that there has been a statutory duty to identify and respond to the support needs of children and victims residing in safe accommodation. The duty includes a requirement to provide accommodation to those seeking support and accommodation from across LA boundaries.
- A Needs Assessment of safe accommodation and support provision across the area must be undertaken every 3 years and refreshed annually. The Needs Assessment should include some specific datasets and must identify the needs of victims accessing domestic abuse safe accommodation from across local authority boundaries.
- The Needs Assessment will inform the development of a Safe Accommodation Strategy setting out how the identified needs will be met and associated commissioning plans.
- The LA must set up a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Partnership Board to oversee the implementation and delivery of the Safe Accommodation Strategy; and to review and evaluate effectiveness of the Strategy. This can be an existing group. Membership should include:
 - the Tier 1 Authority,
 - representative for victims of domestic abuse,
 - representative for children of DVA victims
 - DVA Charities and other CVS organisations
 - Health Care services
 - Policing /criminal justice
 - Housing
- In Torbay the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group (DASVEG) has taken on the role and responsibilities of the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board.

How the Safe Accommodation Strategy will be Used and Monitored

The Strategy will inform commissioning (and de-commissioning – where appropriate) decisions in respect of support and safe accommodation for victim survivors of DVA and their children.

A Safe Accommodation Commissioning Plan will be developed which will include:

- Local commissioning priorities, including joint commissioning opportunities with statutory partners
- Identification of gaps in support and how these will be met
- Regional commissioning priorities – these are services considered to be more viable if co-commissioned regionally, or with one or two neighbouring authorities.
- How the needs of minority communities will be met, including through “by and for” services.

Progress against the Strategy and commissioning plan will be monitored by Torbay’s DASVEG in the first instance, and through annual reporting as prescribed by the DLUHC.

This Strategy and associated Needs Assessment will also inform a Peninsula Safe Accommodation Commissioning Plan, setting out commissioning priorities across the region.

Regional commissioning will be driven by the Peninsula Commissioning Group, which comprises:

- DVA commissioners from Torbay, Plymouth City Council, Devon County Council and Cornwall Council
- Devon Clinical Commissioning Group
- Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon and Cornwall.

There is regular liaison with the Regional Partnerships and Policy Lead from the Office of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner; providing opportunities for two way communication and feedback on how the new duties are being implemented on the ground.

Connectivity with Other Strategies

This Strategy will form part of the overall Torbay Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy, which will be reviewed and re-launched in 2022. The Safe Accommodation Strategy also links to the following national and local strategies:

National	Tackling Violence against Women and Girls Strategy 2021
	Victims Strategy 2018 and updated Victim’s Code 2021
Regional	Emerging Peninsula Safe Accommodation Commissioning Plan
	Peninsula Community Safety Partnerships Strategic Assessment 2020-21
Local	Torbay Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy – under review
	Torbay Housing Strategy 2020-25
	Torbay Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-25
	Torbay Community Safety Partnership Strategic Assessment 2020-21
	Torbay Children and Young People’s Plan 2018-23 (updated Feb 2021)
	Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2018-22
	Torbay Council Community and Corporate Plan 2019-23
	Devon Community Mental Health Framework
	Emerging Standing Tall Community DASV Partnership Community Strategy

The Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment

A Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment, as required by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, was undertaken by external consultants during the period June to September 2021. The assessment followed guidance set out by the then Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). The assessment used a range of sources including the Office of National Statistics (ONS), the Crime Survey of England and Wales (CSEW), national literature and research and localised data where this was available.

An Executive Summary of the Needs Assessment accompanies this document. Key findings are set out in this Strategy, described in sections that relate to different parts of the Safe Accommodation journey. The Needs Assessment captures and incorporates the voices of those who have experienced seeking and /or staying in safe accommodation in Torbay.

Demographics and Prevalence

In 2020 Torbay's collective population was 136,2181. There are 125,118 individuals aged 16 or over in Torbay of which we can estimate around 20,770 will have experienced domestic abuse over their lifetime.

On an annual basis, this equates to 6,410 individuals likely to have experienced domestic abuse (both familial and intimate partner violence) of which the majority (n=4,710, 73%) will be intimate partner violence. (Source – ONS 2020 Mid-Year Population estimates and Crime Survey of England and Wales [CSEW] 2020)

Image 1: overview of domestic abuse prevalence in Torbay

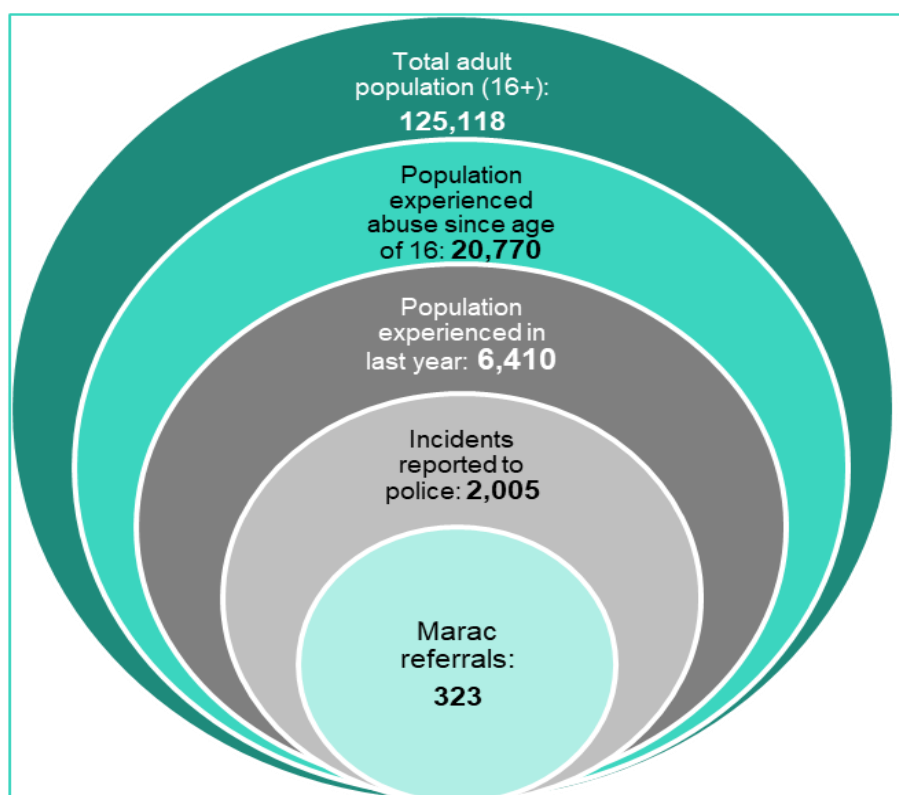
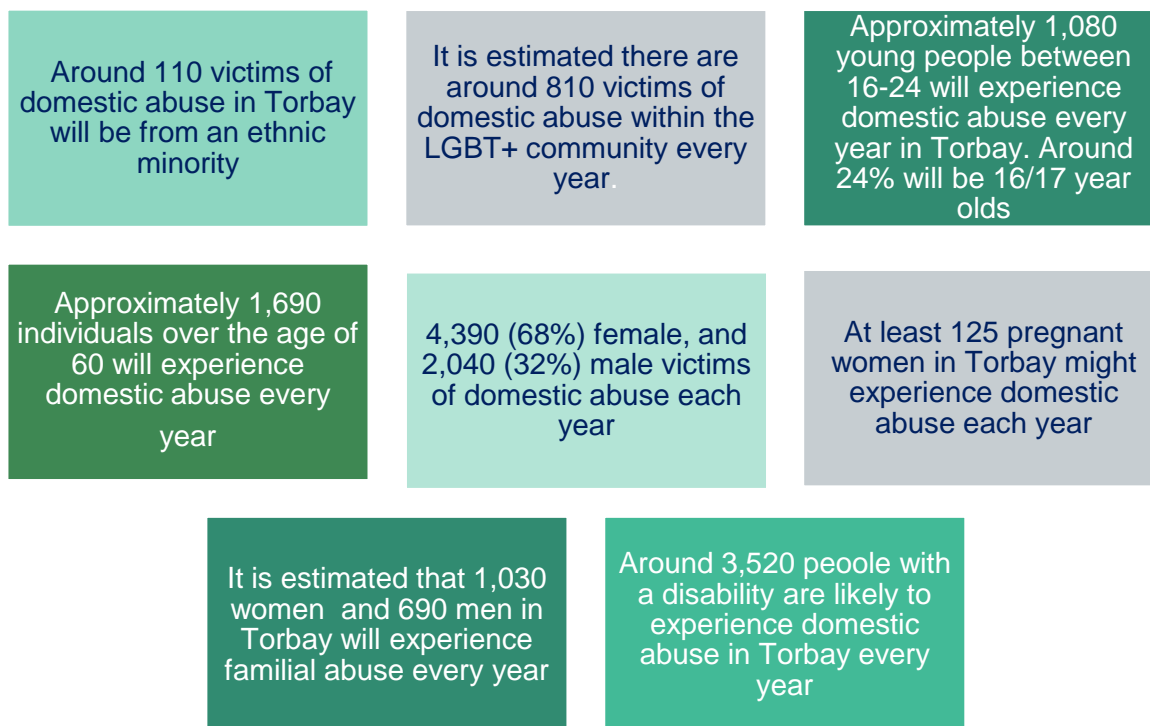


Image 2: Protected Characteristics



- The new Domestic Abuse Act (2021) continues to define domestic abuse victims as individuals over the age of 16, however it has also recognised children as direct victims. Authorities therefore need to consider how **young people** under the statutory definition age of 16 might experience abuse and harmful behaviours within their relationships; and how they might access safe accommodation services and support. A study of 13 to 17 year olds by NSPCC suggests this abuse can begin even earlier in adolescence for large numbers of young people. A quarter (25%) of girls and 18% of boys in the study reported having experienced some form of physical violence from an intimate partner. SafeLives Children’s Insights data found that nearly all (95%) of young people experiencing intimate partner violence were female.

In Torbay in 2020/21, nearly 51% of children who came into the care of the Authority had domestic abuse recorded as a factor in their assessment in the same year or previous two years

- The CSEW 2020 data shows those **aged 55 to 74 years** were less likely to be victims of domestic abuse in the year ending March 2020 than those in most other age groups. However, the CSEW previously did not capture data on victims of domestic abuse aged over 74, and **older victims** of domestic abuse are ‘hugely underrepresented’ in domestic abuse services.
- A 2019 Women’s Aid Annual Survey found that only around 3.4% of their service users were **over the age of 60**.

In Torbay very low numbers of older people access the domestic abuse service.

- The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) shows that 14% of older people in Torbay live in an area that is amongst the 20% most deprived in relation to income deprivation affecting older people in England. This might be an additional barrier faced by older people in Torbay.
- A considerable number of **men** also experience domestic abuse. Mankind (2021) describe male victims as:
 - invisible,

- often unaware of existing support,
- not being referred/signposted to appropriate support, and,
- unable to access dedicated services including accommodation services.
- From their estimates around 300 men across the UK may be rough sleepers due to domestic abuse. Men are less likely to access services with men making up only 4.4% of victims of domestic abuse being supported by local domestic services.

In Torbay no men accessed safe accommodation in the period 2018 to 2021 service.

- Crime data for the year ending March 2020 showed that **adults who were separated or divorced were more likely to have experienced domestic abuse** compared than those who were married or civil partnered, cohabiting, single or widowed
- It is well known that domestic abuse can escalate in **pregnancy**, putting both the victim and their unborn child at significant risk. Around 30% of domestic abuse begins during pregnancy, while 40–60% of women experiencing domestic abuse are abused during pregnancy.

In Torbay we see very low numbers of pregnant women in safe accommodation.

- SafeLives (2018) reported that **LGBT+ victims of domestic abuse** are almost twice as likely to have attempted suicide
- LGBT+ victims are more than twice as likely to have self-harmed
- LGBT+ victims of domestic abuse are more likely to be abused by multiple perpetrators (15% compared to 9% of non-LGBT+ victims)
- The ONS (2018) reported that **bisexual women** are nearly twice as likely (10.9%) as heterosexual women (6%) to report partner abuse. Lesbian women are also more likely than heterosexual women to report partner abuse (8% to 6%).

In Torbay we are unable to identify the number of victim survivors from the LGBT+ community experiencing domestic violence and abuse as the data is not consistently collected.

- For the year ending March 2020, the Crime Survey for England and Wales showed that men and women aged 16 to 74 years with a **disability** were more likely to have experienced domestic abuse in the last year than those without. Research has shown that 'disabled women are twice as likely to experience domestic abuse and are also twice as likely to suffer assault and rape. However, MARAC data shows that nationally only 3.9% of referrals were for disabled victims, significantly lower than the SafeLives recommendation of 16% or higher, (*SafeLives, 2020*). Research shows that the number of disabled people referred into domestic abuse services is also low and this picture is reflected locally.

In Torbay the number of people with a disability referred into domestic abuse services is low.

- **Ethnicity-** the CSEW (2020) shows that:
 - those in the Mixed ethnic group were significantly more likely to experience domestic abuse within the last year than those in the Black or Asian ethnic groups
 - White ethnic group, women were significantly more likely than men to have experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2020 (7.7% of women, compared with 3.6% of men).

- Familial abuse was more likely in in the White and Mixed ethnic groups than those in the Black ethnic group.

In Torbay most victim/survivors accessing services are White or White British. The next largest groups are Black or Black British, Asian, or Asian British and Mixed or Dual Heritage.

- Torbay experiences very few applications from people with **No Recourse to Public Funds**.
- Current services are not set up to appropriately support victims and survivors who experience **multiple and intersecting disadvantages**. Previous research carried out by AVA and Agenda found that of 173 local areas in England and Wales, only 19 had access to support for women facing multiple disadvantage that could address all the following issues: substance use, criminal justice contact, poor mental health, and homelessness.

Torbay is already addressing this issue by commissioning homelessness, adult substance misuse and domestic abuse services together as part of a Multiple Complex Needs Alliance. This is expected to go live in early 2023.

- Research has shown that **socio-economic factors** also play a role in the prevalence of domestic violence and abuse. A comparison of educational qualifications shows that as the level of qualification goes up, so does the disparity between Torbay and the national average.
- The percentage of the Torbay population claiming out of work benefits is slightly higher than the national average but higher than the rest of the South West.
- Poverty and deprivation do not cause domestic abuse however they **set “a context which may create additional vulnerabilities or escalation of abuse”** (Source – *Torbay Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment*). Torbay’s ranking as the 38th most deprived upper-tier local authority out of 151 for 2019, and its low wage economy, may therefore contribute in part to the levels of domestic violence and abuse in the area.

In comparison with the estimated prevalence set out above, we see low numbers of older people, those with disabilities and LGBT+ people in domestic abuse services in Torbay. However, this conclusion is based on a lack of evidence as poor and inconsistent data collection makes it difficult to see the full picture.

Similarly, it is difficult to ascertain the numbers of people experiencing multiple disadvantages as many will not have sought help from services. The wider strategic review and resulting DVA Strategy for Torbay will explore this issue further.

Finding a safe place to stay

“I had to leave my home, I had to leave everything I owned. I had to put my dog with a foster family and it was extremely difficult and then to kind of have to fight for a chance, you know, fight to be able to be just offered like basic housing needs was just awful.”

- Victim in Torbay

The definition of Safe Accommodation

Under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, the following are considered as “Safe Accommodation” for the purposes of the duty:



Refuges offer accommodation and intensive support, which is tied to that accommodation, usually comprising several units in one building with some communal areas.

Specialist safe accommodation are refuges providing dedicated specialist support to victims from minority ethnic groups, or people with complex intersectional needs such as drug and alcohol abuse and poor mental health. Sometimes the service is led by those sharing the same characteristics, these are known as “By and For” services.

Dispersed accommodation is safe (secure and dedicated to supporting victims of domestic abuse), self-contained ‘semi-independent’ accommodation which is not within a refuge.

Sanctuary Schemes provide enhanced physical security measures within a home, enabling victims to remain in their home if they wish and it is safe to do so, and the perpetrator does not live in the same accommodation.

Move-on and / or second stage accommodation temporarily accommodate victims and their families no longer needing the intensive level of support provided in a refuge, but who require a lower level of domestic abuse specific support before moving on to permanent accommodation

Other forms of domestic abuse emergency accommodation give victims an opportunity to spend a short time to consider and make decisions in an environment which is self-contained and safe.

What there is

Torbay Domestic Abuse Service is the only commissioned domestic abuse service in Torbay, providing 15 units of safe accommodation by way of self-contained properties dispersed across the Bay:

Table 1: Mapping of Safe Accommodation services in Torbay

Property Type	1 bed	2 beds	3 beds	Notes
Flat	2	5	1	1x 2 bedroom flat is ground floor and can be shared by 2 single people.
House	0	3	2	
Bungalow	0	1	0	
TOTAL	2	9	3	15 units as 1x 2 bedroom flat is shared.

An additional seven safe houses (a mix of 2 and 3 bedroom properties) with associated specialist support, are being developed using Safe Accommodation Duty New Burdens monies to act as dedicated emergency safe accommodation with specialist support. This will avoid the use of emergency temporary accommodation for those needing immediate assistance where there is no capacity in the existing domestic abuse safe houses.

Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation is considered as “exempt” accommodation for the purposes of the Spare Room Subsidy (the “Bedroom Tax”) and therefore two bedroom units can be used by single people in receipt of welfare benefits. However, these units might be unaffordable to those who are in low paid work.

Across the Peninsula area there are a total of 98 safe accommodation units (not bedspaces) with a further 12 in the pipeline:

Table 2: Total Number of Safe Accommodation Units across Peninsula Region

LA area	Number of units	Gender /specialist
Cornwall	51 plus 5 in development	23 Female only, 12 for women with complex needs, wheelchair accessible
Plymouth	27	11 refuge of which 2 are wheelchair accessible, for women and families. 16 dispersed units for females, males, and families.
Devon	15	Mix of small units for females with complex needs, female only units and self -contained for either gender.
Torbay	15 plus 7 in development	1 wheelchair accessible. Available for females, males, and families.

The provision across the Peninsula is a mix of communal refuges and self-contained accommodation, with varying number of bedspaces. Some cater for specific needs, and some units are female only.

Demand for Safe Accommodation in Torbay

“The Council of Europe (COE) estimate that one family refuge space is required per 10,000 residents in the community. Based on the number of adults over the age of 16 in Torbay (n=125,118) the total number of refuge spaces required is 12.5 spaces” (Source – Torbay Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment).

The Needs Assessment projects that Torbay requires 12.5 spaces of safe accommodation, based on population and prevalence data; however, this is before taking into consideration the needs of those coming from out of the area. Until the Domestic Abuse Act was introduced, Torbay’s commissioned service operated local eligibility criteria for those assessed as being at medium or standard risk under the CAADA DASH risk assessment. The only cases from outside of Torbay that were accepted into the service were high risk cases (i.e. those discussed at the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference [MARAC] and supported by Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs).

The Domestic Abuse Act makes it illegal to operate local connection criteria for safe accommodation and requires Tier 1 Authorities to allow access to safe accommodation to people coming from outside the area, thus facilitating ease of movement for victims from one area to another.

In addition, the priority need criteria relating to victims of domestic abuse under the homelessness legislation was also changed, removing the “vulnerability test” that had to be met to be considered as priority need due to domestic violence.

Both changes will have an impact on the level of demand for safe accommodation in Torbay.

The Needs Assessment details the numbers accessing the existing safe accommodation in Torbay; as well as the numbers who have approached the Authority for assistance as homeless, and those who have been placed in temporary accommodation due to domestic violence. Accommodation that is not dedicated for victims of domestic violence and abuse and not self-contained is not considered to be safe accommodation under the Domestic Abuse Act.

Safe Accommodation/Refuge

The number of referrals to the safe accommodation in Torbay’s commissioned service has been variable year on year with a substantial but steady decline from 108 in 2018-19 to only 39 in 202-21. The significantly low numbers of referrals in 2020-21 will have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic as safe houses remained occupied. Move on into permanent accommodation from the safe houses slowed whilst landlords were unable to operate normally during lockdown restrictions and social distancing measures. Trends show referrals returning to pre-Covid 19 levels as lockdown has ended and associated economic measures eased (for example the withdrawal of the furlough scheme).

Table 3: Overview of referrals to Torbay Safe Houses

	Number of referrals		
	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Total number of all referrals to safe houses	108	84	39

Most referrals into the safe houses are self-referrals or via the commissioned service’s own outreach team and IDVAs, who will often be engaged in supporting victim survivors before they make the decision to leave. Referrals from some agencies are low, however this could be attributed to agencies advising victims to contact the service direct.

Out of Area Referrals

As described above, prior to the Domestic Abuse Act the only out of area referrals accepted into the commissioned safe accommodation were high risk MARAC referrals:

Most referrals from out of area tend to come from neighbouring authorities as shown in table 5 below. However, in 2020/21 this trend changed with an increase in referrals from further afield, possibly because of the pandemic. This trend is expected to increase with the removal of the local connection criteria.

Table 4: Referrals from outside of Torbay

	Neighbouring LAs	Other
2018-19	19 (36%)	34 (64%)
2019/20	17 (65%)	9 (37%)
2020/21	0	6 (100%)

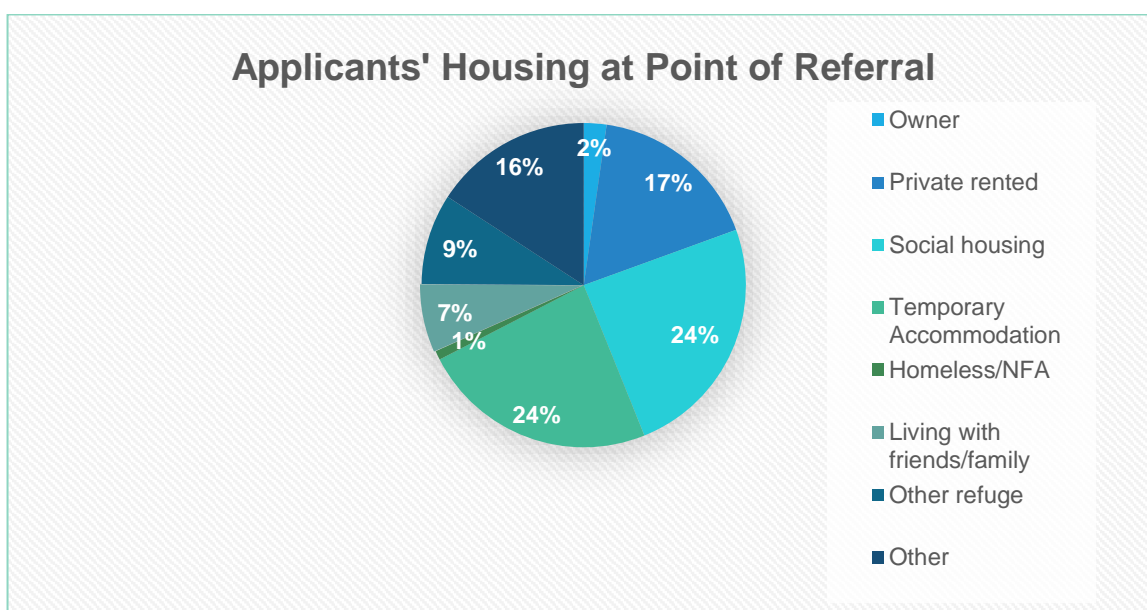
**Neighbouring Authorities are Devon and Plymouth*

Some referrals into safe accommodation were refused, most usually due to the now defunct local connection criteria. Other less common reasons relate to the ability of the service to support substance misuse and/or mental health needs, and previous history of violence or arson. This points to increasing levels of complexity experienced by victim survivors, and the need for staff supporting them to have a broad range of skills and experience; as well as the importance of well understood pathways into other services.

Torbay is recommissioning its domestic abuse support and accommodation services alongside adult substance misuse services and the homeless hostel as part of a Multiple Complex Needs Alliance. This will help to strengthen the skills of the workforce, foster real time sharing of information and good practice; as well as improving the service response to people experiencing other vulnerabilities and life challenges including domestic violence and abuse.

The chart below shows the housing status of applicants accessing safe accommodation in the period April 2018 to March 2021. Most applicants come from social housing or from temporary accommodation, and then from private rented accommodation or other domestic abuse safe accommodation. It has not been possible to analyse more socio-economic data such as employment, occupation, education, and income of victims in refuge in line with the MHCLG/DLUHC Needs Assessment template, as these are not routinely recorded.

Chart 1: Housing at Point of Referral



Victim survivors previously living in social housing have told us how difficult it was to resolve their housing problems with their landlord, for example:

“they kept kind of like, declining me on the on the grounds of the rent arrears, which to me told me that they valued my money more than my life in a sense, you know. Your money is more important to us than your life is, because, you know, the reality is that he did actually almost kill me and I ended up in hospital with a fractured skull”

- Victim in Torbay

The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (<https://www.dahalliance.org.uk/>) provides an accreditation toolkit of standards, policies and procedures that are designed to improve housing organisations' response to domestic violence and abuse. Adoption of DAHA accreditation by the main Registered

Providers in Torbay could ensure early identification of domestic abuse in a household and facilitate resolutions to avoid the need for victims to leave their homes and seek safe accommodation. DAHA also offers accreditation to local authorities with no housing stock, such as Torbay.

Unmet Demand – Domestic Abuse and Homelessness

“Numbers of applicants experiencing domestic abuse has remained stable over the past 2 years despite the overall number of [homeless] applicants reducing. This means the proportion of applicants who present due to domestic abuse has increased from 7% of the total number of applicants in 2019/20 to 9% in 2020/21”. (Source – Torbay Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment).

This figure may reflect the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is too early to say whether this trend will continue as life returns to some form of normality.

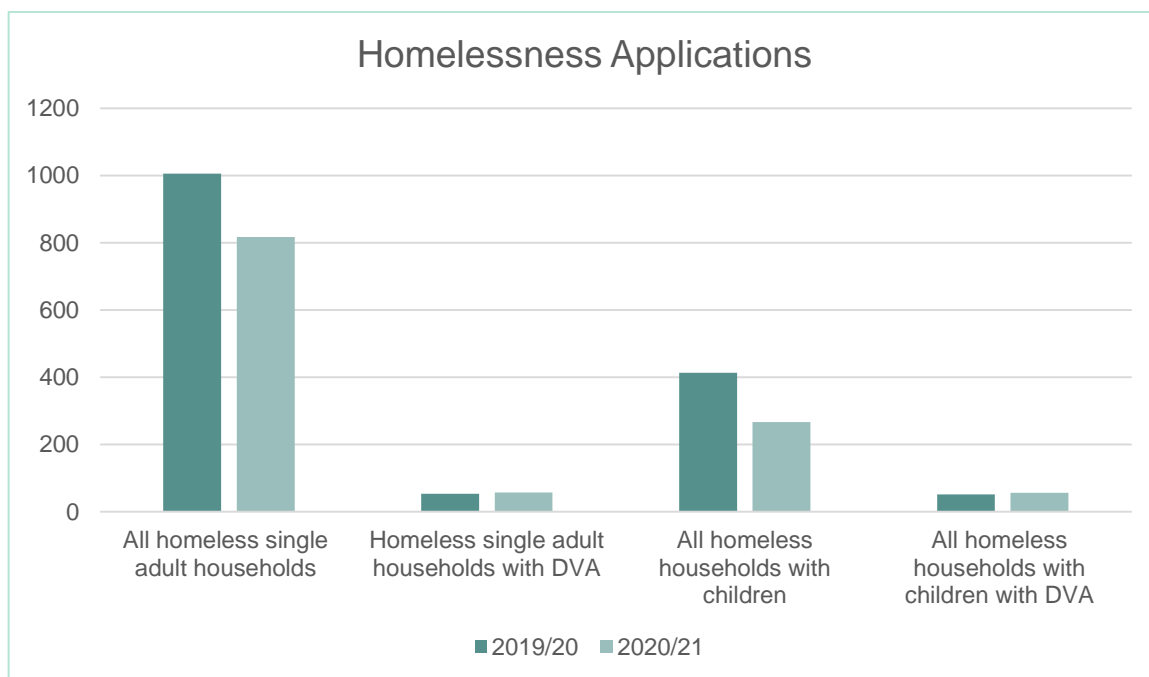
Statutory Homeless Applications and Domestic Abuse

The Needs Assessment tells us that the overall number of single adult households and households with children that present as homeless due to domestic abuse are very similar. However, households with children presenting due to domestic abuse are a larger proportion of the total number of homeless households.

In the year 2020/21 there was an increase of 8% in family households presenting as homeless with domestic abuse. Single adult households with domestic abuse represented 5.4 % of the total number of homeless single adult households in 2019/20. This increased to 7% in 2020/21.

Most applicants are female and aged between 25 and 44 years of age.

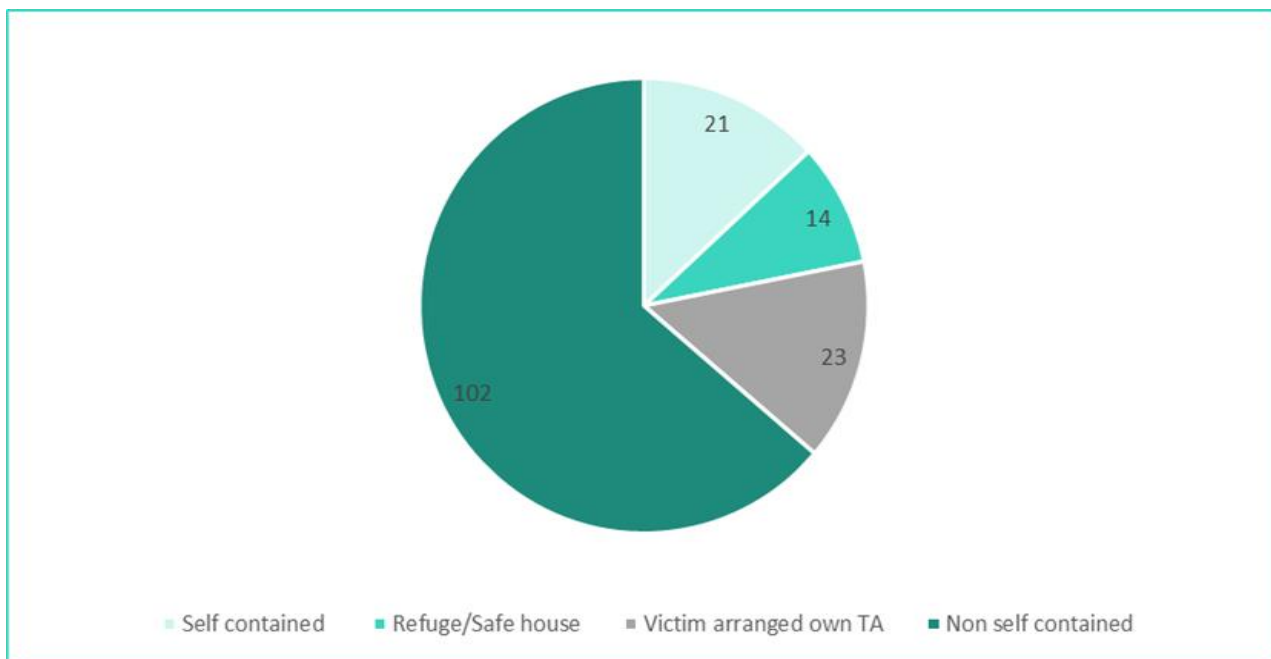
Table 5: Comparison of Single and Family Households Applying as Homeless



The most common need for temporary accommodation for victims of domestic abuse are one bedroom properties with 50% of victims presenting requiring a single bedroom, followed by 28% requiring two bedrooms.

The chart below shows the type of temporary accommodation offered. Together with the information in Table 6 Above, it demonstrates the need for a range of safe accommodation and move on housing of different sizes, including for single people.

Chart 2: Temporary accommodation outcomes for victims requiring temporary accommodation (April 2019 to Sept 2020)



Non-self-contained units are most commonly hotel accommodation, with some victims being placed in bed and breakfast accommodation. The Domestic Abuse Act (2021) is clear that this is not defined as safe accommodation.

Meeting the needs of minority communities and intersectionality

Most homeless applicants experiencing domestic abuse reported their sexuality as heterosexual/straight; or “sexual identity unknown” or “prefer not to say”. Research (*Galop 2020*) tells us that LGBT+ people experience individual and interpersonal barriers to seeking help from support services - which are seen to be designed and delivered in ways that make them less inclusive for LGBT+ people.

In 2020/21 the number of domestic abuse victims/ survivors with a disability accessing homelessness services increased by 7 applicants from 18 the previous year, to 25. Recording of applicant’s disability status is unreliable, with very limited numbers each year specifying they did not have a disability and the majority of responses recorded as “unknown”.

In 2020/21 there was an increase in the number of domestic abuse victims/survivors accessing homelessness services who are White or White British. Asian or Asian British victims/ survivors have seen a very small increase since 2019/20, however, numbers are very small. Very small decreases have also been noted amongst those who are Mixed or Dual Heritage and Black or Black British.

The Needs Assessment has identified that some agencies do not consistently record or collect data in respect of protected characteristics, and therefore there is a lack of disaggregated data broken down by age, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, and other protected characteristics. This means that we are unable to accurately determine the accessibility of services, the barriers to

access, the level of demand nor the suitability of existing services in meeting needs to inform future commissioning decisions.

How Accessing Safe Accommodation is Experienced in Torbay

Services in Torbay are designed to provide support at the point of crisis, and this is reflected in the findings of the Needs Assessment, with victims leaving at the point of escalation and often turning to family initially for somewhere to stay. Some will then approach the domestic abuse service direct, be referred by a statutory agency, or will approach the Council's Housing Options Team for assistance.

“the one thing that seems so hard at first was actually housing. It was literally one thing is you have nowhere to go. And first, obviously when I walked down that road, the first day, the hardest bit was walking and realising my children were still there. And so it was ‘where am I gonna go?’”

- Victim in Torbay

People living in social housing managed by a Registered Provider found that they were not offered preventative support when they disclosed domestic abuse, and therefore had to leave and access temporary or safe accommodation. Options such as management transfers, where a Registered Provider offers a move to an existing tenant in exceptional circumstances, were sometimes not offered unless rent arrears were paid off first; leading to a perception that money was more important than a life.

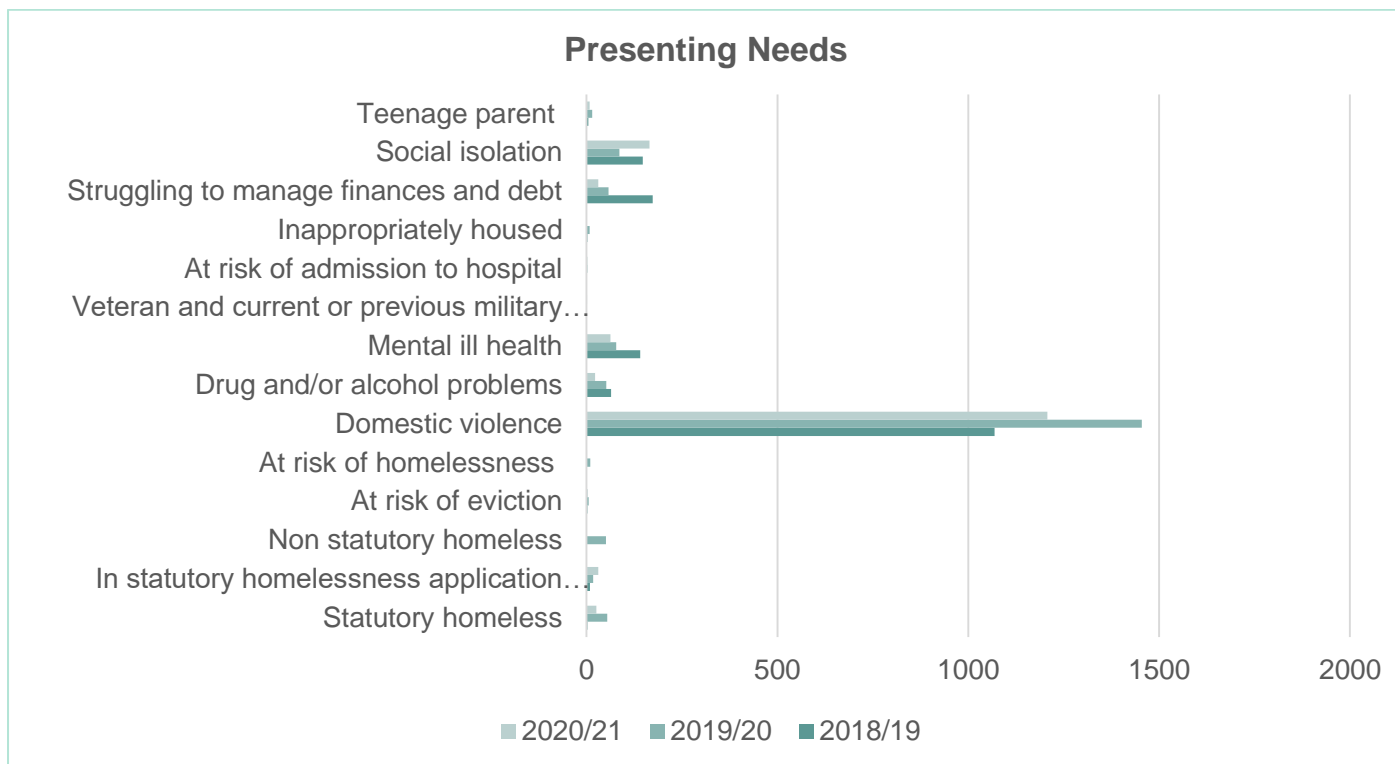
What is apparent from the experiences of victim survivors who have used Torbay services is that the whole process of seeking safe accommodation is challenging and overwhelming:

“Most of the victims and survivors we spoke to found the initial steps relating to housing daunting, and they often did not feel confident in knowing where to go both physically or to get advice” (Source – Torbay Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment).

Safe houses are located across the Bay however inevitably victims may find they have to travel across the Bay to another town to access their safe accommodation, away from existing networks, work, and children's schools. Safe houses provide wider options in terms of size of accommodation and the ability to accommodate older children, especially boys – than a refuge; as well as more easily catering for specific cultural requirements. Some victims find they can feel isolated as opposed to the peer support that can be available within a refuge. Torbay de-commissioned its refuge in 2018 partly due to widespread knowledge of its location and its unsuitability for larger households or those with older children.

Analysis shows that victims accessing the commissioned domestic abuse service (not just for safe accommodation) will often have other presenting needs. The chart below shows the other needs that some victims have. Poor mental health, reliance on substances, financial issues and social isolation are the most common. These factors correspond closely to the socio-economic profile in Torbay.

Chart 3: Presenting Needs of Victims Accessing the Domestic Abuse Service



Source – Torbay Domestic Abuse Service

A small number of referrals each year are declined by the service due to the complexity of need presented and the ability of the service at any time to meet those needs. Some victims might be placed in emergency temporary accommodation or will have been unable to access safe accommodation due to lack of vacancies or suitability of location. Victims placed in temporary accommodation are likely to experience similar challenges around location and isolation as their safe house counterparts, sometimes with additional issues around lack of facilities and quality of accommodation.

Not everyone who is placed into emergency temporary accommodation by Torbay Council moves into a safe house. Furthermore, the experience of approaching the Council for assistance as someone fleeing domestic violence or abuse is not always a positive one.

“...people who work for the council, when you speak to them and they’re kind of a bit emotionless and it kind of sometimes sounds as though they don't really have any sympathy or understanding maybe. And that’s quite upsetting and difficult, you know, and constantly feel like, you know, they want proof, they want statements, they want this and that. You have to prove that what you’re saying actually happened and it’s the truth. Like, they could be a bit more compassionate on that sense I think”.

- Victim in Torbay

What is needed/missing/would have helped?

- The biggest gap currently in terms of safe spaces are for those with a disability with only one safe unit having mobility access; and increasing capacity for single people.
- There needs to be consideration of the pathways to safe accommodation for young people aged 16 and over, many of whom will not have been in their own accommodation before and may be in low paid employment.
- The Needs Assessment suggests that increasing safe accommodation capacity should be explored, partly due to the current housing landscape and partly due to the level of referrals declined by the service. The dispersed model that is in place is generally seen to be favourable.
- Specialist support to address the needs of minority groups should be considered, for example LGBT+ and those with learning disabilities. This would include services for minoritised groups developed by people with the same needs (known as “by and for”).
- The table below shows the projected safe accommodation requirements according to the demographic profile:

Table 6: Projected Safe Accommodation capacity requirements for demographic cohorts

Community	Population	Prevalence p/a	Capacity Requirement (units)	Comment
Young people	12,499	1080	1.2	Age appropriate
Older people	53,018	1690	5.3	Mobility considerations
Disability	30,480	3520	3	Adaptations and accessibility
Men	60,789	2040	6	Single sex
LGBT+	8780	810	0.8	“By and for” need
Ethnicity	3260	110	0.3	“By and for” need
Multiple Complex Needs (MCN)	unknown	unknown	unknown	Specialist or “By and for” provision dependent on needs

- A programme of workforce development is required to enable better support for victims with more complex needs.
- Wider accessibility of safe accommodation is an issue, for example the visibility of and number of older people and disabled people accessing the domestic abuse service are extremely low compared with the demographic profile and projected prevalence of domestic violence and abuse in Torbay. This requires specific focus in the wider DVA strategy in terms of accessibility and addressing cultural and societal stigma around domestic violence and abuse.
- Different pathways into safe accommodation are considered which better relate to the circumstances of the victim, for example those who are planning to leave and those who need immediate accommodation and support.
- Pathways and targeted information about the service are well publicised, easily accessible, and available to practitioners and the public; with more information for victim survivors about what to expect.
- Improve data collection from homelessness and safe accommodation applicants, particularly around ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation to ensure true levels of need are evidenced.
- Consider Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance accreditation to ensure Registered Providers have policies and procedures in place that support early identification of domestic violence and abuse, and ways to address it without the victim having to leave the property and accessing safe accommodation.

Getting Support for Victim Survivors and their Children within Safe Accommodation

What there is

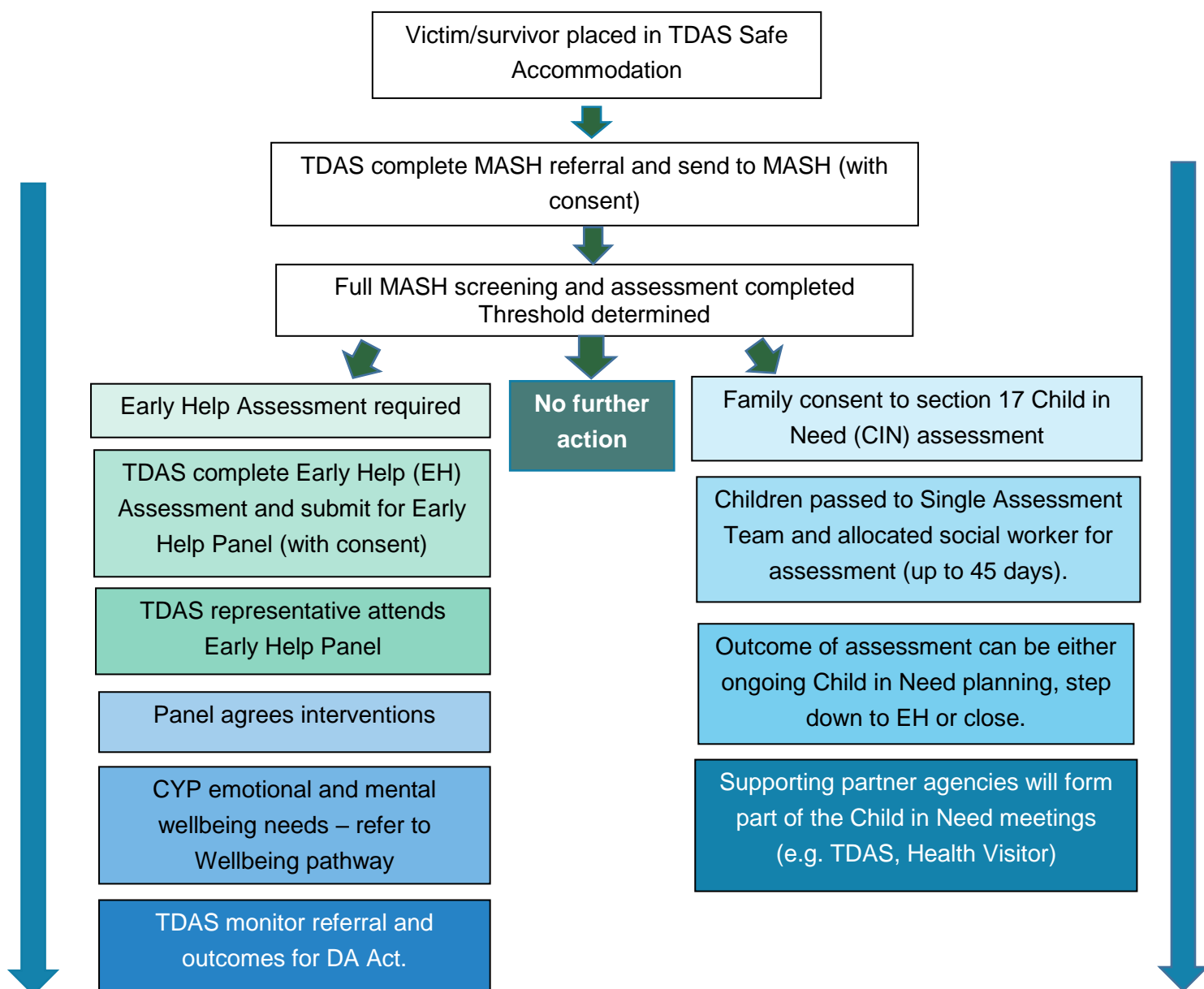
- **Torbay Domestic Abuse Service** provides Accommodation Project Workers who provide support to those occupying the safe houses, in addition to **Independent Domestic Violence Advocates** (IDVAs) who provide support to those at the highest levels of risk.
- **Children’s Workers** deliver play and art therapy (young children) and the **Helping Hands** programme (Key Stage 2 and higher) to the children of those living in the safe houses. Teenagers receive a version of the Recovery Toolkit that has been adapted for the cohort.
- **2 additional FTE emergency safe accommodation project workers** and a part time Children’s Worker have been recruited in 2021 using New Burdens monies. These roles will support victims and families occupying additional new dedicated short stay/crisis safe houses as an alternative to Housing Options emergency temporary accommodation.
- **The Standing Tall CVS DASV Partnership** – a partnership of voluntary and third sector organisations and charities - provides wrap around support such as legal advice, counselling, food parcels and other essential items, a listening ear service, and emotional and wellbeing support groups. They refer into TDAS and vice versa.
- **Children’s Services** – provide individual support to children and young people based on assessed need. A referral to the Children’s Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) is made when a child or young person is placed in safe accommodation. This ensures a robust assessment of the child/young person’s needs and how they will be met. The diagram on the next page illustrates the pathway to support for children and young people in safe accommodation.

The table below illustrates some of the engagement between TDAS and the children’s safeguarding process in Torbay:

Table 7: Overview of TDAS engagement with the safeguarding process

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Number of child protection incidents reported by TDAS in the year	44	24	13
Number of child protection meetings contributed to by staff (attending or providing sufficient information)	164	86	48
Number of children that the above meetings related to (the meetings that staff contributed to)	383	200	108
Number of clients with children who were placed in a safe house	140	73	37

The diagram below sets out the process for assessing the support needs of children and young people in domestic abuse safe accommodation. *(Safe Accommodation comprises the safe houses provided by the commissioned domestic abuse service (TDAS): and any self-contained, dedicated domestic abuse temporary accommodation units that are provided by TDAS. Housing Options temporary or B&B accommodation does not meet the statutory requirements of safe accommodation).*



Other support that is available in Torbay includes:

- **0-19 Service** - an integrated service supporting children, young people, and their families/carers across Torbay. It brings together health visiting and school nursing with children’s centres and Checkpoint - a service for young people - so that families and young people can access services from pregnancy to adulthood.
- **KOOTH** - a free, anonymous, and safe online mental wellbeing community for young people aged 11-25 years throughout Devon.
- Education Services provide pastoral support in schools. The Police use **Operation Encompass** to notify schools before 9am on a school day when a child or young person has been involved or exposed to a domestic abuse incident the previous evening.
- **Imagine This** partnership of community based voluntary organisations collaborating with and supporting children and young people and their families.
- **NHS Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT)** services providing counselling and cognitive behavioural therapies (CBT) for people with anxiety disorders and depression. Access to mental health services is anecdotally difficult for people in safe

accommodation, with many victim survivors reporting that they are told they cannot be supported until they are living in stable accommodation

- **Community Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)** for young people that often has a significant waiting list.

How Support in Safe Accommodation is Experienced in Torbay

“then we were in the safe house, you know, we were treated really, really well, you know. Because we went there over Christmas and the children's birthdays and, you know, Halloween and all these kind of things. They treated us to parties and, you know, donations from the public at Christmas and things like that. So that was really, really nice”

- Victim in Torbay

Many of the experiences from victim survivors in Torbay refer to experiences in refuge placements that they were in before coming to Torbay, or where they were referred before being housed in Torbay. However, they reveal common experiences of isolation and the need for more emotional support, and several referred to the short term nature of the safe houses and being asked to leave before they felt they were ready.

“There were gaps all around, you know, I just feel I was still on my own but I didn't feel quite so on my own, you know. There were other women I could talk. There were staff I could talk to”

- Victim in Torbay

“The help was there but it was intermittent and it was short-lived. I think they said to me at one point ‘you've been here for long as you can be here”

- Victim in Torbay

Others however commented on the impact on their mental health of waiting a long time before being able to move on:

“I think that the sort of being stuck in that safe house forever or I mean, at one point in time, my only choices that I thought I had were staying in the safe house forever or go back to the property where he knew I was. And that drove me to feeling suicidal

- Victim in Torbay

Waiting lists for Freedom and Confidence programmes for victim survivors were significantly impacted by Covid-19 due to the face to face nature of delivery and social distancing restrictions.

One to one support continued by way of telephone or virtual platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft teams, although some people chose to wait for face to face support.

The impact of domestic abuse and homelessness on children’s emotional wellbeing and the disruption to their education are well documented.

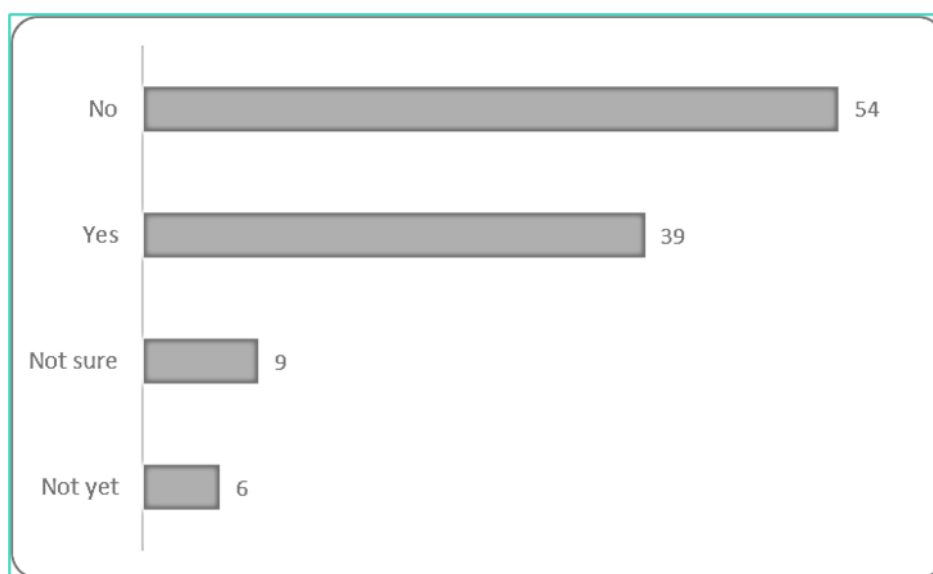
“..a survey by Shelter on homeless children in temporary accommodation found they missed an average of 55 school days (quarter of the school year) due to the disruption of moving in between temporary accommodation” (Source – Torbay Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment).

The interviews with victims and survivors in Torbay demonstrated a clear need that children required support in their own right. Examples included:

- A child had to remain with the perpetrator as the control was too entrenched and she may have disclosed the safe house location
- A child who had been directly harmed herself by the perpetrator through sexual abuse
- A victim who discussed having to make phone calls to flee in front of her children and potentially upsetting them

Moving home is a significant change for adults, and the affect only compounded for children. Several victims discussed that their child had been referred to non-specialist domestic abuse organisations such as CAMHS or Children’s Services; but overall, most victims stated their children would have needed support and did not get it. This finding mirrors the finding from the Council’s domestic abuse “Are You Okay” survey which asked victims whether their children had received any help or support with the effects of the domestic abuse:

Chart 4: “Are You Okay” survey results of number of victims who stated children had accessed support



Some victim survivors find they must move several times once they have left the abusive relationship, perhaps into temporary accommodation and then specialist domestic abuse safe accommodation or refuge, before moving once again into longer term accommodation. Where the victim survivor is pursuing property rights and residency of their children, or seeking right to remain in the UK, they will require ongoing support through legal proceedings, and it may be a significant time before they are finally settled into a permanent home. The Whole Housing Approach outlines support that can be provided for such cases. The Needs Assessment recommends that future commissioning and pathway planning should seek to minimise the number of times victims and their family must move and ensure move on from refuge is secure and stable accommodation.

This is especially important where it is anticipated that longer stays in safe accommodation may be needed. See Case Study “Edna” under the Three Journeys to Safety section below.

What is needed/missing/would have helped?

- Current programmes of support in safe accommodation do not consistently cover all age ranges and referral processes vary, with a significant number of referrals coming from education settings.
- More emotional wellbeing support is needed for victim survivors and their children in the safe houses. To some extent this is available for adults via the Standing Tall CVS Partnership – but this has only been in place since the Covid -19 pandemic and is reliant on non-recurrent grant funding. The commissioned service also provides a free counselling service to its safe house residents as added value to the contract however this is often oversubscribed.

“think I could have had more, obviously counselling. But I think it would’ve helped me if they talked to me a bit more, but they didn’t talk to me a lot, but they just seemed to understand”

- Victim in Torbay

- The impact of trauma and the uncertainty of navigating an unfamiliar system, combined with worrying about the impact on children as well as what the future holds cannot be underestimated. Many victim survivors talked of the value in speaking to other survivors, and this has been made more difficult during the pandemic as peer support groups have not been able to meet so easily, and recovery programmes could not be delivered due to social distancing restrictions. Peer support and group work should be an essential element of any safe accommodation support. Commissioners should encourage service providers to collaborate closely with the third sector to identify community groups and activities to facilitate peer support and networking for those who do not meet the thresholds for mental health services.
- Support needs tailored to the circumstances of the victim on their journey– with a focus on practical support in the early stages, and emotional and therapeutic support longer term.
- Ensure that all support is trauma informed and sensitive to the context and experiences of the individual.
- Operation Encompass (where notifications to schools are made when children have had to leave their home and go in to safe accommodation) should link to the existing pathway for support for children in safe accommodation.
- Review and improve data collection across agencies in relation to children accessing safe accommodation. This should include identification, agencies signposted to, risk assessment levels, identified needs, outcomes, and demographics to ensure the true needs of children are captured.
- Data on children within safe accommodation should feed in to partnership sub groups across the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence partnership as well as Children’s Safeguarding Board.
- Commissioning of safe accommodation services should include the allocation of a dedicated children’s worker for each child to support and advocate on their behalf. They should continue

to work with the child through to resettlement and ensure appropriate referrals to other agencies are in place for more formalised therapeutic or statutory support.

Moving On to a New Home

“I also had a social worker, the social worker was from Torbay Council. She stayed with us and she was helpful. You know, she kind of [...] it was a battle I think it was a battle for her, as well as it was a battle for us because we actually thought that we were gonna be stuck in the safehouse forever. So yeah, I mean everybody did as much as they could”.

- Victim in Torbay

What there is

Nationally the picture for those seeking long term or settled accommodation is challenging, with increasing shortages of social housing, continued residualisation of social housing through “Right to Buy”, the impact of welfare benefit policies and affordability of rents in the private rented sector.

Torbay has a sizeable private rented accommodation sector, as well as a shortage of social housing provision to meet the needs of those seeking accommodation via the local housing register. This leads to increasing numbers of social housing applicants seeking to resolve their housing situation via the private rented market.

Torbay’s Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (2020-25) describes the challenges of increasing rent levels putting private sector accommodation beyond the reach of local people, and the additional pressures on temporary accommodation as a result.

- Rents tend to be higher than the average local income allows and have been rising steadily in the last 10 years, some beyond Universal Credit/Housing Benefit levels
- Those on welfare benefits or in lower paid work may struggle to afford the costs, or be able to fund the deposits and rent in advance that landlords require
- Landlords are more likely to favour prospective tenants who are financially secure
- The impact of Covid-19 has seen an increase in people from cities and more urban areas seeking accommodation in the private sector in coastal locations including Torbay. This is creating increased demand and forcing up rent levels, making the private sector unaffordable to many, including victims and survivors of domestic violence and abuse.
- Landlords are utilising the demand for “staycation” holiday accommodation to offer properties on Airbnb, further reducing the availability of rental properties in the market
- Quality of accommodation can be poor.

The combined effect of these factors means that victim survivors who have left their homes due to domestic violence and abuse face an increasingly uncertain wait in safe accommodation or temporary accommodation:

“With a lack of suitable, affordable options for people to move onto in Torbay, the [Homelessness and Rough Sleeping] strategy highlights that not only are more people going into temporary accommodation, but they are also finding themselves there longer.” (Source – *Torbay Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment*)

Interventions such as those described in “The Whole Housing Approach” may help to mitigate some of these challenges, through earlier identification and support with housing issues before the need for safe accommodation arises. See the section “The Whole Housing Approach” below.

How Moving on from Safe Accommodation is Experienced in Torbay

The common theme from the feedback from victim survivors who told us their stories is the difficulty in getting onto the Housing Register, inconsistencies in banding levels for the choice based lettings system Devon Home Choice; and the length of time it took to be housed.

“I only got accepted onto the home choice, register after 10 months of fighting. So I was only accepted onto the register one month before I actually left. And they put me on a band B eventually. But before that they were putting me on a band E, which is no housing need”.

- Victim in Torbay

People are encouraged to seek their own private rented accommodation rather than waiting for social housing however as outlined in the section above, affordability is a significant challenge.

Once people have found a permanent place to live, they are expected to move out of their existing accommodation very quickly; and for victim survivors unaccustomed to making such arrangements this can be another traumatising experience. To some extent the need for speed is due to external factors such as the regulatory pressures on registered housing providers to relet empty properties quickly; and for those in receipt of welfare benefits, the rules restricting the payment of Housing Benefit on two properties. However, the pressure experienced by victim survivors could be significantly reduced if they had access to dedicated resettlement support to help with the moving process and the multiple practical tasks entailed in settling into a new home. Additionally, a move on grant from funding such as the Flexible Funding model described in the Whole Housing Approach could support with the purchase of essential items.

“when I went into the refuge, I was grateful to get away from my own house and then when I left the refuge I needed emergency accommodation then, that was, took a while to get and nobody helped me with that. And I had to do like, on my own. So I had the savings to do that. There was a huge hole in passing from the refuge into safety. I really felt that I was put right back into the danger zone, whilst I was still fighting trying to keep my home and trying to get everybody to save my daughter”

- Victim in Torbay

“The example above highlights victims’ experiences of lack of clarity and not feeling there was a coordinated plan in place in terms of their journey. The experience in this instance made the victim feel she had no sense of control which mirrored her experiences of domestic abuse with the perpetrator. Additionally, the impact on the children was significant.” (Source: *Torbay Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment*)

Victim survivors who are owner occupiers describe prolonged legal processes, and more experiences of abuse as perpetrators use the system to further exercise coercion and control, for example via child contact proceedings, financial and property arrangements.

What is needed/missing/would have helped?

“Maybe just a bit of after care for [...] maybe people have settled from other areas and they've left safe houses, and they've come to live in this area, maybe TDAS could like have a support network for people, you know, who have just left safe houses”

- Victim in Torbay

As with earlier parts of the safe accommodation journey, more information about what to expect would provide some reassurance to victim survivors waiting to move on. This would include:

- Clearly publicised pathways
- Better communications and information especially around move on

The experience of accessing the Housing Register could be improved by:

- Increasing safe house provision so that victims can access a safe house in emergency circumstances whilst they are supported to find longer term settled housing
- Ensuring staff assessing homelessness presentations have a good understanding of the dynamics and impacts of domestic violence and abuse, including coercive control. This could be through using dedicated staff who have undergone enhanced training in domestic violence and abuse.

“An important factor in ensuring that an authority develops a strong and appropriate response to domestic abuse is understanding what domestic abuse is, the context in which it takes place in and what the impacts are on victims; as well as how the impacts may be different on different groups of people. Specialist training for staff and managers will help them to provide a more sensitive response and to identify, with applicants, housing options which are safe and appropriate to their needs”. (Source - *Homelessness Code of Guidance July 2021*)

- Ensuring that the updated Homelessness Code of Guidance in respect of assessing domestic violence presentations is followed, including limiting requests to “prove” the violence or abuse.

“Housing authorities should not have a blanket approach toward domestic abuse which requires corroborative or police evidence to be provided”. (Source - *Homelessness Code of Guidance July 2021*)

- People working with those fleeing domestic abuse understand that victim survivors are at most risk when they leave the abuser and that perceived difficulties accessing safe accommodation might make it more likely that they will return to an environment where they are then at increased risk of harm.
- Consider co-locating a domestic abuse specialist within Housing Options. Ensure that every victim placed within temporary accommodation is allocated a domestic abuse worker who can support them from the point of presentation to start finding longer term housing.
- All staff working with victims of domestic violence and abuse receive training in trauma informed approaches

“It is vital that all housing related organisations have a basic understanding of domestic abuse and the impact on victims, so they are able to ask questions in a compassionate and trauma informed manner.” (Source: *Torbay Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment*)

- Improve transparency and consistency in respect of banding decisions
- Availability of peer support networks that meet victim survivor needs
- Develop interventions to enable victim survivors to remain in their own home, including removal of the person exercising the violence/abuse, and other interventions to prevent the need to access safe accommodation (see The Whole Housing Approach).
- Pilot an increase to the length of stay criteria in safe accommodation to 20 weeks in line with Peninsula partners and evaluate whether this a) positively impacts the number of times a victim must move and b) whether it negatively impacts the capacity of the service.
- Ensure Housing options collect data on victims presenting as homeless, placed in temporary or emergency accommodation and the pathway through the banding system to a settled home. This should include length of time at each stage of the pathway, and demographic information to understand how journeys differ for particular groups (e.g. single people, large families, younger people, people with a disability).
- Provision of resettlement support for those leaving safe accommodation to ensure a positive transition into their long term home.
- Commissioned safe accommodation services should work with the Standing Tall voluntary sector partnership and others to ensure community based support is introduced and offered as part of victim and children’s resettlement.

Three Journeys to Safety

The next pages show three case studies following the safe accommodation journeys of three victim survivors in Torbay who have consented to sharing their experiences. Their names have been changed to protect their identities.

Case study: Laurel

A journey to safe accommodation

"I think a lot of times I would have left sooner had I had some sort of certainty."



"My mum lived just around the corner so that was kind of intimidating being that close"

Laurel lived with her partner and children in a private rented flat. They received housing benefit and universal credit. After years of abuse she decided to leave.

When Laurel fled, she initially went to her mother's house nearby. She didn't feel safe there as he knew where she was and was so close. She also worried about the safety of her mother.

"The place was filthy, I had to share a double bed which me and my daughter pulled the mattress, the mattress cover off. And it was filthy underneath, it was stained to hell. The furniture smelled bad. There were burns in the carpet where people have been smoking inside and just putting their fags out in the carpet."



"[they said] you have 48 hours to pack everything up. They'll ring you with the address'. I was horrified, horrified about what to tell the kids. We've got to go somewhere, we don't know where we're going"

She was moved into a holiday let as a form of temporary accommodation. It was in a new town which meant she lost her local support networks, and when she arrived she found the property in disrepair.

Laurel called the police who gave her a number for emergency housing. She was moved into a shared space but after a few weeks, required to move again which made her feel uncertain about the future.

"You feel like you're being shoved from pillar to post and you've got no choice"

"The amount of times I burst into tears, because they'd all say 'oh you don't have a guarantor' or 'yeah but you've got DHP'"



Laurel spent most of her time searching for properties to move into something more secure. She found that she was not high enough priority to bid for properties, and it was a challenge to find private landlords that would accept benefits, or required a guarantor which she did not have.

Laurel had no success in finding a property on her own. She had to ask a previous step father to be a guarantor for her which impacted her mental health and wellbeing. However he did agree and she moved into a private rented property where she currently remains.

"The only reason I have this house now is because I literally got down on my knees in front of my second step dad and begged him to be my guarantor - I just threw dignity and modesty out the window and I got down on my knees"

Case study: Clara

A journey across Local Authority boundaries

"When my support worker asked for the appeals procedure, we were told that there was no appeal, that that one decision was final and we weren't allowed to reapply"



"[he was] so close that he could even see my front door from his living room window. You know, he could see kind of like who was coming and going".

Clara had left her abusive partner and lived alone with her two children, including a teenager. The perpetrator continued to abuse her after the separation and moved into a house across the road.

Clara spoke to her housing association about the situation and her need to move. She was in rent arrears at the time so although they tried to arrange a managed move it was declined and there were no other options.

"[I] asked if I could just have any help in moving. I didn't have any savings. I didn't have, you know, really anything. I was working but I was kind of just making ends meet type thing. And then they just refused to help me every time"



"He would say to me, you know, if you don't lend me your car, I'm gonna set fire to it. My tires were getting slashed constantly. My windscreen was smashed. So then, yeah, during the first lockdown, he had asked if he could come and move in, back into my house and I kind of agreed. But it was like out of fear".

When lockdown came into effect, she became increasingly fearful as he would no longer be at the pub or work. The additional time increased the harassment and physical violence. He stated he wanted to move back in and she was too fearful to refuse. At this point a physical incident occurred in which she and her son were injured. The perpetrator was arrested.

Clara continued to experience abuse and so escalated her need to move by writing to the Local Authority and her MP outlining her experience. They were not able to support her in moving.

"I think one thing I think if I could wave a magic wand would be that women wouldn't have to spend so long in the safe house".



"He had already been arrested for violence. He had already been, you know, arrested for vandalising my car and things like that. If I was given the help then to not be living across the road from him, I don't think the next incidents would have happened".

Clara and her children were supported by TDAS to move to a refuge in another Local Authority area. Her and her two children shared one bedroom and shared kitchen and toilet facilities with five other families.

In total Clara spent 11 months in the refuge. During that time, she cleared her rent arrears and got legal support from the national charity 'Shelter'. Her housing association offered her a new property where she moved to and remains in now.

"It was a battle for us because we actually thought that we were gonna be stuck in the safehouse forever"

Case study: Edna A journey full circle

"He worked for the council and his friends were in the police. So, it was quite hard to deal with it and he went into huge denial. And that was just the whole experience, not being believed by authorities".



Edna had been experiencing abuse from her partner of 20 years. He was also abusive to their daughter. Because of his job he knew a lot of police and people within the council, so Edna was scared to seek help. She anonymously called citizens advice who gave her the TDAS number.



TDAS moved Edna into a refuge. Her daughter couldn't come with her as they feared she was too controlled by the perpetrator and would disclose the address. Edna found the refuge challenging as many of the women would drink. Eventually she was told she had to leave the refuge.

"The help was there but it was intermittent, and it was short-lived. I think they said to me at one point 'you've been here for long as you can be here'".

"They put me in this tiny little room in this horrible place. I walked out, I left. I physically couldn't stay there, I just couldn't cope the claustrophobia, and I have back problems".



Edna called the council's homelessness department. They placed her in emergency accommodation. However, it was too small for her physical needs due to back pain.



She didn't know where she would stay on the day she left. Upon speaking to a friend, they offered her a place to stay at their caravan. However, after a short time her friend rented the caravan out, so Edna had to move.

"I fled the refuge with nowhere to go. I was going to go and live in my car and a friend phoned me as I was leaving Torquay. And asked what I was doing, and I told her, and she said, 'come and stay at my caravan'".

"I had to do like, on my own. So, I had the savings to do that. There was a huge hole in passing from the refuge into safety. I really felt that I was put right back into the danger zone".



She decided to move to rented accommodation in the private sector. Her new property suited her needs much better, although she had to spend a considerable amount of her savings to stay there.



During this time, her residency application for her child continued through the courts. The judge told her that she would need to move to a two-bedroom property. So, she moved again.



Finally, Edna won her court battle, and she was able to move back to her owned home. She sold it and used the money to buy a new home where she currently still resides.

"I owned my house, but my ex was telling everybody that he owned it. So, at one point, he made me live in the shed. So, the whole thing was just so confusing. I might have owned it on paper, but he controlled it".

Recurring Themes from What Victim Survivors Told Us

Access to safe accommodation is difficult and in some cases is deterring victims from leaving a violent relationship

Access to longer term housing is challenging and the process can be re-traumatising

There are shortages of suitable, affordable accommodation and waiting times can be lengthy

Some people experience several moves before finding a long term home

Children and young people living with victims not only experience the trauma of witnessing/hearing domestic abuse in the home, but the uncertainty and further trauma of staying in insecure accommodation, disruption in education and supportive relationships when the victim leaves.

There is a lack of preventative housing options and processes to identify housing solutions at an earlier stage

For some victim survivors the focus on the system and processes appears detrimental or secondary to providing a human response to trauma

Poor communications about what will happen next once victim survivors have moved into safe accommodation or temporary accommodation creates uncertainty at a time when victims need to feel secure and that they have made the right choice

Lack of or inconsistent data collection means that levels of demand from minority communities or those requiring by and for services cannot be identified and their needs met.

The narrative of lived experience shows us that the current pathways and challenges to accessing safe and longer term accommodation can lead to victims returning to unsafe situations. We know that victims are at high risk when they choose to leave. The system, and the processes within it, are inadvertently contributing to creating increased risk; and undermining efforts to prevent domestic violence and abuse and to support and encourage victims to leave abusive relationships.

The Domestic Abuse Act places new responsibilities on the Authority in terms of understanding of the specific support needs of children and young people in safe accommodation in relation to domestic violence and abuse. The stories that victim survivors have shared with us reveal the impacts on the emotional wellbeing of their children as they navigate the uncertainties of accessing accommodation and moving from one location to another. However, there is limited local data available to evidence the specific impacts of domestic abuse and staying in safe accommodation on children and young people.

As the implementation of the new duty progresses, trends in the needs of those children and young people will be better understood and any potential commissioning recommendations, particularly around trauma, will be escalated to the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board for decision.

How do we want People to Experience Safe Accommodation in Torbay?

“Victim Survivors and their children are safe, and supported to recover and thrive”

Our ambitions

Victim Survivors:

- can access preventative help and advice about their housing situation and the safe accommodation pathway, including before they decide to leave
- know where to seek help
- receive advice and support from a workforce that understands, is empathetic, skilled and trauma informed
- are provided with safe accommodation and support that meets their needs and those of their children
- know what to expect
- are kept informed throughout their journey
- can receive support after they have left safe accommodation if they choose to.

Key Areas for Action

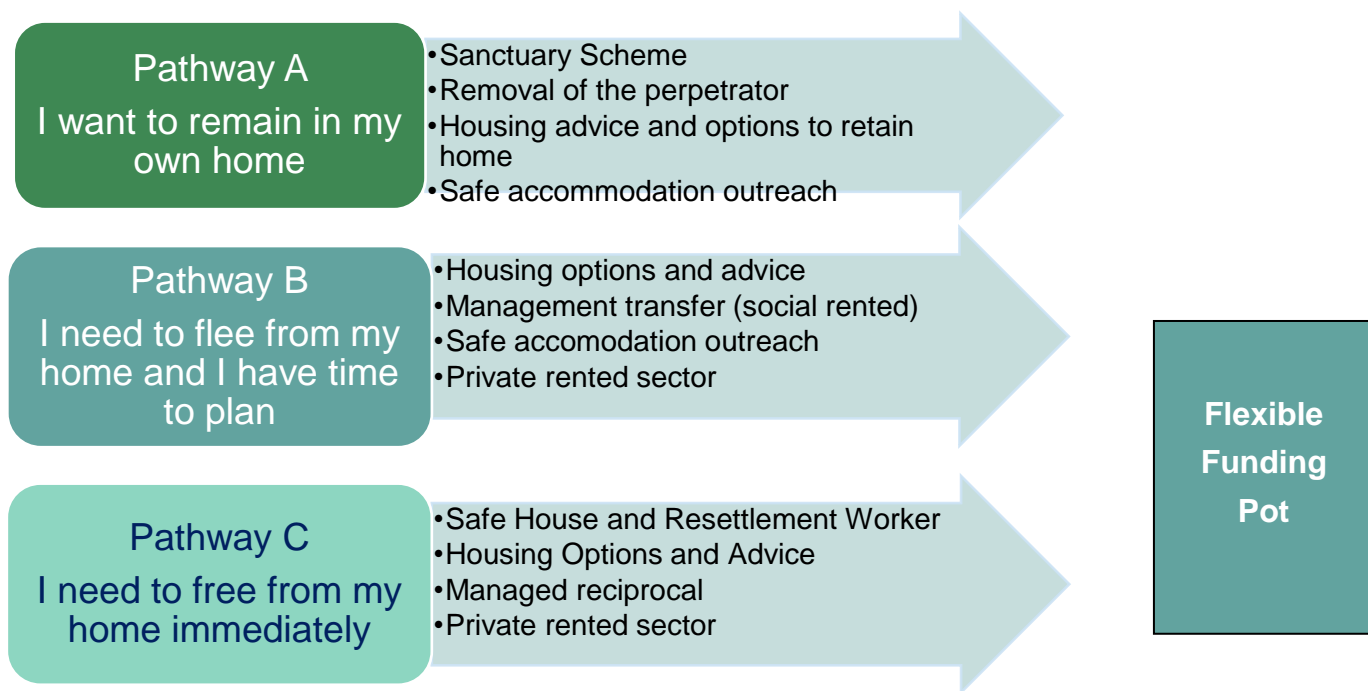
Increase safe accommodation capacity
Increase safe accommodation accessibility particularly for those under-represented/less visible according to Torbay’s demographic profile
Develop new pathways for safe accommodation support according to the urgency of the victim’s situation, with support options tailored to their circumstances
Prevention through adopting aspects of The Whole Housing Approach to prevent victims needing to access safe accommodation, including those experiencing economic abuse
Support in Safe Accommodation and to move on including elements of The Whole Housing Approach
Skills and Workforce Development
Work with the Peninsula DASV Commissioners Group to devise a regional commissioning plan to address specialist needs and priorities identified from all the Peninsula safe accommodation needs assessments, including developing cross border referral pathways.

Three Safe Accommodation Pathways

Key to providing more tailored safe accommodation support will be the development of three safe accommodation pathways, each with a range of support options designed around the housing circumstances of the individual. The image below sets out an example of how the pathways might look and the type of support that could be provided under each. The Flexible Funding Pot is one of the elements of the Whole Housing Approach (detailed in the section The Whole Housing Approach below) and is used to remove the obstacles to accessing safe accommodation and move on.

Pathways will be co-produced with victims and survivors and key stakeholders.

Image 3 – Example Safe Accommodation Pathways



The Whole Housing Approach

The Whole Housing Approach is a toolkit which:

- Aims to ensure access to a range of tailored housing options and initiatives for people experiencing domestic abuse, giving choice to either relocate or remain in their existing accommodation
- Provides a full suite of housing options enabling agencies and organisations to work together more collaboratively, considering the long-term security of the victim/survivor, as well as managing crisis situations.

The toolkit is organised into three themes:

1. Tenure and Accommodation Type – tenure related interventions and approaches
2. Specialist Domestic Abuse Service Provision – ranging from specialist (non IDVA) advocacy options to a dedicated Housing First model for women experiencing homelessness and domestic abuse.
3. A suite of housing options and initiatives specific to domestic abuse that are responsive to the needs identified for securing safe accommodation.

Whole Housing Approach Elements

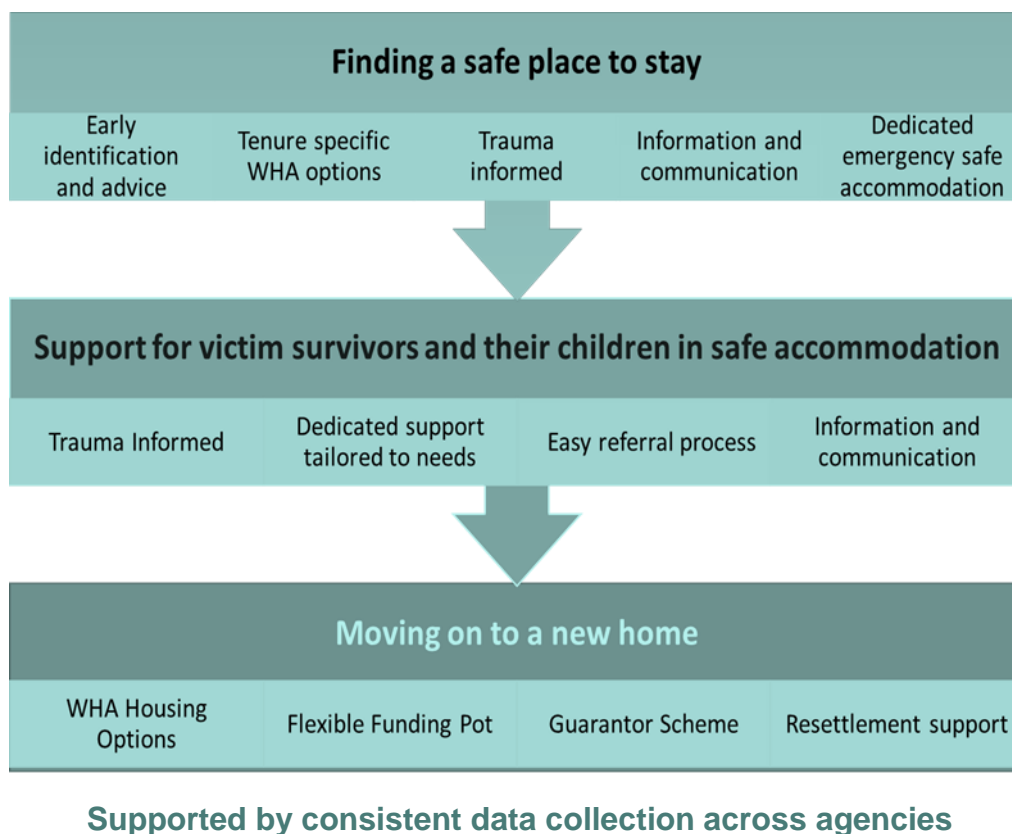
The diagram below shows the twelve elements of the Whole Housing Approach toolkit. Different elements can be selected and used according to local need. The green circles relate to different forms of accommodation including the three main tenure types (social, private rented and private ownership); and temporary accommodation settings (refuge services, supported accommodation). The white circles are the housing options and initiatives designed to support victim/survivors of domestic abuse and provide the choice of remaining in property or relocating to new accommodation.



Graphic provided with kind permission of Standing Together

More details on the Whole Housing Approach can be found at: <https://www.standingtogether.org.uk/housing-whole-housing> and it will be featured in Torbay's new DVA Strategy.

Key Elements for Safe Accommodation Pathways and Support



Funding and Budget

At the time of writing, commissioned domestic abuse support and accommodation is funded as detailed below:

Table 8: Funding of commissioned domestic abuse service in Torbay

Service element	Amount	Funding source
Torbay Domestic Abuse Service (existing contract) – IDVAs, community outreach, children’s support worker, recovery programmes and 15 safe houses	£280,000 pa	Torbay Council base budget
7 crisis safe accommodation units (to be used as alternative to B&B) set up costs	£30 000	Capacity Building monies
Additional safe accommodation project staff, managerial and back office staff to manage increased capacity, and repairs costs.	£140,000 pa	New Burdens monies (2021/22)
Ongoing costs for void rent and service charges	-	New Burdens monies (2021/22)
Balance Flexible Funding Pot and development of Whole Housing Approach	£98, 000	New Burdens monies (2021/22)

Review and Evaluation

The Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group (DASVEG) has adopted the role and functions of the local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board for the purpose of fulfilling the Authority's duties under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. Review of activities will be undertaken as follows:

Performance and delivery of safe accommodation support	Quarterly contract monitoring	DASV Strategic Commissioner Reported to DASVEG as part of performance dashboard
Commissioning and action plan	Bi monthly	DASVEG
Progress and update reports to Senior Leadership Team and Cabinet	Ad hoc as required	DASV Strategic Commissioner
Monitoring and progress report to DLUHC	Annually	DASVEG
Safe Accommodation Strategy	2024	DASVEG

Consultation

Consultation on the draft Safe Accommodation Strategy was undertaken as follows:

Senior Leadership Team	28/9/21
Informal Cabinet	5/10/21
DASVEG draft sign off (as statutory DA Partnership Board)	12/10/21
Cabinet draft sign off	27/10/21
Publication of draft for consultation	1/11/21 to 21/11/21
Final Cabinet sign off	14/12/21
Final DASVEG sign off	21/12/21
Submission to DLUHC	5/1/22

Recommendations

The recommendations from the Needs Assessment are set out in the action plan below, following the different steps of the safe accommodation journey.

Commissioning and Action Plan

“Ensuring victim survivors and their children are safe and supported to recover and thrive”


Recommendations		Action Owner(s)	Year 1 (21/22)	Year 2 (22/23)	Year 3 (23/24)
Finding a Safe Space to Stay					
FSS1	Torbay Council and Registered Providers adopt Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance accreditation to ensure policies and procedures are in place to support early identification of DVA and interventions to avoid the victim needing to access safe accommodation and address wider accessibility issues.	SB/TH	Part of wider DVA Strategy		
FSS2	Explore interventions such as management transfers or the removal of the person displaying harmful behaviour to prevent the need for victims and their children to access safe accommodation (see The Whole Housing Approach).	TH	Part of wider DVA Strategy		
FSS3	General increase in safe space capacity to minimum 19 units to account for current housing landscape and withdrawal of local connection criteria.	SB/TDAS	7 new DA Temp Accommodation units in pipeline		Part of MCN Service design
FSS4	Increase safe space capacity for people with a disability and single people including younger adults, including units with mobility access (in partnership with Adult Social Care).	SB & ASC	Work with Peninsula to review no of mobility units		
FSS5	Review pathways and affordability of crisis safe accommodation for young people aged 16 and over who may be in low paid employment	DASVOG	To be tasked		
FSS6	Review length of stay in safe houses (balancing sufficient time to engage in support, not silting up, and use of	SB		Review once new units and workers are embedded	Consider as part of MCN service design

	outreach and resettlement staff to support once moved on).				
FSS7	Develop framework of specialist DVA safe accommodation to call off as required for additional capacity	Housing/Proc/SB	As part of wider TA procurement, include mobility access		
FSS8	Specialist support to address the needs of minority groups should be considered, for example LGBT+, People with Learning Difficulties.	DASVEG	TDAS hosting regional LGBT+IDVA post	Learning from LGBT+ IDVA and other specialised roles across region	
FSS9	Develop Safe Accommodation support pathways that are simple and clearly publicised, consider single access point.	DASVOG	Interim pathway To be tasked	Align with regional pathways	Consider alongside MCN service design
FSS10	Consider Health IDVA in Torbay Hospital to address disclosure and accessibility to safe accommodation support by older people	DASVEG/CCG DASV Lead	CCG DASV Lead funding and business case	Recruitment	
FSS11	Address wider accessibility issues with specific focus on addressing cultural and societal stigma around domestic violence and abuse	DASVEG	Action for wider DVA strategy		
FSS12	Targeted information about the service that is available to practitioners	TDAS	To be tasked		
FSS13	Welcome pack of information for victim survivors about what to expect – developed by and for	TDAS & Housing	Safe Accommodation workers to be tasked		
FSS14	Robust demographic data collection from homelessness and safe accommodation applicants, particularly around ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation to ensure true levels of need are evidenced. Identify common datasets that can be used across the system alongside data required by DLUHC.	DASVEG	To be tasked. MARAC system will contribute in part. LGBT IDVA and Sexual Health IDVA roles to contribute	To be tasked	To be included in MCN reporting as agreed by Alliance

FSS15	Consider co-location of DVA staff within Housing Options team to support assessment of DVA homelessness presentations and develop preventative safe accommodation options for DVA victims as described in the Whole Housing Approach.	TH/SB	2x FTE Safe accommodation workers to be co-located with Housing Options	Review if further co-location required	
FSS16	Review consistency in respect of DHC banding decisions	TH	To be tasked		
FSS17	MCN Alliance to take account to voices of lived experience in designing services that meet intersectional needs	MCN commissioners	Included in MCN service specification	Part of MCN service design	Part of MCN service delivery and oversight
FSS18	Ensure all staff working with victims of domestic violence and abuse understand the requirements of the DAA 21 and follow the updated Homelessness Code of Guidance in respect of assessing domestic violence presentations.	DASVEG	To be tasked	Refresher programme to be put in place	
FSS19	All staff working with victims of domestic violence and abuse receive training in trauma informed approaches and skills that better support victims with more complex needs	DASVEG	TIA training programme in progress across agencies	Part of MCN requirements	Part of MCN requirements
Support in Safe Accommodation					
SSA1	Ensure age appropriate programmes of support in safe accommodation all age ranges	SB	To be reviewed		
SSA2	Ensure other agencies and practitioners understand the referral processes for support for CYP in safe accommodation	DASVOG	To be tasked		
SSA3	Ensure group work and peer support is included in domestic abuse service offer	SB/TDAS	ongoing		
SSA4	Develop community based emotional wellbeing support for victim survivors in the safe houses.	TDAS/Standing Tall	Ongoing		

SSA5	Commissioners encourage service providers to collaborate closely with the third sector to identify community groups and activities to facilitate peer support and networking for those who do not meet the thresholds for clinical support	SB/DASVOG	Ongoing Standing Tall Community Strategy in development		
SSA6	Availability of peer support networks that meet survivor needs	TDAS and Standing Tall	ongoing		
Moving On to a Permanent Home					
FPH1	Better communications and information around move on	TDAS/Housing	Safe Accommodation workers to be tasked once in post		
FPH2	Provision of resettlement support for those moving on from safe accommodation and ongoing for a period after moving on to prevent re-victimisation.	TDAS	2 x FTE posts being recruited Sept/Oct 21		
FPH3	Establish move on grants from a flexible funding pot (Whole Housing Approach) to facilitate timely move on and avoid “silting up” of safe accommodation, enabling victim survivors experiencing financial barriers to access safe accommodation.	SB/TDAS/Housing	To be tasked - Protocol to be agreed Funding identified in New Burdens monies		
FPH4	Consider a guarantor system for victims of domestic abuse to facilitate access to the private sector.	TH	Part of broader systemic approach in addressing homelessness through working with the private rented sector.		
FPH5	Establish affordable move on pathways for young people who are in low paid work and not be eligible for benefits	Housing and Children’s Services	To be tasked Strategic link to edge of care and homelessness strategies		

FPH6	Peninsula wide or local operational partnership that includes expert advisers in domestic abuse, housing, financial and legal matters to help victims navigate complex economic barriers to access safe accommodation.	SB &/or Peninsula Commissioners Group	Link to wider DVA Strategy. Potential role for CVS.		
Regional Priorities					
RP1	Develop cross border referral pathways and processes	Peninsula Commissioners Group	Peninsula Co-ordinator appointed	Regional plan to be agreed	
RP2	Raise awareness of DAA21 requirements	Peninsula Commissioners Group	Peninsula Co-ordinator appointed		
RP3	Peninsula referral coordination function for refuge/safe accommodation across the region for agencies that operate across the footprint	Peninsula Commissioners Group	Peninsula Co-ordinator pathway mapping	Develop prototype/pilot	
RP4	Development of regional datasets	Peninsula Commissioners Group	Peninsula Co-ordinator appointed	Regional plan to be agreed	
RP5	Peninsula managed reciprocals agreement and protocols	Peninsula Commissioners Group	Peninsula Co-ordinator appointed	Regional plan to be agreed	
RP6	Peninsula safe accommodation joint commissioning plan for specialist requirements and by and for services	Peninsula Commissioners Group	To commence once all Peninsula SA NAs complete		
RP7	Addressing quality issues and disparities between different types of safe accommodation across the Peninsula	Peninsula Commissioners Group		Regional plan to be agreed. Include DAC Office regional lead.	

Domestic Abuse Partnership Board Actions			
PB1	Ensure Safe Accommodation priorities are reflected and to the wider DVA Strategy and other connected strategies and strategic plans.	DASVEG	
PB2	Hold partner agencies to account in considering joint commissioning options and opportunities to pool budgets to achieve strategic outcomes	DASVEG	
PB3	Ensure compliance with recommended quality standards in current and current and future commissioned services	DASVEG	
PB4	Ensure compliance with requirements of Part 4 DAA21	DASVEG	

END

