

**Meeting:** Overview and Scrutiny Board

**Date:** 12 March 2025

**Wards affected:** All

**Report Title:** Update on Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment Refresh

**When does the decision need to be implemented?** N/A

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## 1. Purpose of Report

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1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Board with an update on the refresh of the domestic abuse Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment.

## 2. Background

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

2.2. This assessment should be refreshed annually; however we waited until we could gather a full two years of data before undertaking the refresh, which was completed in September 2024. A full version of the Needs Assessment is available on request, a summary version is attached at Appendix 1.

2.3. The process to undertake the refreshed needs assessment included:

- a) Identification of the key data in the original assessment and updating the data where it was available
- b) A survey of people staying in safe accommodation to gather their views on their experiences
- c) Checking progress against the Safe Accommodation Strategy Action Plan
- d) Identifying new or continuing gaps.

- 2.4. It should be noted that reliable Devon and Cornwall Police data was not available during this process due to the implementation of the new IT system. This also meant that crime data specific to Devon and Cornwall that would have been used was also not available for the period under review (2022 to 2024) such as the Crime Survey for England and Wales. However national data has been used where possible to show general trends for comparison with Torbay.

## 3. Findings

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### 3.1 Ongoing priorities from previous Safe Accommodation Plan:

- a) Pathways into safe accommodation and support - work on this is held within the Growth in Action Alliance comprising the domestic abuse service, homeless hostel and adult treatment services. (Growth in Action is the new name of the Multiple Complex Needs Alliance).
- b) Improving access for people with mobility needs, older people, minoritised communities and those with intersectional needs. There has however been some progress in this regard for people with learning difficulties, older people and those from the LGBT+ community.
- c) Achieving move on in the current local housing market and the impact on length of time people stay in safe accommodation
- d) Cross border referral pathways and processes.

### 3.2 New gaps identified:

- a) The need for more single person safe accommodation units due to demand
- b) Addressing the specific lack of representation in safe accommodation of groups with a high prevalence in the local population particularly older people, men, and young adults under 25, people with learning difficulties or other neuro-diverse conditions.
- c) Limited wheelchair accessible accommodation
- d) Understanding of economic abuse
- e) The use of time limited grant funding from sources other than the Safe Accommodation New Burdens Grant to support some identified needs.
- f) An appropriate and sustainable emotional therapeutic offer for children and adults in safe accommodation.

## 4. Recommendations from the Needs Assessment

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- 4.1 The recommendations resulting from the refreshed Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment are as follows:
- a) Increase safe accommodation provision for single people and initiatives to improve move on;
  - b) Raise awareness of domestic abuse among and improve access to safe accommodation by older people;
  - c) Provide the right offers of emotional support for people living in safe accommodation, particularly their children. Exploring broader co-commissioning opportunities with the South West Peninsula commissioners in this regard may well provide a way forward once needs are better understood;
  - d) Promote the safe accommodation service as a non-gendered service offer in targeted locations;
  - e) Replace a 2 bedroom safe house with a 2 bedroom wheelchair adapted safe house;
  - f) Explore peoples' experiences of accessing Alliance services to improve pathways;
  - g) Continue collaboration and co-commissioning with SW Peninsula colleagues and ensuring visibility in the proposed Collaboration Forums as required by the emerging Victims and Prisoners Bill (Duty to Collaborate); and
  - h) There should be more effort to proactively identify and address domestic abuse at an earlier stage, providing support before the need to access safe accommodation. The Co-ordinated Community Response<sup>1</sup>, Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance and Whole Housing Approach<sup>2</sup> are models that Torbay should consider;
- 4.2 The recommendations have been incorporated into an action plan which is attached at Appendix 2 and the Board is recommended to consider the action plan and make recommendations to the Cabinet.

## 5. Supporting Documents

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- 5.1 Summary Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment- Appendix 1
- 5.2 Updated Safe Accommodation Action Plan - Appendix 2

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

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

## 6. Financial Implications

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- 6.1 The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government provides funding for the Authority to meet the needs identified in the Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment. From April 2022 to April 2024 this came via a New Burdens grant however the funding for April 2025 to March 2026 and thereafter will be included in the annual Local Government Finance Settlement.
- 6.2 The funding for 2025/26 totals nearly £400K. The funding is set out as a separate line in the settlement and the Chief Executive is expected to sign a Memorandum of Understanding confirming that the funding will be used for the purpose of meeting the needs identified in the needs assessment.

## 7. Equality Impact Assessment

Protected characteristics under the Equality Act and groups with increased vulnerability	Data and insight	Equality considerations (including any adverse impacts)	Mitigation activities	Responsible department and timeframe for implementing mitigation activities
Age	<p>18 per cent of Torbay residents are under 18 years old.</p> <p>55 per cent of Torbay residents are aged between 18 to 64 years old.</p> <p>27 per cent of Torbay residents are aged 65 and older.</p>	<p>The needs assessment has highlighted that older people are under-represented in domestic abuse services.</p>	<p>Older People’s Charter and Age Friendly pledge</p>	<p>See action plan</p>
Carers	<p>At the time of the 2021 census there were 14,900 unpaid carers in Torbay. 5,185 of these provided 50 hours or more of care.</p>	<p>There is no differential impact</p>		
Disability	<p>In the 2021 Census, 23.8% of Torbay residents answered that their day-to-day activities were limited a little or a lot by</p>	<p>The needs assessment has highlighted that more family sized adapted safe accommodation is needed</p>	<p>Re-provide one adapted family safe house</p>	<p>See action plan</p>

	a physical or mental health condition or illness.			
Gender reassignment	In the 2021 Census, 0.4% of Torbay's community answered that their gender identity was not the same as their sex registered at birth. This proportion is similar to the Southwest and is lower than England.	There is no differential impact.	LGBT+ support in place	
Marriage and civil partnership	Of those Torbay residents aged 16 and over at the time of 2021 Census, 44.2% of people were married or in a registered civil partnership.	There is no differential impact		
Pregnancy and maternity	Over the period 2010 to 2021, the rate of live births (as a proportion of females aged 15 to 44) has been slightly but significantly higher in Torbay (average of 63.7 per 1,000) than England (60.2) and the South West (58.4). There has been a notable fall in the numbers of live births since the middle of the last decade across all geographical areas.	There is no differential impact		

Race	In the 2021 Census, 96.1% of Torbay residents described their ethnicity as white. This is a higher proportion than the South West and England. Black, Asian and minority ethnic individuals are more likely to live in areas of Torbay classified as being amongst the 20% most deprived areas in England.	The needs assessment has highlighted that people from minoritised communities are under-represented in safe accommodation	Joint working with Peninsula commissioners and VCS by and for groups	See action plan
Religion and belief	64.8% of Torbay residents who stated that they have a religion in the 2021 census.	There is no differential impact		
Sex	51.3% of Torbay's population are female and 48.7% are male	The needs assessment has highlighted that males are under-represented in domestic abuse safe accommodation	Targeted promotion and one bed provision	See action plan
Sexual orientation	In the 2021 Census, 3.4% of those in Torbay aged over 16 identified their sexuality as either Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or, used another term to describe their sexual orientation.	There is no differential impact	LGBT+ support in place	
Armed Forces Community	In 2021, 3.8% of residents in England reported that they had previously served in the UK armed forces. In Torbay,	There is no differential impact		

	5.9 per cent of the population have previously served in the UK armed forces.			
<b>Additional considerations</b>				
Socio-economic impacts (Including impacts on child poverty and deprivation)		The needs assessment identifies the need for more resource to move on into long term accommodation		
Public Health impacts (Including impacts on the general health of the population of Torbay)		The needs assessment identifies the need for therapeutic support for victims and their children	Explore options	See action plan
Human Rights impacts		There is no differential impact		
Child Friendly	Torbay Council is a Child Friendly Council, and all staff and Councillors are Corporate Parents and have a responsibility towards cared for and care experienced children and young people.	The needs assessment identifies the need for therapeutic support for children and young people in safe accommodation as victims of domestic abuse.	Explore options	See action plan



