



Social housing – a place of safety for domestic abuse survivors

Domestic abuse is, by its very nature, a housing issue and a key driver of homelessness for women. 2.1 million people were subjected to domestic abuse in England and Wales last year with two-thirds (65%) of victims women.¹ Domestic abuse is the third most common trigger of homelessness.²

Access to an alternative safe and affordable home is a key factor in a survivors' decision-making about whether they stay with, or leave, an abuser. If survivors who need to escape their home cannot find another suitable, affordable home they are at risk of homelessness.

The chronic lack of genuinely affordable social rent homes and a punitive benefit cap forces survivors of domestic abuse to make an impossible choice: homelessness or being trapped with their abuser.

An increasing cause of homelessness

Through our services, we see the devastating impact the housing emergency has on survivors trying to leave an abuser. Having access to an alternative safe, affordable and suitable home can be the difference between leaving and surviving an abusive relationship, having to endure further abuse or even face being killed.

Housing is often used to exert control over the victim. Some perpetrators know the survivor has no options to access a suitable alternative home, especially when they have dependent children and need a family home. They can use the threat of homelessness to deter the survivor from leaving. They can also put the survivor at risk of eviction due to antisocial behaviour, such as noise and damage.

This is a growing crisis. Domestic abuse is the third most common trigger of homelessness and in 2022/23 it was the most common reason for households owed a homelessness relief duty to lose their last settled home. This has increased by 5.4% since 2021/22.³

A punitive benefit cap

The social security system should be there to protect survivors and children who need to escape their homes to stay safe. However, the household benefit cap can make people fleeing domestic abuse homeless by leaving with them without enough housing benefit to afford a suitable home. For many survivors, leaving an abuser necessitates moving from being in a coupled family to a lone parent family. By leaving an abuser who is in work, many go from being in a 'working household' (not subject to the cap), to a capped household because they're not earning the equivalent of 16 hours a week at the National Living Wage (currently £793 a month). Capped families have only £1,835 per month (£2,110 in London) to cover the rent on a family home, utility bills, food and other essentials.

The financial implications of this can act as a huge deterrent to the survivor leaving. Lone parent families with young children are particularly at risk from the benefit cap⁴ because in order to avoid



the consequences of the cap, they must cover all childcare responsibilities and work enough hours single-handedly. The household benefit cap affects 77,000 households, 73% of whom are lone parents with children.⁵ If they also have to move to find a cheaper home, they risk losing any informal childcare support, such as from neighbours, family or friends which can support them to work, and also risk disrupting any older children's education by moving schools. This can prove isolating for survivors, and extra distressing for children, as they lose their practical and emotional support networks.

A disappearing lifeline

Last year (2022/23), more than 15,000 households fleeing domestic abuse across England were denied support at safe accommodation sites due to lack of capacity or an inability to meet the household's needs.⁶

Social rent homes provide a lifeline to domestic abuse survivors fleeing their abusers and play a crucial role in providing survivors with long-term stability and security.

But this lifeline is disappearing as we sell and demolish more social rent homes than we build resulting in a social housing deficit. In the last year alone we lost 11,700 social rent homes⁷ and the waiting list grew to almost 1.3 million households.⁸ Our failure to build social rent homes at the scale required over the past few decades means that too often this lifeline is not available.

Social rent is the only housing tenure that is affordable by design because rents are set with a formula tied to local wages, unlike every other so-called 'affordable' home. So, social rent homes are usually far more affordable than private renting, as well as providing a permanent home.

Escaping domestic abuse is often just the first step in a survivor's journey toward independence and self-sufficiency. The secure tenancy and affordability of social housing allows survivors to rebuild their lives by establishing roots in their communities and access necessary support services, free from the threat of further abuse. Without a stable home, survivors can be at serious risk of homelessness and struggle to maintain employment, access education and healthcare, or engage with support networks, hindering their ability to fully recover from the trauma they have experienced.

Settled homes and economic security

As domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG) typically occur within the home, if the government is serious about protecting and supporting the victims of these crimes it must recognise the role of housing policy, including access to housing benefit.

The government must provide survivors and their children escaping abuse with:

- **Settled, genuinely affordable homes:** by ramping up to 90,000 social rent homes a year over the next parliament to provide sufficient alternative housing options to survivors needing to flee abuse and build a safe and settled future.
- **Economic stability:** abolishing the cruel household benefit cap, which puts people needing to flee domestic abuse at risk of homelessness and destitution, especially lone mothers with children in need of a family home.



¹ 2.1 million people aged 16 and over in England and Wales experienced domestic abuse between April 2022 and March 2023. This includes partner or family non-physical abuse, threats, force, sexual assault or stalking. [ONS Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview](#); November 2023, Table 2

² Between July and September 2023, 12% of households found to be homeless or threatened with homelessness lost their last settled home due to domestic abuse. This is the third most common homelessness trigger after family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate (28%) and the end of an assured shorthold tenancy (25%). DLUHC, Homelessness statistics, Statutory homelessness live tables, Table A2P and A2R

³ [DLUHC National statistics Statutory homelessness in England: financial year 2022-23](#); 6 November 2023

⁴ [Those with a child under five are 19 times more likely to be affected and those with a child under two are 21 times more likely to be affected](#) Shelter, (2018), Submission to Work and Pensions Select Committee Inquiry into Benefit Cap, Shelter

⁵ DWP, [Benefit cap: number of households capped to November 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

⁶ DLUHC [Support in domestic abuse safe accommodation: financial year 2022 to 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#), Table DA8

⁷ Shelter analysis of government data to calculate the net loss of social rent homes. Sources: DLUHC, [Live tables on affordable housing supply](#), Table 1006C, DLUHC, [Live tables on social housing sales](#), Table 684 and 678, DLUHC, [Local authority housing statistics](#), Section K and RSH, [Private registered provider social housing stock and rents in England 2022 to 2023](#), Private registered providers data release and Private registered providers additional tables, Table 3.13

⁸ At the end of March 2023 there were 1,287,180 households on the waiting list for social housing. This has increased by 6% since 2022. DLUHC, [Live tables on rents, lettings and tenancies](#), Table 600

