

Shropshire Safe Accommodation Strategy 2022

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Introduction

This document sets out Shropshire’s strategy for domestic abuse safe accommodation, as required by Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. It provides the context and background for the statutory requirements, outlines the process followed by Shropshire to deliver this strategy, and sets out safe accommodation commissioning intentions.

When it came into force in April 2021, Part 4 of the Act set out new duties for local authorities. In summary these are to:

- appoint a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board (in line with core membership set out in the Domestic Abuse Act and statutory guidance), which will carry out a governance and consultative role as it performs certain specified functions
- assess the need for safe accommodation-based domestic abuse support for all victims in their area
- in consultation with the Partnership Board, develop and publish a strategy for the provision of such support to cover their locality – which is based on the needs assessment, is implemented through commissioning decisions, and includes monitoring and evaluation

Local authorities have been allocated new burden funding to meet their new duties including the requirement to deliver safe accommodation-based support. The allocations announced for Shropshire Council were £578,549 in 2021/22 and £580,151 in 2022/23¹.

It is the Local Authority’s duty to ensure safe accommodation-based support is provided as defined in Part 4 of the Act:

- **Refuge accommodation** – a refuge offers single gender or single sex accommodation and domestic abuse support which is tied to that accommodation.
- **Specialist safe accommodation** – specialist safe accommodation offering single gender or single sex accommodation, alongside dedicated domestic abuse support

¹ [Local Authority Domestic Abuse Duty: 2022 to 2023 funding allocations - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/local-authority-domestic-abuse-duty-2022-to-2023-funding-allocations)

which is tailored to also support those who share particular protected characteristic(s) and / or who share one or more vulnerabilities requiring additional support.

- **Dispersed accommodation** – safe (secure and dedicated to supporting victims of domestic abuse), self-contained with a similar level of specialist domestic abuse support as provided within a refuge OR ‘semi-independent’ accommodation which is not within a refuge but with support for victims who may not require the intensive support offered through refuge, but are still at risk of abuse from their perpetrator/s.
- **Sanctuary Schemes** – properties with local authority or private registered providers of social housing installed Sanctuary Schemes which provide enhanced physical security measures to a home or the perimeter of the home. The [Whole Housing Approach Toolkit on Sanctuary Schemes](#) provides further information.
- **Second stage accommodation** – accommodation temporarily provided to victims, including their children, who are moving on from other forms of relevant accommodation and/or who no longer need the intensive level of support provided in a refuge, but would still benefit from a lower level of domestic abuse specific support for a period before they move to fully independent and settled accommodation.
- **Other forms of domestic abuse emergency accommodation** – a safe place (single gendered or single sex, secure and dedicated to supporting victims of domestic abuse) with domestic abuse support tied to the accommodation to enable victims to make informed decisions when leaving a perpetrator and seeking safe accommodation.

The support that can be funded is as follows:

- **Overall management of services within relevant safe accommodation** – including capacity building, support and supervision of staff, payroll, financial and day to day management of services and maintaining relationships with the local authority (such functions will often be undertaken by a service manager).
- **Support with the day-to-day running of the service** – for example scheduling times for counselling sessions, group activities (such functions may often be undertaken by administrative or office staff).
- **Advocacy support** – development of personal safety plans, liaison with other services (for example, GPs and social workers, welfare benefit providers).
- **Domestic abuse prevention advice** – support to assist victims to recognise the signs of abusive relationships, to help them remain safe (including online), and to prevent re-victimisation.
- **Specialist support for victims**
 - **Designed specifically for victims with relevant protected characteristics** (including ‘by and for’), such as faith services, translators and interpreters, immigration advice, interpreters for victims identifying as deaf and / or hard of hearing, and dedicated support for LGBTQ+ victims [not limited to].
 - **Designed specifically for victims with additional and / or complex needs** such as, mental health advice and support, drug and alcohol advice and support [not limited to], including sign posting accordingly.

- **Children’s support** – including play therapy, child advocacy or a specialist children worker (for example, a young people’s violence advisor, IDVA or outreach worker specialised in working with children).
- **Housing-related support** – providing housing-related advice and support, for example, securing a permanent home, rights to existing accommodation and advice on how to live safely and independently.
- **Advice service** – including financial and legal support, including accessing benefits, support into work and establishing independent financial arrangements; and,
- **Counselling and therapy** – (including group support) for both adults and children, including emotional support.

Background

The most recent Shropshire Council Domestic Abuse Strategy & Action Plan (2018-2020) was approved by the Council’s Cabinet and the Community Safety Partnership. It aimed to improve services for victims of domestic abuse within Shropshire and to respond effectively to domestic violence and abuse.

The priorities set were to:

- Prevent domestic abuse
- Ensure co-ordinated and sustainable services are delivered to victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse

Tackling domestic abuse has been a priority for the Council and all statutory and community sector partners in Shropshire for several years. The strategy lapsed as the country went into lockdown and other priorities took over, which resulted in Shropshire working to an action plan only, although partners continued to work well together.

The Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnership (SSCP) comprises the Local Authority, Integrated Care System, Fire Service, Police and the Probation Service. As a collective they hold the responsibility for Shropshire’s statutory duties around adults, children, criminal justice and health via the SSCP Strategic Board which is chaired by an independent person. In preparation for the Domestic Abuse Act coming into force, the Domestic Abuse County Forum evolved and became the SSCP Domestic Abuse Priority Group.

The SSCP Domestic Abuse Priority Group fulfils the functions of the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board (DALPB) as required by the Domestic Abuse Act. The local authority chairs the group, ensuring the action plan enables the partnership to meet statutory duties, and ensuring all services respond effectively to domestic abuse. Shropshire Council also works with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia.

Context – Shropshire Data

Shropshire is a rural county in the Northwest Midlands, bordering Wales, with a population of 325,415. 49.5% (161,240) of the population is male, and 50.5% (164,175) is female. Shropshire has a high proportion of older age groups, with older age groups increasing rapidly compared with younger age groups.

Age Group	Under 5s	5-15s	16-64s	Over 65s
Population	14,788	38,345	191,066	81,216
% of Population	4.5%	11.8%	58.7%	25.0%

95.4% of the population is White British, of the remaining 4%:

- 55.6% are White Other; this is likely to be made up of Europeans: 54% of those born outside of the UK were born in Europe. The top non-English language spoken is Polish.
- 21.9% are Asian/Asian British
- 15.4% are Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups
- 4.1% are Black/African British
- 3.0% are 'other' ethnic group

The most ethnically diverse area in Shropshire is Church Stretton (7% are other than White British) followed by Shrewsbury, Whitchurch, and Ellesmere (5%).

There were 129,674 households in Shropshire in the 2011 census. 38.6% of housing in Shropshire is detached, and 32.7% is semi-detached. 11.5% are flats.

Tenure	% in Shropshire
Owned outright	38.6%
Owned with a mortgage or loan	30.6%
Private renting	13.1%
Social renting	13.5%

The needs assessment applied CSEW prevalence data² for the year ending March 2020 to local population data (those aged 16+ years) and estimated the following prevalence:

	Women	Men
Subject to domestic abuse since age 16	38,175	18,487
Subject to domestic abuse in the last year	10,097	4,823

² Crime Survey for England & Wales (CSEW) estimate, year ending March 2020: 7.3% of women (1.6 million) and 3.6% of men (757,000) had experienced domestic abuse in the last year; 27.6% of women and 13.8% of men had experienced domestic abuse since the age of 16.

Shropshire Council Needs Assessment

Process

In May 2022, Shropshire Council commissioned Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse (STADA³) to complete a needs assessment to inform commissioning of accommodation-based support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other safe accommodation as per Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act. In addition to supporting Shropshire Council to meet the statutory duty, STADA were commissioned to deliver a review that would inform wider strategy and the development of a coordinated community response to domestic abuse.

Standing Together held meetings with practitioners and leaders from a range of services and organisations across statutory and voluntary sector encompassing the local authority, health, and the criminal justice system. Data was also gathered from statutory and community services.

21 survivors were interviewed, all recruited through specialist services. Nine case studies were analysed: four from Shropshire Council Housing Options; four from specialist services and one from West Mercia Police.

Current provision of safe accommodation

The refuge provision in Shropshire is delivered by Connexus, a Registered Social Landlord; the service is named Shropshire Domestic Abuse Service (SDAS). The current Shropshire-wide contract has been in place since 2017. The properties are owned by Connexus, and Shropshire Council currently commission the accommodation-based support to adults as well as some additional funding towards outreach services.

There are 17 units of accommodation located across Shropshire:

- Ten units in a women's only refuge ('main refuge'), including space for 15 children. All have shared facilities. There is one single occupancy room, one unit is wheelchair accessible and there is a wet room.
- Seven units in dispersed refuge accommodation, including space for eight children: one property providing two units for female survivors including space for three children; one property providing three units for female survivors including space for three children; and one property with two units for male survivors, one of these units can accommodate two children, and the units are wheelchair accessible with a wet room in the bathroom. All dispersed properties have shared living space, kitchen/dining area, and bathrooms.

The SDAS accommodation-based service received 410 referrals in 2020/21 and 2021/22; there was a 21% decrease in referrals from 2020/21 to 2021/22. The table below compares

³ www.standingtogether.org.uk

women and men referred to, and becoming resident in, refuge (18% were unknown, potentially hiding an unmet need).

	Women		Men	
	Referred	Resident	Referred	Resident
2020/21 & 2021/22	85%	92%	4%	6%

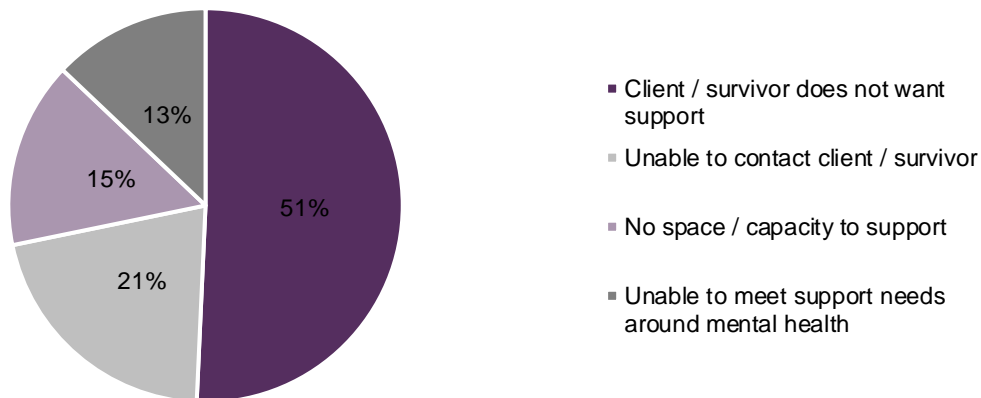
The demographic breakdown of individuals accessing refuge accommodation highlighted the following:

- Ethnicity: this was in line with population data for Shropshire.
- Gender: this was as expected when compared with national and local prevalence data; when comparing the average length of stay, men appeared to spend much longer in refuge than women.
- Age: the higher proportion of older people residing in Shropshire was not reflected in referral data, with only 15% of clients aged over 45.
- A third of individuals resident in refuge in 2021/22 were recorded as being disabled, suggesting a high level of accommodation for those with physical health needs or challenges.

Most referrals (73%), as would be expected with refuge provision, were from out of area. The decrease in referral numbers from 2020/21 to 2021/22 largely came from a reduction (by 45) in out of area referrals, while within-area referrals remained steady. Over the two years, the majority of out of area referrals (N=301) came from the West Midlands, with the highest being Telford and Wrekin (19% of out of area referrals), Birmingham (10%) and Wolverhampton (7%).

Two thirds of referrals to SDAS did not result in individuals/households being accepted into refuge provision, for both men and women. The main reason refuge was not provided was due to it being declined by the victim/survivor. NB: the total number of those with reasons for non-acceptance, N=209, did not add up to the total number not accepted, N=281, so there may be other reasons not captured here.

Reasons for refuge not being provided



SDAS are in the process of opening a new refuge service named Acorns, that aims to meet the needs of women facing multiple disadvantages, including drug and alcohol use and mental health related needs. The Acorns service, if started and fully involving substance misuse and mental health services, should address the issues of unmet need found in the needs assessment relating to this cohort of victims/survivors in need of safe accommodation: 13% were declined a space in refuge due to these types of needs.

There is a Sanctuary Scheme available in Shropshire, but this is not widely known about nor accessed. A scheme run by West Mercia Police provided support for 16 survivors in 2021/22 either directly or through facilitating provision from the Registered Social Landlord. The Shropshire Council-run scheme received one referral in the same year, the outcome is not known. It is assumed there is unmet need here, but the picture is not complete or clear.

Housing Services Responses

The Housing Options Team at Shropshire Council respond to and manage all homelessness applications including those from people fleeing domestic abuse. If temporary accommodation is required, this is passed to the Temporary Accommodation team to facilitate, following which individuals will be supported by the Housing Support Team.

If an application is made to HomePoint, and the applicant mentions being a victim/survivor of domestic abuse in their information, this will be passed automatically to the Housing Options Team, who will contact the individual to progress a homelessness application. Applicants are not informed by HomePoint that their information is being passed across and consent is not sought. HomePoint will not classify a case as domestic abuse unless there has been physical violence, and it will be named relationship breakdown. Both categories are passed to the Housing Options Team.

The data shown below was extracted from the Housing Options Team database through a search for those coded as 'domestic abuse – victim' and 'domestic abuse' as the reasons for homelessness.

The number produced (348 across the two years) was not felt to be accurate based on the experience of the team. It may be that another code is also being used, 'Relationship with partner ended (non-violent breakdown)', possibly due to a misperception that this is more appropriate where violence has not been used (despite controlling and coercive being potentially present) or a lack of exploration with the applicant about their situation.

Homelessness Applications and Codes	2020/21 & 2021/22
All homelessness applications	6,440
'Domestic abuse' or 'Domestic abuse – victim'	348 (5%)
Relationship with partner ended (non-violent breakdown)	667 (10%)

Commissioning Safe Accommodation and Support

The Council is commissioning accommodation-based support in line with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and the local needs and demand found by STADA in the Needs Assessment. This work is being led by the Local Authority People Directorate with partners across the SSCP Domestic Abuse Priority Group. The service will commence on 1 April 2023 providing:

- Support to all victims aged 16+ who access any form of safe accommodation
- Support to children and young people living in safe accommodation with their parent

The ways in which this new commissioning will start to address the identified gaps in accommodation-based support is by ensuring services are equipped to support older people and by providing direct support to all age children and young people.

The wider needs of Shropshire have been considered and as such Shropshire Council is also commissioning other victim services to ensure all victims and survivors who need support are able to find it.

As part of our commitment to commissioning victim services we will look for:

- Collaborative / partnership approach to allow smaller by and for groups access to funding
- Accessible service(s) to meet the needs of differing ages, genders and cultures
- An understanding of all forms of domestic abuse to enable the right response

The Sanctuary Scheme will be reviewed and improved through the following actions, recommended in the Needs Assessment:

- All practitioners and services involved in the current provision of Sanctuary Scheme, as well as SDAS, will form a short-term working group to map the pathways in place.
- Following this, for the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board will agree the design of a Sanctuary Scheme that meets national definitions, and for data to be gathered and collated that enables the partnership to understand the ongoing use of, and short/long term effectiveness of the Scheme.

In addition to commissioning, other recommendations were made in the Needs Assessment to improve responses and these can be found in Appendix 1.

Reviewing this Strategy and Developing a Partnership Domestic Abuse Strategy

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 requires local authorities to review the needs assessment every year, and conduct a new needs assessment every three years, and in Shropshire this will be completed through the leadership of the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board. The Board will also be accountable for the monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of this strategy and the commissioned service and reporting annually to central government.

Partners on the SSCP Domestic Abuse Priority Group are currently:

- Reviewing the most recent Domestic Abuse strategy outcomes
- Reviewing the outcomes from the SSCP Priority Group Action plan
- Reviewing the Needs Assessment recommendations

This will lead to the establishment of working groups to focus on specific areas of work, for example, Whole Housing Approach, core training needs, identifying, and engaging by and for specialist organisations, raising awareness.

Appendix 1 Needs Assessment Recommendations

Accommodation-Based Headline Recommendations

- Understand why, having been referred to refuge, such a high proportion of clients then decline the support; including understanding whether these were self or professional referrals and the impact the different referral routes had on acceptance.
- All practitioners and services involved in the current provision of Sanctuary Scheme, as well as SDAS, to form a short-term working group to map the pathways in place.
- Following this, for the Domestic Abuse Priority Group to agree the design of a Sanctuary Scheme that meets national definitions, and for data to be gathered and collated that enables the partnership to understand the ongoing use of, and short/long term effectiveness of the Scheme.
- Shropshire Council should progress with the Whole Housing Approach (WHA, see section 14), including gaining Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) Accreditation.
- Specialist, targeted, mandatory training is urgently required for all staff across Shropshire Council housing-related services, across both the People and Place Directorates (listed above) and incorporating contracts for housing/tenancy related support outside of the Council.
- Ensure those fleeing domestic abuse are accurately recorded, including a review of the categories available to remove any confusion. Enable their journeys through Housing to be recorded, including outcomes and whether this met the survivors' wishes.

Specific Housing Services Recommendations:

- Shropshire Council should progress with the Whole Housing Approach (WHA, see section 14), including gaining Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) Accreditation.
- Specialist, targeted, mandatory training is urgently required for all staff across Shropshire Council housing-related services, across both the People and Place Directorates (listed above).
- With reference to the section on Registered Social Landlords below (see section 14), encourage DAHA accreditation where this is not already in place/development. In addition, support the Landlords and HomePoint to develop a Managed Reciprocals process as outlined in the WHA.
- Clear pathways when responding to domestic abuse are needed between all teams listed here, as well as connecting with housing-related teams located in other parts of the Council. With reference to the WHA, look to commission mobile and/or co-located advocacy (e.g., within the Housing Support Team) to ensure victims/survivors receive specialist support regardless of their housing type.
- Ensure responses to Anti-Social Behaviour across the housing system do not conflate this with domestic abuse, and ensure specialist responses that do not hold victims responsible for the behaviour of abusers.

- With reference to the WHA, develop a partnership approach to those needing support due to domestic abuse who are homeowners. This should include an understanding of economic abuse and the legal and financial support victims/survivors require.
- The work of the Housing Strategy and Development Manager and the development of a new Housing Strategy must reference, and ensure compliance with, the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 Parts 4 and 7 as well as have reference to the WHA.
- In all areas of development, attention must be paid to all forms of housing. This includes sheltered and supported accommodation, to ensure responses in these settings are appropriate and safe, with training and referral pathways, and reviewing allocation criteria to ensure victims/survivors with additional, or care and support needs, are able to access appropriate housing.
- Amend the process by which HomePoint automatically pass on domestic abuse victims to the Housing Options Team without consent: consent must be sought, appropriately and safely, by the HomePoint team, as well as providing information on alternative options, and what the homelessness process will entail.
- Ensure those fleeing domestic abuse are accurately recorded, including a review of the categories available to remove any confusion. Enable their journeys through Housing to be recorded, including outcomes and whether this met the survivors' wishes. (9.27)

Strategic Headline Recommendations

- Develop a shared vision across all partners and in consultation with survivors; the vision and consequent objectives to be owned by the strategic partnership. All organisations (statutory, voluntary and community) to be held to account through the DA Partnership for having the following in place, encompassing the voice of survivors:
 - Role-appropriate, mandatory, domestic abuse training for all staff, provided internally or accessed externally as required, with data collection that tracks training accessed.
 - Domestic abuse policy and procedure/guidance for staff responding to the public.
 - Domestic abuse policy and procedure/guidance for how the organisation will respond to employees who are victims/survivors, or perpetrators, of domestic abuse.
 - Appropriate data gathering, collation, analysis and sharing, informed by the needs of the DA Partnership and strategy (see separate recommendation below).
- A Strategic Group should be established, reporting to the SSCP but not within the 'priority' framework (and connecting with the Health and Wellbeing Board in a robust way). An Operational Group should be established to report to, and receive direction from, the Strategic Group. A wide domestic abuse 'forum' should be established to enable any practitioner to be involved in the partnership: this is essential to maintain the commitment of the wide range of partners currently attending the Priority Group. Consideration should be given for sub-groups focusing on the Whole Housing Approach, responses to children and young people, and victims/survivors who face

additional barriers to accessing services: to understand provision, need, and actions required to improve responses.

- Leadership and accountability for the partnership approach and response to domestic abuse to be established across partner organisations and communicated throughout those organisations.
- When establishing the new structure described above, representation must be at the right level for the strategic group, which means individuals who can make strategy and resourcing decisions and hold others accountable for implementation of the new strategy. This will also be reflected in the operational group, which should comprise individuals who will take direction from the strategic group and have the capacity and responsibility for delivery. The specialist domestic abuse sector in Shropshire must be represented and have an equal voice at the strategic group.

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