

# Shropshire Safe Accommodation Strategy July 2025

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## Introduction

This document sets out Shropshire Council'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 Council 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 £591,756 in 2023/24 and £602,920 in 2024/25<sup>1</sup>.

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 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.

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<sup>1</sup>[Gov UK \(2023\) Local Authority Domestic Abuse Duty: 2023 to 2025 funding allocations](#)

- **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.

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## 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

The Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnership (SSCP) enhances collaboration and effectiveness in safeguarding efforts by involving various agencies to protect children, young people, and vulnerable adults through multi-agency collaboration, regular communication, and specialized training. The SSCP has adopted these priorities and continues to work towards achieving them.

Addressing domestic abuse has been a priority for Shropshire Council and its partners for several years. For instance, the 2022 Shropshire Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment identified key areas for improvement, such as increasing safe accommodation and enhancing support services for victims and their children.

Governed by the Community Safety Partnership, the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board (DALPB) also focuses on broader domestic abuse issues and ensures a coordinated approach to safeguarding and supporting victims. Following the 2022 Needs Assessment, the DALPB developed success statements to guide their efforts, including ensuring that Section 47 Child Protection, Section 42 Adult Safeguarding, and Anti-Social Behaviour investigations always consider domestic abuse, whether current or historic.

The 2024 Shropshire Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment led to the creation of this domestic abuse safe accommodation strategy.

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## Context – Shropshire Data

Shropshire is a rural county in the Northwest Midlands, bordering Wales. In 2021 Shropshire had a population of 323,600<sup>2</sup>. 50.6% (163,900) of the population was female and 49.4% (159,700) of the population was male. Shropshire was seen to have a high proportion of older age groups compared to children.

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<sup>2</sup> [Shropshire Council \(2021\) Shropshire's profile](#)

Age Group	Under 15s	15-64s	Over 65s
Population	48,000	193,600	82,000
% of Population	14.83%	59.83%	25.3%

In 2021, 96.7% of Shropshire's population classified themselves as White, compared to 81% in England and 81.7% in the West Midlands. Among those identifying as White, 93.3% were White: English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, or British<sup>3</sup>.

The proportion of people identifying as 'White Other' increased from 2% in 2011 to 2.8% in 2021. Apart from 'White Other', all major ethnic groups saw relatively small increases in both number and proportion since 2011.

The second largest ethnic group in Shropshire was Asian, Asian British, or Asian Welsh, accounting for 1.3% of the population, which is significantly lower than in England (9.6%) and the West Midlands (13.3%). This group's proportion increased from 1.0% in 2011 to 1.3% in 2021. Importantly, there has been a small increase in ethnicity diversity, making Shropshire more diverse than it was in 2011.

Shropshire, being predominantly rural, is less ethnically diverse compared to other areas of England. However, despite this, the county is home to farming communities, migrant workers, and other diverse groups. This unique blend means that Shropshire's diversity looks different.

There were 139,579 households living in Shropshire in March 2021<sup>4</sup>. 41% of housing in Shropshire is detached, and 33.5% is semi-detached. 6.1% are flats<sup>5</sup>.

Tenure	% in Shropshire
Owned outright or Owned with a mortgage or loan	68.6%
Private renting	17.5%
Social renting	13%

The Shropshire domestic abuse needs assessment 2024<sup>6</sup> applied the nationally recognised statistics that 1 in 3 females are subjected to domestic abuse in their lifetime and 1 in 6 men and estimated the following prevalence in Shropshire:

	Women	Men
Number of people in Shropshire be subjected to domestic abuse in their lifetime	54,000	27,000

<sup>3</sup> [Shropshire Council \(2022b\) census 2021 data- Ethnicity, national identity, language and religion](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Shropshire Council \(2023\) Census 2021 data tenure bulletin](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Census \(2021\) Residents in households and communal establishments](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Shropshire Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment 2024](#)

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## **Shropshire Domestic abuse Needs Assessment 2024**

### **Process**

In August 2024, Shropshire Council conducted a domestic abuse needs assessment to guide the commissioning of accommodation-based support for victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other safe housing, in accordance with Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act. Beyond meeting the statutory duty, the needs assessment aimed to inform broader strategy and foster a coordinated community response to domestic abuse.

To develop the needs assessment, a member of Shropshire Council's Domestic Abuse Prevention Team engaged with practitioners and leaders from various services and organizations across both statutory and voluntary sectors, including the local authority and health services. Additionally, data was gathered from statutory and community services.

Furthermore, 5 survivors were interviewed over the phone, another 5 participated in a focus group, and 44 survivors completed a survey. All participants were recruited through specialist services, the Lived Experience Advisory Group, or identified as homeless, under the guidance of Shropshire Council's Domestic Abuse Lived Experience Project Officer.

### **Current provision of safe accommodation**

The refuge provision in Shropshire is delivered by Connexus, a Registered Social Landlord, under the name Shropshire Domestic Abuse Service (SDAS). The current Shropshire-wide contract, established in 2023, spans three years. Connexus owns the majority of the accommodation while Shropshire Council commissions the accommodation-based support for adults and children, along with additional funding for outreach services.

There are 22 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.
- 5 self-contained units for single women experiencing domestic abuse and who have multiple disadvantages. These disadvantages often include mental health issues, substance use and involvement with the criminal justice system

According to the Shropshire domestic abuse needs assessment 2024 the SDAS accommodation-based service received 307 referrals, 165 in 2022/23 and 142 in 2023/24.

The table below compares women and men referred to, and becoming resident in, refuge. This data was provided by Shropshire Domestic Abuse Service (SDAS).

	Women		Men		Not disclosed/unknown		Trans/nonbinary	
	*Referred	Resident	*Referred	Resident	*Referred	Resident	*Referred	Resident
2022/23 & 2023/24	268	122	16	8	22	0	1	2

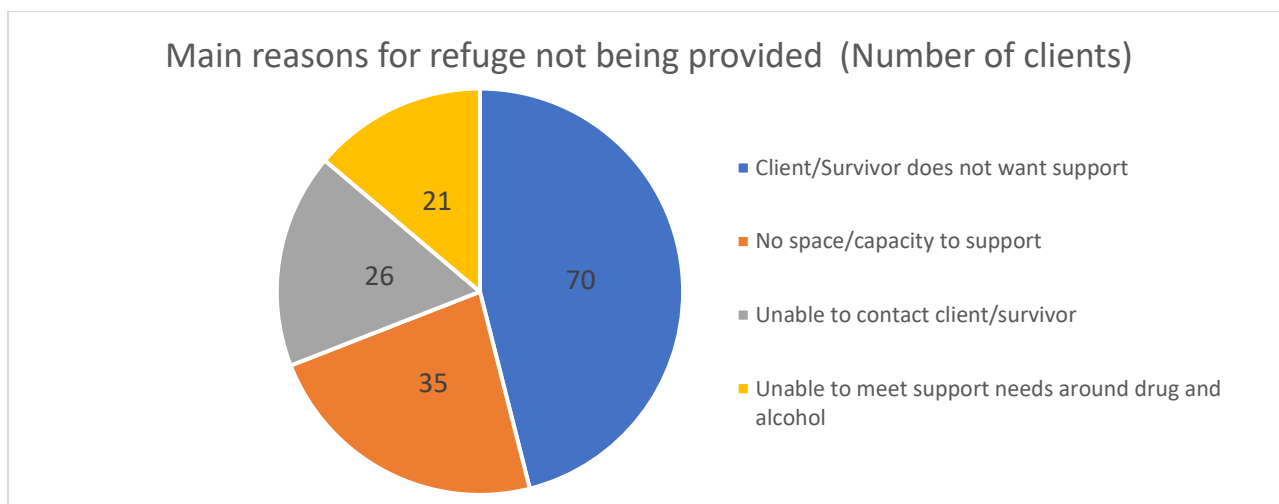
\* This does not include any referrals that were immediately declined at first contact due to capacity

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 1 client aged over 64.
- 17% (53 individuals) resident in refuge in 2022/24 were recorded as being disabled, suggesting a high level of accommodation for those with physical health needs or challenges.

Between 2022-2024, there were more referrals (59%) as would be expected with refuge provision, from out of area (183 referrals) than within area (124 referrals). Over the two-year period the majority of out of area referrals came from the West Midlands, with the highest being Telford and Wrekin (18%), Birmingham (4%) and Walsall (4%).

In 2022-2024, 69% 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 client not wanting support. Some of the other main reasons are listed below:



SDAS launched a new refuge service named Acorns, in 2022 that aims to meet the needs of women facing multiple disadvantages, including drug and alcohol use and mental health related needs. The contract was standalone initially. However, in 2023 the contract referenced above became part of the main contract provision.

The Acorns service involves substance use and mental health services, which should have addressed the issues of unmet need found in the needs assessment relating to this cohort of victims/survivors in need of safe accommodation: However, the needs assessment identified (9.9%) of clients were still declined a space in refuge due to these types of needs.

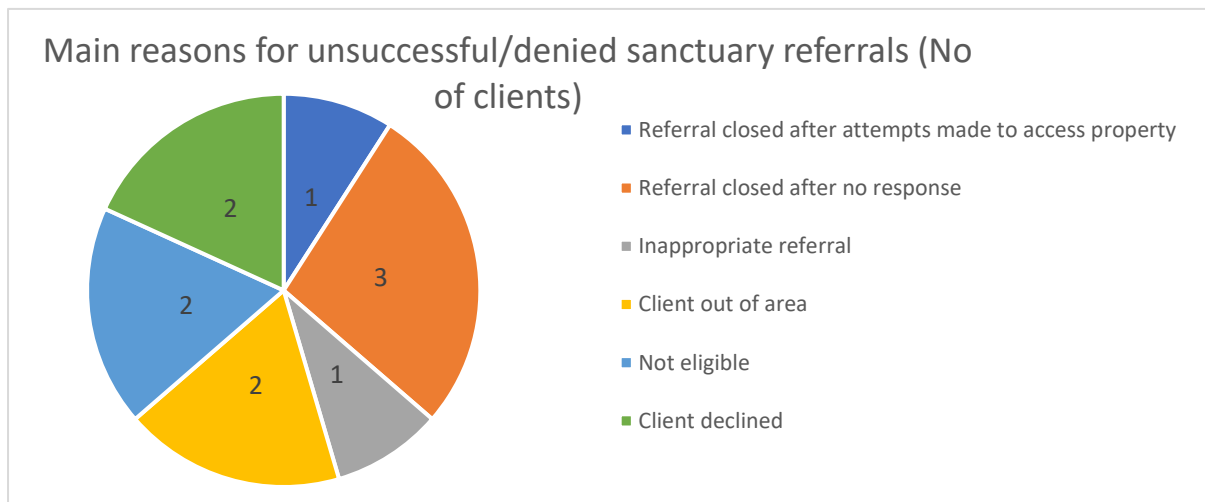
Historically, West Mercia Police Design Out Crime Officers (DOCO) in Shropshire conducted crime risk assessments only for high-risk clients identified by the Domestic Abuse Unit (DAU). Clients not on a high-risk management plan did not receive these assessments.

The Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board agreed 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 turn, a Council-run Sanctuary Scheme, launched in April 2023, now supports all households and individuals at risk of domestic abuse, regardless of tenure. Referrals are made by specialist service professionals. Eligibility requires the client to want to stay in the property, the perpetrator to no longer live there or have the right to remain, and landlord permission if the property is rented. This initiative helps prevent homelessness and offers victims/survivors the choice to remain in their homes through enhanced security measures and support.



Between April 2023 and March 2024, there were 50 referrals, with 78% accepted. The most common reason for declined referrals was no response (7.6%)



Feedback from survivors is collected after three months on the sanctuary scheme. The needs assessment includes this feedback and highlights those who received a Sanctuary Scheme assessment on their property felt safer and found the assessments helpful and reassuring.

#### 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. In 2024, there was the exploration of looking to co-locate a specialist domestic abuse support officer.

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. This procedure is still followed by the team, but as part of the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance Accreditation (DAHA) the process will be revised.

The data included in the needs assessment was taken from the Housing Options Team database through a search for those homelessness applications coded as 'domestic abuse – victim' and 'domestic abuse' as the reasons for homelessness. There were 241 in 2022/23 and 304 in 2023/24. This shows an increase (21%) in homelessness applications in 2023/2024.

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## **Commissioning Safe Accommodation and Support**

The Council commissioned accommodation-based support in line with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and the local needs and demand found by STADA in the 2022 Shropshire Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment. The service commenced 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

This commissioning has started to address the identified gaps in accommodation-based support ~~is~~ by ensuring services are equipped to support older people, those with multiple disadvantage 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

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

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## **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.

We will follow the Assess, Plan, Do, Review (APDR) cycle to monitor the effectiveness of the strategy. Assess involves gathering data to understand the current strategy, identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Plan sets clear goals and outlines steps, roles, and timelines. Do is the implementation phase, requiring flexibility to address challenges. Review evaluates outcomes against goals, analysing successes and areas for improvement. This cycle ensures continuous improvement and helps develop a robust, adaptable partnership strategy.

Using this approach will enable a cyclical approach which will meet our statutory duty.

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## **Appendix 1 Needs Assessment Recommendations**

### **Accommodation based headline recommendations**

#### **Shropshire Domestic Abuse Service**

- To explore the reason why a high proportion of clients decline support after being referred into refuge service.
- Acorns Service has been launched, so there is a need to fully explore why there are still individuals being unsuccessful/denied refuge provision due to service being unable to meet support needs around drug and alcohol.
- To explore the less common reasons for referrals to refuge being denied.
- wider understanding of their IDVA service and what that provides for them to look at their delivery model to manage the increase in referral rates
- Shropshire Domestic Abuse Service to consider the recommendation in the 2022 Shropshire Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment around developing a plan for a new refuge whilst working with commissioners to identify the type of safe accommodation required.
- Partners may need to explore further the gaps in unmet need that have yet to be identified before making a final decision on this.

#### **Sanctuary Scheme**

- For Shropshire Sanctuary Scheme Coordinators to work with West Mercia Police, to gather data in relation to clients receiving assessments in Shropshire to create a comprehensive picture on the delivery of the Scheme - Sanctuary Scheme Co-ordinators to record the date of birth of clients referred into the service consistently, to provide the demographic data.
- Domestic Abuse Prevention Team to promote the Shropshire Sanctuary Scheme to various professionals to ensure they are aware of how to refer into the scheme, the criteria, and the process, to ensure that the scheme is being utilised.

#### **Shropshire Council Housing Service**

- For the Shropshire Council Housing Service to review their domestic abuse pages available to the public to ensure that it is easily accessible and includes all necessary information.
- For a domestic abuse training plan to be put together that all Shropshire Council Housing Teams must complete. Part of the plan will be to undertake regular refresher training once all modules have been completed.

- When focussing on development, ensure that all forms of housing, including sheltered and supported accommodation, are safe and appropriate.
- Training and referral pathways: Providing an appropriate level of training for staff - according to their role
- Raising awareness of the Domestic Abuse Directory of services accessed via Shropshire Council Well Being pages on the internal intranet.
- Updating the external internet Housing pages so victim/survivors know how and where to access support. External internet pages must also include information for perpetrators of domestic abuse, to ensure they are aware of how they can access support to change their behaviour.
- Shropshire Council should progress with the Whole Housing Approach (WHA) including gaining Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) Accreditation.
- For all teams in the housing service, to consider their domestic abuse response by creating a set of policies and procedures.
- To explore further co-located DA specialists within the housing teams.
- When a victim/survivor (and any accompanying children) is placed in temporary accommodation, an appropriately trained Housing Support Officer is assigned to provide support within 48 hours. The support should be focused on reducing isolation, access to food, improving awareness of local amenities, and should be delivered in a trauma informed way.
- Before placing a victim/survivor in temporary accommodation, the local authority must carry out necessary checks to assure itself of the suitability and safety of the building and its surrounding environment.
- When placing perpetrators of domestic abuse in temporary accommodation, there must be careful consideration to ensure the safety and well-being of all involved. In order to do so, best practices around managing perpetrators of domestic abuse in temporary accommodation must be explored and followed.
- Ensure that survivors of domestic abuse, are signposted where necessary to furniture and clothing access which include but are not limited to local furniture schemes, little stars for children's clothing, baby stop and the Welfare Support Team.