

# SAFE ACCOMMODATION FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE IN SUFFOLK

STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN – 2021-24

**SAFE AND SUPPORTED IN SUFFOLK**  
**ACCESSIBLE · CHOICE · CONSISTENCY**

**West Suffolk**  
Council



**IPSWICH**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL



**EASTSUFFOLK**  
COUNCIL



**BABERGH**  
SOUTH SUFFOLK  
**Mid Suffolk**  
DISTRICT  
Working Together



## 1. Introduction

We are committed to ensuring that no victim is turned away from specialist domestic abuse support. Reinforced by the aims and ambitions in our countywide Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2022-25, this document outlines the steps being taken across Suffolk to embed a 'Whole Housing' approach to domestic abuse.

Suffolk County Council, working closely with our partners across the 'Suffolk System' has a well-established track record of delivering good quality:

- i. Communal refuge accommodation
- ii. Satellite provision for those with complex needs
- iii. Target Hardening scheme

However, we recognise that there is more we can and must do to ensure that no one is turned away, our accommodation and support is accessible for all, and that our offer is consistent across the county.

Going forward, we look forward to the opportunities of enhancing and capturing more data to inform our approach and progressing our ambition to work with neighbouring counties to strengthen reciprocal arrangements across the region.

## 2. Our Approach

This strategy has been informed by a Domestic Abuse Accommodation Needs Assessment in addition to research and evidence undertaken by the University of Suffolk:

- i. [Refuge Scoping Review](#)
- ii. [Refuge Evaluation Report](#)

The analysis of available data and research has helped shape our proposed system response to the new duties contained in the in the [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) and specifically, local authorities' requirement to assess the delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in safe accommodation - see [Statutory Guidance](#).

## 3. Our Aims

- i. Ensure that no one<sup>1</sup> is turned away from safe accommodation (and associated support)
- ii. Create a 'Whole Housing' approach<sup>2</sup> across the system with choice as a key principle
- iii. Establish a consistent response across accommodation and support services
- iv. Embed 'intelligent' commissioning informed by data and evidence, victim voice and pooled/aligned funding where possible

---

<sup>1</sup> Includes all protected characteristics

<sup>2</sup> Individual support to a diverse range of survivors and their children to ensure their accommodation is safe (including private housing, social housing, refuges, and any other accommodation type)



- v. Ensure that survivor voices inform, challenge and ultimately drives service improvement

## 4. Activity

### i. Target Hardening

We recognise that providing safe accommodation for those fleeing domestic abuse is essential, but that it is also important wherever possible and safe to do, that victims have the choice to remain safe in their own homes.

Since April 2018, Suffolk has been working with the national charity Safe Partnership to 'Target Harden' homes. A pooled, annual pot of funding from all Suffolk councils, the Police and Crime Commissioner as well as local Housing Associations means that the homes of high-risk victims have the necessary physical measures fitted within 24 hours of the referral being made. Such measures secure the property to deter, delay or prevent an offender from entering and include locks, surveillance, fencing, arson prevention measures, and safe rooms.

This not only means that victims and their children are physically safer, it also creates an enhanced 'feeling' of safety for the victim and creates confidence that services are listening and acting in their best interests.

***"I supported a lady who was a high-risk domestic abuse victim. She had been separated from her partner for over a year, but he would continue to enter her property whenever he chose. He would force his way into the property and would be verbally and emotionally abusive towards her and her 4 children (who were not his) - this would often escalate into physical violence.***

***My client felt helpless and didn't feel that anything would prevent him doing as he pleased.***

***A target hardening referral was made and additional locks were added to the front door, a fireproof letter box was added, and general security measures were explored. Since these measures have been put in place my client is feeling more confident and knows that she is secure in her property."***

***Suffolk Independent Domestic Abuse Adviser (IDVA)***

### ii. Domestic Abuse Accommodation

#### Refuge

Suffolk County Council commission three separate refuge accommodation providers offering communal living in locations across the county (31 spaces in total). The providers are commissioned to deliver accessible, secure accommodation for female



victims of domestic abuse and their children, and to support those victims to remain safe, rebuild stability, resilience, and wellbeing.

In recent years we have developed a shared performance framework across all the providers, introduced annual quality assurance procedures and convene quarterly meetings to share best practice, resolve common issues and undertake joint training. We have recently extended the commissioning cycle so that it can be informed by this needs assessment and strategy.

***‘N’ moved into Refuge accommodation after fleeing a violent and controlling relationship. Her perpetrator lived in another house and forced ‘N’ to pay most of her benefits to him in rent, not leaving her enough for her and her 3 children. The children were all on a Child in Need plan.***

***‘N’ is Tamil and non-English speaking, so the Refuge arranged for information to be printed out in Tamil for her and arranged interpreters for support meetings. This enabled ‘N’ to communicate about the abuse she had suffered, and about what was important to her. The Refuge also contacted local Tamil groups to support her, and arranged benefits for her, which enabled her to have her own money for the first time.***

***‘N’ received support with her children, ensuring she was linked in with a health visitor, nursery and school places were found, and she also received parenting classes.***

***‘N’s confidence has grown, with the life skills support she’s received since being in the Refuge, as well as through the English speaking lessons she has begun. ‘N’s children are no longer on the Child in Need plan, and are all settled well into Suffolk.***

### **Satellite Accommodation**

Keen to explore alternative accommodation models and increase overall capacity, in 2018 Suffolk also commissioned 12 Satellite Accommodation units for those with mental health and or substance dependency needs - where communal refuge is not suitable. In recent months we have been able to double that provision, open support to male victims, add ‘wrap around support’ and now have 24 satellite units available in Suffolk overseen by District and Borough Housing departments/in partnership with the voluntary and community sector.



***Sally is in her twenties, from Essex, and has one child. Prior to entering the Satellite property, Sally lived with her perpetrator who was physically and emotionally abusive, and there were concerns for the welfare of her child, who had been removed from her care prior to entering the Satellite Project.***

***Sally was referred into Satellite, as opposed to Refuge due to her mental health. Throughout Sally's childhood she was abused, and she had entered into multiple abusive relationships. Sally was put into contact with local mental health services, registered with a GP and had weekly sessions with her support worker.***

***As a result of the interventions, Sally's self-esteem and self-confidence have grown. Sally has built up a network of support in the local community and her mental health has improved since entering the project. Sally has had her child returned to her care, and she currently looking to move into her own property close to where she is currently living.***

## **5. Recommendations from the University of Suffolk Evaluations**

In 2020, Suffolk County Council commissioned the University of Suffolk to undertake a [scoping review](#) and an evaluation of both our existing refuge and [satellite accommodation](#) to inform our future approach to commissioning. The objectives of the research were to:

- Understand what works and what doesn't work so well
- Identify challenges and how these impact on survivors needs
- Locate gaps in service provision and understand the impacts

The scoping review (national) highlighted a number of issues that the new Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and specifically the statutory duty for Local Authorities now seeks to address - including gaps in provision for male victims, accessibility, diversity, No Recourse to Public Funds, funding shortages and a need to better understand outcomes and measures.

The evaluation of both the traditional refuge accommodation model and satellite accommodation gave a useful insight to inform this needs assessment and strategy, but overwhelmingly confirmed that the two different models are not, and should not be, in direct competition. Rather, that they complement each other and provide much needed choice in the system.



## Recommendations from the evaluation include:

Recommendations
i. Commissioning in partnership yields stronger buy-in and engagement
ii. Utilising a more integrated approach to service delivery across domestic abuse
iii. Longer term sustainable funding beyond three years to include ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and review frameworks
iv. Accommodation professionals and housing staff service levels must be equal, and would benefit from alignment from the existing/established infrastructure
v. Provide specific accommodation for the 'missing cohort of victims' e.g., disabled people, victims/survivors with no recourse to public funds, families with older dependent children
vi. Improved use of the monitoring and evaluation frameworks to include the experiences of service users and impacts
vii. Include resettlement outcomes as evidence in performance frameworks

## 6. Needs Assessment

Many of the data fields requested by Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) are currently not available in Suffolk, but we have supplemented this with other domestic abuse data sets available to us - including data contained within the academic research from the University of Suffolk. We are already progressing mechanisms to ensure data is available for the 2021/22 Needs Assessment refresh.

## Key facts:

<b>12,207 reported incidents to Suffolk Police</b> <b>April 2020 to March 2021</b>	<b>284 improvements to homes under the Target Hardening Scheme</b> <b>2012 to 2021</b>
<b>79% average occupancy of Domestic Abuse refuges (impacted recently by COVID-19)</b> <b>April 2020 to March 2021</b>	<b>Over 620 calls received to Suffolk Domestic Abuse Helpline</b> <b>May 2020 to June 2021</b>
<b>2633 referrals received by MARAC</b> <b>Year ending June 2021</b>	<b>1786 referrals received by Suffolk IDVAs</b> <b>Year ending June 2021</b>
<b>739 referrals received by the Domestic Abuse Outreach Service</b> <b>Year ending June 2021</b>	<b>3 in 5 Domestic Abuse victims that require accommodation support have mental health conditions</b> <b>April 2020 to March 2021</b>

## 7. Governance

Suffolk has an established governance and accountability structure through the [Safer Stronger Communities Board](#), with buy-in and commitment from senior leaders and officers across a number of organisations in Suffolk.

Functions of the new Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board ([part 4, Sec 58 of the Act](#)) will be undertaken by the existing:

**i. Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategic Group**

**Purpose:** Development and strategic oversight of the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy/action plan for Suffolk.

**Membership:** Senior decision makers/commissioners from Suffolk County Council (Public Health and Communities; Children and Adults Safeguarding); Suffolk Police; Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner; Ipswich and East, West, and Norfolk and Waveney Clinical Commissioning Groups; District and Borough Housing; East of England



Ambulance Service; National Probation Service; the Norfolk and Suffolk Criminal Justice Board; and two representatives from the Suffolk Violence and Abuse Partnership.

**ii. Suffolk Violence and Abuse Partnership**

**Purpose:** An information sharing network established to strengthen collaboration and encourage innovation.

**Membership:** 180+ interested individuals with a personal/organisational interest in Violence Against Women and Girls, including: victim/survivors; voluntary and community sector providers; academics; military; volunteers; By and For services; and elected members.

## **8. Our Response/action plan**

Suffolk has been preparing for the new statutory duties and have/are planning to implement steps which will make a positive contribution:

- i. Each local authority has now employed a domestic abuse link worker within Housing Options to help create a consistent approach to housing where domestic abuse is a factor
- ii. We have doubled the number of satellite accommodation units available across Suffolk from 12 to 24
- iii. A grant fund will be launched to assist accommodation providers to enhance the 'accommodation support' element of the new duties and to fill gaps identified by the needs assessment
- iv. A requirement for disabled access to refuge provision as well as improved access for male victims and access to trauma therapy will be built into future commissioning arrangements
- v. Work with partners to investigate how we can best accommodate victims with no recourse to public funds
- vi. Work to establish reciprocal protocols initially across district and borough boundaries
- vii. Establish a survivor's group to map experiences of accommodation and support services and to steer service re-design
- viii. Build on the work already undertaken to establish consistent monitoring and evaluation of safe accommodation to include data fields required by Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)





## 9. Consultation

The consultation on this strategy took place from 26<sup>th</sup> October until 13<sup>th</sup> December 2021. Thoughts, comments, and suggestions have been taken into consideration and the strategy has been updated. The Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2022-25 and associated action plan will continue to monitor and address the accommodation needs of domestic abuse survivors and their children.

For more information, please contact [community.safety@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:community.safety@suffolk.gov.uk)

