

The National Housing & Domestic Abuse Policy & Practice Group General Election Manifesto 2024

Chaired by  **daha**
Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance



With thanks to our group members...



Chartered Institute of Housing



Crisis



DAHA



Generation Rent



Gentoo



Homeless Link



Peabody Housing Association



Refuge



Resolve ASB



Respect



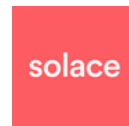
SafeLives



Shelter



Single Homeless Project



Solace Women's Aid



Southall Black Sisters



Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse



St. Mungo's



Surviving Economic Abuse

An Introduction

Judith Vickress, Head of Housing & Nicki Clarke, Senior Programmes Manager (WHA & DAHA) at Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse (STADA) Chairs, National Housing & Domestic Abuse Policy & Practice Group. (“The National Group”)

As Chairs of the DAHA-led National Group it is our privilege to introduce this critical manifesto from the Group. Since its inception in 2018, the National Group, has been at the forefront of bringing together experts from the housing, domestic abuse, and violence against women and girls’ (VAWG) sectors and has diligently worked to influence policy and practice that impacts the safety and housing security of domestic abuse survivors in that time.

Domestic abuse is intrinsically a housing issue. By its very nature, it undermines a survivor’s right to a life free from violence and abuse and disrupts their right to a safe and stable home. Perpetrators of domestic abuse create environments of fear and restricted freedom, typically within the home. Tragically, it is where survivors are at their most vulnerable to serious harm, including homicide. On average two women are murdered every week by their partners or former partners and a majority of those are murdered in or near their own home. Many more die by suicide, choosing to end their lives as a way to end the abuse they experience.¹

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 finally recognised children as victims of domestic abuse in their own right – acknowledgment of the impact and harm that living in a household where domestic abuse exists has on them. All victims and survivors have a right to a home and one that is safe, offering the stability needed to thrive. All parties must make this a priority.

Domestic abuse is a leading cause of homelessness in this country. For women, it is the leading cause of homelessness. Despite this, responses to housing and homelessness, whether from public services, or politicians, so often treat women’s experiences of homelessness as unusual and domestic abuse as a side issue. We call on all parties to ensure that this changes.

Housing is the primary barrier for many women attempting to leave abusive situations. As a Women’s Aid survey revealed, 68.4% of women cited their housing situation and concerns about future housing as reasons for not leaving their abusers.² This fear of homelessness or lack of safe housing forces survivors, including children, to remain in dangerous and traumatising environments.

Furthermore, many survivors who flee their homes to escape domestic abuse face additional hurdles in securing safety and housing stability in new areas. These challenges include gatekeeping, local connection tests, and the loss of secure social housing.

Children’s lives are disrupted when they are forced to change school and leave everything they know, impacting their well-being and subsequently increasing the likelihood of them experiencing significant mental health issues later in life. This in turn can lead to an increased risk of exploitation due to their vulnerability.

[1] 010998-2020-Femicide-Report_V2.pdf (femicidecensus.org)
[2] Evidence Hub: The Hidden Housing Crisis 2020 - Women’s Aid (womensaid.org.uk)

Domestic abuse is currently the second most common reason for households approaching English councils for homelessness relief. Yet, once triggered, the ongoing causes of homelessness are structural: the lack of affordable or suitable housing options in the market and the inability to access genuinely affordable socially rented homes.

The chronic undersupply of social housing is a fundamental issue linked to all these priorities. Addressing this shortage is crucial for meeting the housing needs of domestic abuse survivors. All parties must commit to building new social homes across the country – crucially NOT just in urban areas but with a new and overt focus on rural areas (including “market” towns). Too often the focus of house building and, indeed, housing and domestic abuse policy looks to urban areas, and we must now see a levelling up in all parties agendas to recognise and respond to need of our country’s rural areas and the communities there.

We want to see all parties genuinely and tangibly work towards a future where families come first. To do this it is imperative to recognise that such a future cannot coexist with a reality where domestic abuse remains a leading cause of homelessness for women and children. Every victim and survivor of domestic abuse, including children, should have the choice to remain safely in their own home or access safe accommodation when fleeing abuse. We must see all parties focus on prevention, holding perpetrators of abuse to account and we support and endorse our Group member Respect’s Manifesto. We call on all parties to prioritise all that supports the removal of a perpetrator of abuse from a household and the provision of adequate housing that ensures they are not removed into homelessness but receive support that meets their needs and prevent future harm they may cause.

We urge all parties and all policymakers to commit to creating a society where the safety and housing security of domestic abuse survivors are prioritised. Together, we can build a future where everyone can live free from abuse and with the stability of a safe home.

To address these issues we call on all parties to:



Pledge to prioritise the provision of safe and stable housing for all survivors/victims of domestic abuse and hold those who perpetrate the harm accountable



Commit to reducing domestic abuse related homelessness through prevention



Reduce the additional trauma and harm created by homelessness and define “temporary” accommodation and legislate against leaving survivors/victims of abuse, including children, beyond the defined time limit



Provide long term and adequate funding to local authorities to adopt and implement a Whole Housing Approach³ to domestic abuse that is flexible to meet the needs of their individual residents recognising the distinctive needs of rural and urban populations. Adequately resourcing both to ensure that survivors can access safe and secure accommodation, wherever they live and whatever their housing tenure.

[3] <https://www.dahalliance.org.uk/innovations-in-practice/whole-housing-approach/>

Our Key Priorities:



Local Authorities

Commit to prioritising domestic abuse and the implementation of the Whole Housing Approach in all local authority areas across the country.



Social Housing

Commit funding to build a new generation of social rent homes – at least 90,000 a year over ten years to address this deficit and ensure that everyone has a safe place to call home.



Private Rented Sector

Commit to comprehensive rental reforms to rebalance the power gap between landlords and tenants so that renters can feel stable and secure in their home.



Homelessness

Commit to preventing homelessness and to recognise and respond to all forms of women's homelessness, such as couch surfing, street homelessness and rough sleeping, as a distinct and urgent problem which requires a distinct and urgent response. And to commit to the Housing First initiative and build on the existing Housing First pilot delivery by committing to deliver a full-scale rollout of Housing First.



Migrant Survivors

Commit to ensure that all migrant survivors have a legal right to suitable emergency accommodation and adequate support for everyone at risk of street homelessness.

Some Context

We are the National Housing and Domestic Abuse Policy and Practice Group, led by the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA). Our group was established in 2018 and brings together experts from the housing, domestic abuse, and violence against women and girls' (VAWG) sectors from commissioning, charity, and policy perspectives. We support statutory agencies, government departments, and the private sector to deliver safe and suitable housing for survivors of domestic abuse.

We believe every victim and survivor of domestic abuse, including children, should have the choice to remain safely in their own home, or to access support and safe accommodation if they are forced to flee due to domestic abuse. The current reality is that fleeing domestic abuse is a leading trigger of homelessness for women and children and this is not sustainable, socially or economically.

Furthermore, the point at which women seek refuge or emergency safe housing often takes place simultaneously with other forms of domestic abuse, which diminish the financial and emotional capacity of the survivor to live independently of their abuser.⁴ For instance, in many cases the perpetrator stops contributing to rent leading to an accumulation of debt, which is very often in the name of the survivor.

The threat of being homeless for months and even years in unsuitable, trauma inducing temporary accommodation, in both women and children, is a critical factor in the choice to flee domestic abuse. If political parties are serious about tackling domestic abuse, they must make sure there are housing options for those who need to or choose to flee.

Survivors need safe and stable housing, and often may need to access refuge or other emergency safe accommodation not in their original local area.⁵ Currently, social housing allocation policies, a severe lack of social housing, and gaps in regulatory oversight of housing policies can, unfairly, determine whether a survivor is able to safely leave an abuser.

It is therefore critical that political parties ensure that **all** survivors, **and we are clear that this must include migrant survivors**, can access safe and suitable housing when fleeing abuse by addressing the severe lack of social housing, ensuring that regulations designed to protect survivors' access to social housing are effectively implemented.

We encourage all parties to strive for policy measures that improve the lives of domestic abuse survivors, addresses gender-based violence and guarantees victims' rights.

Children & Young People

145,800 children were recorded to be living in temporary accommodation in England at the end of December 2023. (Shelter) The number of children in temporary accommodation has increased by 15% (19,460 children) since December 2022⁶ and is the highest number since records began (June 2004).

[4] Women's Aid (2019) The Domestic Abuse Report 2019: The Economics of Abuse. Bristol: Women's Aid.

[5] Bowstead, Janet C. Why women's domestic violence refuges are not local services, 2015, https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/SR/Shelters/Janet%20C_Bowstead_Critical_Social_Policy-2015-Bowstead-327-49.pdf, pg331.

[6] DLUHC Statutory Homelessness Statistics Live Tables (Table TA1 - Number of households in temporary accommodation at the end of quarter by type of TA provided England, 1998 Q1 to 2023 Q4).

This is a national shame and MUST be a priority of all parties. Children and young people's opportunities to grow, thrive and shine are severely limited because they are trapped in temporary accommodation for months and even several years. Some children are starting their school years having NEVER had a home.

In recent months we have seen increasing number of Local Authorities issuing, or advising that they are close to issuing, s114 notices and the cost of temporary accommodation is a significant contributor to this. Councils spent £1.7 billion on temporary accommodation for homeless households between April 2022 and March 2023. This is a 9% increase in spending in just one year and a 62% increase in the last five years. One third of the total was spent on emergency B&Bs and hostels – £565 million – which are often considered the worst accommodation for families with children to live in.

We are imploring all parties to invest in the future of our children and young people now, and this must start by providing safe and stable homes where they are able to thrive. This investment will improve outcomes for children and young people and inevitably save lives. It will also reduce pressure on the national economy, by reducing the pull on children's social care for children and families and also costs to health, to education and to policing.

The Whole Housing Approach (WHA) is a framework for addressing the housing and safety needs of victim/survivors in a local area. It brings together under one umbrella all the main housing tenure types alongside the housing options and support initiatives needed to help people experiencing domestic abuse to either maintain or access safe and stable housing.

Its key aims are to:



Create earlier identification and intervention for domestic abuse through mobilising social and private landlords and key institutions involved in private ownership



Reduce the number of people who are made homeless as a result of domestic abuse



Increase tenancy sustainment options so that people experiencing domestic abuse can remain safely in their home when it is their choice to do so or do not lose their tenancy status if they relocate. This includes social housing landlords taking action to remove perpetrators from properties through enforcement and positive engagement activities.



To bring together the housing and domestic abuse sectors through a Coordinated Community Response (CCR) to keep victim/survivors safe and hold abusers to account

Areas which have piloted the Whole Housing Approach have demonstrated that for every £1 invested, an average of £19.61 can be saved to the public purse.

We would ask that all parties encourages all Local Authorities to implement this model to ensure survivors from all housing tenures have access to safe and secure accommodation in a cost effective model.

Social Housing



Key Priority:

Commit funding to build a new generation of social rent homes – at least 90,000 a year over ten years to address this deficit and ensure that everyone has a safe place to call home.

Any response for survivors of domestic abuse cannot be fully effective unless the current housing crisis is addressed, and we believe that social housing is key to solving this challenge.

Social rent remains 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. However, in the last year alone we lost 11,700 social rent homes and the waiting list grew to almost 1.3 million households.⁷

A lack of safe and secure settled accommodation is a fundamental problem from which many complex housing issues arise, and changes to policies such as joint tenancies and local connection, for example, whilst welcome in themselves, will be limited without genuinely committing to a new generation of socially rented homes.

We have witnessed a significant proportion of survivors forced to give up secure social tenancies and accept accommodation within the private rented sector (PRS), which is often unaffordable, insecure, and even discriminatory towards vulnerable tenants, particularly in London, due to a shortage of social housing stock. The impact on survivors' economic and housing security is profound and long term.

There are now 1.3 million households on the official social housing waiting lists. However, the National Housing Federation's People in Housing Need report of people in need of social housing in England has reached 4.2 million, which equates to 1.6 million households – significantly more than on the official waiting lists.

Black and minoritised survivors are disproportionately impacted by poor responses to domestic abuse from statutory agencies. A report into the housing experiences of Black and minoritised survivors in London also found evidence of local housing team "gatekeeping" practices, and that inconsistent testing of vulnerability prevented women from accessing safe, emergency housing. This is also applicable to migrant survivors.⁸

Joint Tenancies

Where survivors of domestic abuse share a joint tenancy with their abuser, it is legally complex and expensive to maintain their tenancy and home when separating from their abuser. This applies equally to socially rented housing and those living in the Private Rented Sector. Many perpetrators of abuse refuse to remove themselves from a joint tenancy as this enables them to continue to exercise a form of post separation control over the survivor, causing financial issues, preventing them from moving or resulting in them becoming homeless.

[7] [The story of social housing – Shelter England](#)

[8] [Latin American Women's Aid \(LAWA\), London Black Women's Project \(LBWP\), \(2019\): A roof not a home. The housing experiences of Black and minoritised women survivors of gender-based violence in London. London: Trust for London](#)

Therefore, to alleviate the issues caused to survivors by this situation and to place the burden of leaving on those causing harm, we worked with members of the House of Lords to add an amendment to the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 during its committee stage to simplify the legal process for removing a perpetrator from a joint secured or assured social tenancy.

While the amendment was not added, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) published a consultation on joint tenancies and domestic abuse in May 2022. We provided our own comprehensive response to the consultation,⁹ yet are still awaiting a response.

Since this time, both Scotland and Wales have passed legislation that improves the legal options for survivors of domestic abuse to maintain their tenancy while the perpetrator is removed, and we would hope that this has set a strong precedent for England to follow. We encourage all parties to read our [Briefing](#) and our [Question and Answer](#) follow-up for more detail.

Priority Need & Local Connection

After significant campaigning from this group and VAWG sector partners, victims of domestic abuse were given automatic priority need if they are homeless because of their experience of domestic abuse through the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

Despite these legislative changes, there is a growing body of evidence of continued [gatekeeping from some local authorities](#), as cited by Shelter.¹⁰ This prevents survivors from being given priority status and accessing immediate safe accommodation and ongoing services and support.

Local authorities hold significant discretionary powers in determining who is eligible for local connection exemptions, but a seeming over-reliance on the individual will or domestic abuse expertise of Local Authority staff has proven to be ineffective in guaranteeing survivors access to social housing when fleeing to a new area.

Many survivors face additional barriers from local authorities who continue to also apply a local connection test when allocating social housing, against statutory guidance, which disqualifies a significant proportion of survivors who must flee to an unknown area to become safe. In some areas the local connection criteria is included within the s106 agreement and it is essential that this is exempted for survivors of domestic abuse, particularly where they need to flee to a new area to escape abuse.

We have responded to the Government's consultation on local connection tests and domestic abuse, and have also called for a statutory exemption for survivors of domestic abuse (and all survivors of VAWG), and the regulation of the implementation of these statutory connection, priority need and local connection tests, but there has been no subsequent action to address this significant barrier for survivors made homeless due to domestic abuse.

[9] [dahc-national-housing-and-da-group_joint-tenancies-consultation-response.pdf](#) (dahalliance.org.uk)

[10] [Safe housing for survivors – Solace Womens Aid](#)

Furthermore, we would ask that all parties encourage Local Authorities to proactively support perpetrators to access alternative housing where this enables the survivor and children to remain living within the existing home. This will prevent families, including children, being uprooted and moved away from support networks, or being relocated in unsuitable temporary or long term accommodation.

Our Priorities:



Key Priority:

Commit funding to build a new generation of social rent homes - at least 90,000 a year over ten years to address this deficit and ensure that everyone has a safe place to call home.

- Provide local authorities with the resources and access to training that they need to ensure all survivors can access their housing rights and ensure that ALL housing professionals have access to mandatory domestic abuse awareness training as an integral part of their functions, so that domestic abuse is identified early and escalation of harm is prevented.
- Create a dedicated fund for delivering a variety of affordable housing tenures for domestic abuse survivors/victims, including homes for single people and families, with relevant security measures in place. This will offer people a route out of abuse and options for long term good quality homes that are safe, in turn reducing the burden on local authorities. This will also include housing for those who perpetrate the abuse, supporting the right for victims & survivors to remain safe in their own home. This should include a commitment to have a set annual target to deliver these homes, and publish outcomes on an annual basis.
- Commit to supporting survivors who share a joint secure or assured social tenancy with their abuser, so that survivors can maintain their tenancy and their home, while placing the responsibility of leaving on perpetrators of abuse.
- Commit to hold local authorities to account for the implementation of the automatic priority need to survivors of domestic abuse, and to make a statutory exemption for survivors of domestic abuse from local connection or residency requirements as part of their qualification criteria for applicants of social housing.
- Reduce the additional trauma and harm created by homelessness and define "temporary" accommodation and legislate against leaving survivors/victims of abuse, including children, beyond the defined time limit.
- Ensure provision of funding for local authorities to provide proactive support for perpetrators of abuse to access new accommodation and thus preventing survivors, including children, from having to uproot and be moved to (often) unsuitable temporary and long-term accommodation.
- Commit to prioritising domestic abuse and the implementation of the Whole Housing Approach in all local authority areas across the country.

Private Rented Sector (PRS)



Key Priority:

Commit to comprehensive rental reforms to rebalance the power gap between landlords and tenants so that renters can feel stable and secure in their home and ensure that no fault s21 evictions are banned.

Over the last two decades, the private rented sector has doubled in size, overtaking social housing to become the second biggest form of housing tenure. A safe home is vital for a survivor of domestic abuse to find peace and recovery in their lives, yet under our current system private renters live in constant insecurity under the threat of a no-fault eviction. Too often survivors and victims of abuse – some of those in the most need of protection and support – are forced to live in insecurity and uncertainty, facing unfair evictions, unaffordable rent, homelessness, poor conditions, and unsafe standards.

Despite reforming private renting being a manifesto commitment for all major parties at the last election, tenants are no better protected today than we were then. This cannot happen again – over the past five years, the renting crisis has grown worse by every metric, harming renters across the country.

These measures would dramatically improve renters' ability to exercise their rights and the quality of privately rented properties, supporting survivors into safe, secure and good quality homes, key to rebuilding their and their children's lives.

The high cost of renting privately creates a barrier for women leaving and moving on from a relationship with an abusive partner. A recent report found that there is no region in England where private rented housing is affordable on women's median earnings, whereas men can afford to rent a median home (median private sector rental cost) in all regions except London".¹¹

Existing requirements to rent for low-income families, such as the benefit cap, further exacerbate the barriers faced by domestic abuse survivors. This is not only due to the increasing lack of appropriate refuge spaces and permanent, suitable and affordable houses to accommodate them after they are ready to move on, but also, it is caused by systemic failures that result in issues with homelessness assessments and applications, housing allocations and insufficient provisions for women with insecure immigration status.

The Renters (Reform) Bill initially appeared to address some of the key issues we see in the PRS. The Bill, as drafted, did go some way to reduce the power imbalance between landlords and tenants (e.g. the banning of s.21 no fault evictions). However, it did not fully support key issues critical to our objective of protecting domestic abuse survivors/victims. This includes the "tenant trap", the revision of the ASB grounds and the watering down of defining the term "homelessness."

[11] Women's Aid. (2020) The Domestic Abuse Report 2020: The Hidden Housing Crisis. Bristol: Women's Aid

We urge all parties to work with us as a group to introduce comprehensive rental reforms to rebalance the power gap between landlords and tenants, so that renters can feel stable and secure in their home and ensure that no fault s21 evictions are banned to provide tenants with the rights they need.

Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

Tenants who are experiencing domestic abuse are four times more likely than other tenants to have ASB complaints made against them. This is often due to the misidentification of domestic abuse as ASB. For example, neighbours who hear frequent shouting, screaming, or banging, might contact the council, landlord or police to report suspected ASB when some of the residents (most often women and children) are suffering from domestic abuse and may be at serious risk of harm including homicide. Furthermore, if the call handler or initial appraisal of the report; lacks adequate training on spotting the signs/flags for domestic abuse, then there is the risk that the report could be categorised as ASB.

When housing, police, or other multiagency professionals do not recognise these reports as domestic abuse and continue to treat them as ASB, they risk criminalising, isolating, evicting, and ultimately causing homelessness to victims and survivors, instead of offering safeguarding and support. The Domestic Abuse Act provides a clear steer to all social housing providers that they should adopt working practices which recognise, identify and address domestic abuse in all its' guises, however it doesn't compel them.

Survivors of domestic abuse can be put at risk of repossession and eviction from both private rented and social rented homes, as well as being deemed 'intentionally homeless' due to anti-social behaviour caused by the perpetrator, even when the perpetrator no longer lives in the home.

It is therefore vital that measures to address anti-social behaviour do not have the unintended consequence of survivors losing their homes or their entitlement to homelessness rehousing duties and that landlords are provided with clear guidance to be alert to this.

Local Housing Allowance

A third of private renters claim local housing allowance to afford their rent. But with rents rising at record rates and local housing allowance again frozen, finding a private rented home they can afford is a huge barrier to women needing to flee domestic abuse, even with the help of council homelessness services. This can leave them stuck homeless in temporary accommodation, including with their children, for months and years. There are now a record number of children (over 145,000) homeless in temporary accommodation.¹²

Furthermore, 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.

[12] [Why women are at the sharp end of the rental crisis](#)

The psychological impact of relocating is also isolating for survivors and their children as they lose their practical and emotional support networks, further impacting their psychological wellbeing.

This week, the Scottish government committed to introducing rent controls when it unveiled its Housing (Scotland) Bill. The Westminster government has repeatedly rejected bringing in similar measures and the demand for private rented accommodation suggests rents are only going one way.

Our Priorities:



Key Priority:

Commit to comprehensive rental reforms to rebalance the power gap between landlords and tenants so that renters can feel stable and secure in their home and ensure that no fault s21 evictions are banned. This includes those that take place through loopholes in any proposed new mandatory eviction grounds and unaffordable in-tenancy rent increases which also lead to eviction and homelessness.

- We encourage provision of funding for local authorities to provide proactive support for survivors to maintain tenancies or access new accommodation.
- We also ask that all parties commit to new funding and an ambitious plan to improve local enforcement capabilities and increased legal aid funding so that all renters can access timely legal advice and have their case heard before a judge that has the discretion to deny an eviction when circumstances require.
- Work with us to create and mandate use of a pre-eviction ASB protocol for landlords and managing agents.
- Work with us to create and publish an accompanying guidance for landlords and managing agents on responding to ASB (including links between ASB and domestic abuse).
- We ask all parties to commit to keeping the local housing allowance (LHA) in line with at least the 30th percentile of local rents, as recommended by the Work and Pensions Select Committee, recent call for the introduction of a new 'uprating guarantee' to increase benefits every year and end uncertainty for tenants and landlords.
- Abolish the household benefit cap, which limits the total amount of benefits that households can receive, to tackle homelessness.

Private Owned Housing

DAHA-led National Group Partner, *Surviving Economic Abuse*¹³, shone a light on how perpetrators of domestic abuse use a joint mortgage shared with the survivors/victims to prevent them from accessing economic safety and freedom by forcing them to remain trapped with the abuser because they do not have economic control over the home that they live in. For those who do flee, perpetrators use joint mortgages to maintain control and cause significant harm long after the survivors/victims have left.

Issues faced by survivors who share a mortgage with the abuser include abusers withholding consent to switch to better terms or refusing to have their name, or that of the survivor, removed from the mortgage, even when ordered to do so by the court. Lenders may also be prevented from removing the abuser's name from the mortgage, due to affordability requirements. As a result, many survivors are forced into mortgage arrears, face repossession, leading to homelessness, destroyed credit ratings and a lifetime of housing insecurity.

The financial services sector has expressed a need for the government to support them in developing a consistent and robust approach to this issue based on the Financial Conduct Authority's Consumer Duty, introduced in 2023. This should include legal mechanisms for de-linking mortgages in cases where one party is being subject to economic abuse and support to implement affordability assessments and repayment plans that reflect the needs and circumstances of survivors.

Our Priority:

We share *Surviving Economic Abuse's Manifesto* recommendations¹⁴ for all parties to commit to:

- Working alongside the regulator to develop a consistent, industry-wide approach to addressing joint and several liability through the Consumer Duty.
- Where required, introduce legislative reform to de-link joint mortgages in cases of domestic abuse.

[13] [Surviving-Economic-Abuse_General-Election-Manifesto](#) (survivingeconomicabuse.org).

[14] [Surviving-Economic-Abuse_General-Election-Manifesto_V2](#) (survivingeconomicabuse.org).

Homelessness

Key Priority:



Commit to recognise and respond to all forms of women's homelessness, such as couch surfing, street homelessness and rough sleeping, as a distinct and urgent problem which requires a distinct and urgent response. And to commit to the Housing First initiative and build on the existing Housing First pilot delivery by committing to deliver a full-scale rollout of Housing First.

It is well documented that domestic abuse is one of the leading causes of homelessness amongst women and once they are homeless women are even more vulnerable to experiencing domestic abuse and other forms of VAWG. Domestic abuse is both a cause and result of homelessness amongst women. In fact, the second most common reason for those owed a relief duty was due to domestic abuse, accounting for 6,470 or 14.5% of households owed a relief duty. This had increased 2.7% from the same quarter last year.

The combination of these factors can result in women developing addiction, mental health issues and marginalisation during homelessness, making it even harder to find stability and break the cycles of homelessness. Women experiencing these issues concurrently can be described as experiencing 'multiple disadvantage' and they face considerable barriers in accessing services and support that meets their needs.

There is also a strong body of qualitative data, as well as compelling new quantitative data, which demonstrates that women's homelessness is significantly under-represented in current statistics, and current provision is failing to address and provide for women's needs.

Women who are street homeless, especially women of colour and young women, can be too afraid to bed down due to the risk of gender-based and/or racist violence, abuse or harassment. Instead, they can end up spending the night in public places, such as stations or night-buses, in exploitative situations to avoid the streets or sofa-surfing at night but spending the day on the streets. This can result in them being hidden from support services and uncounted in rough sleeping statistics (because they don't meet the definition of 'bedded down' or are bedded down in hidden locations). For many, the only offer off the streets is to go into mixed accommodation, where women may continue to be exposed to male violence and abuse.

Without identifying and responding to women's experiences of street homelessness as distinct from men, this will remain a recurring challenge.

Housing First is an internationally recognised approach designed to end repeat homelessness, reduce offending behaviour and improve health needs for a small but significant cohort of people whose needs go unmet by existing homelessness provision.

Furthermore, women's homelessness disproportionately affects Black and minoritised survivors from diverse communities. The barriers they face to leave their abusive homes are greater owing to lack of information where to seek help from, their unfamiliarity with the UK system, lack of information about their rights and services and language barriers preventing them from accessing these. Evidence shows that local authorities are failing to provide vital accessible information about By and For support services and refuges, which means that Black and minoritised survivors are being left unsupported and at greater risk for extensive periods of time before they become aware of their options.

Several projects have been developed across the country which focus on supporting women impacted by VAWG and are delivered in partnership with specialist women's providers. There is a growing evidence base that shows how such interventions end homelessness and maximise safety, health and wellbeing for women who occupy the sharp end of disadvantage.

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Our Priorities:



Key Priority:

Commit to recognise and respond to all forms of women's homelessness, such as couch surfing, street homelessness and rough sleeping, as a distinct and urgent problem which requires a distinct and urgent response.

- Inclusion of a gender informed and anti-racist homelessness pathway and women-only accommodation offer across the country.
- The introduction of the legal right to suitable emergency accommodation and adequate support for survivors at risk of street homelessness.
- Commit to the Housing First initiative and build on the existing Housing First pilot delivery by committing to deliver a full-scale rollout of Housing First. This should include ringfenced funding to ensure all services are developed in line with gender informed and anti-racist principles.

Migrant Survivors



Key Priority:

Commit to ensure that all migrant survivors have a legal right to suitable emergency accommodation and adequate support for everyone at risk of street homelessness

Migrant survivors face particular challenges, with the perpetrator often using their immigration status to enforce their control and prevent them from leaving. This can be compounded by them having No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF).

Research from London School of Economics and Oxford Migration Observatory¹⁶ estimates that there are approximately 32,000 victims and survivors in England and Wales who would choose to come forward for support but are prevented from doing so as a result of their NRPF status. Their insecure immigration status can also be used by perpetrators as a tool for further coercion.

It is key to ensure that all women with NRPF have access to safe and dignified accommodation which recognises their specific experiences and needs, while they wait for a decision on their asylum claims.

Once they have been recognised as refugees, women should be provided with appropriate time and support to move onto safe and suitable accommodation.

Our Priorities:



Key Priority:

Commit to ensure that all migrant survivors have a legal right to suitable emergency accommodation and adequate support for everyone at risk of street homelessness.

- We urge all parties to extend eligibility for the existing Domestic Violence (DV) Rule to ensure not only survivors on spousal visas can access a refuge space, financial support and housing.

Summary of Our Priorities

- Commit funding to build a new generation of social rent homes – at least 90,000 a year over ten years, to address this deficit and ensure that everyone has a safe place to call home.
- Provide local authorities with the resources and access to training that they need to ensure all survivors can access their housing rights and ensure that ALL housing professionals have access to mandatory domestic abuse awareness training as an integral part of their functions, so that domestic abuse is identified early and escalation of harm is prevented.
- Create a dedicated fund for delivering a variety of affordable housing tenures for domestic abuse victims-survivors, including homes for single people and families, with relevant security measures in place. This will offer people a route out of abuse, and options for long term good quality homes that are safe, in turn reducing the burden on local authorities. This will also include housing for those who perpetrate the abuse, supporting the right for victims & survivors to remain safe in their own home This should include a commitment to have a set annual target to deliver these homes, and publish outcomes on an annual basis.
- Commit to supporting survivors who share a joint secure or assured social tenancy with their abuser, so that survivors can maintain their tenancy and their home, while placing the responsibility of leaving on perpetrators of abuse.
- Commit to hold local authorities to account for the implementation of the automatic priority need to survivors of domestic abuse, and to make a statutory exemption for survivors of domestic abuse from local connection or residency requirements as part of their qualification criteria for applicants of social housing.
- Reduce the additional trauma and harm created by homelessness and define “temporary” accommodation and legislate against leaving survivors/victims of abuse, including children, beyond the defined time limit.
- Ensure provision of funding for local authorities to provide proactive support for perpetrators of abuse to access new accommodation and thus preventing survivors including children from having to uproot and be moved to (often) unsuitable temporary and long term accommodation.
- Commit to prioritising domestic abuse and the implementation of the Whole Housing Approach in all local authority areas across the country.
- Commit to comprehensive rental reforms to rebalance the power gap between landlords and tenants so that renters can feel stable and secure in their home and ensure that no fault s21 evictions are banned. This includes those that take place through loopholes in any proposed new mandatory eviction grounds and unaffordable in-tenancy rent increases which also lead to eviction and homelessness.

- We encourage provision of funding for local authorities to provide proactive support for survivors to maintain tenancies or access new accommodation.
- We also ask that all parties commit to new funding and an ambitious plan to improve local enforcement capabilities and increased legal aid funding so that all renters can access timely legal advice and have their case heard before a judge that has the discretion to deny an eviction when circumstances require.
- Work with us to create and mandate use of a pre-eviction ASB protocol for landlords and managing agents.
- Work with us to create and publish an accompanying guidance for landlords and managing agents on responding to ASB (including links between ASB and domestic abuse).
- We ask all parties to commit to keeping the local housing allowance (LHA) in line with at least the 30th percentile of local rents, as recommended by the Work and Pensions Select Committee, recent call for the introduction of a new 'uprating guarantee' to increase benefits every year and end uncertainty for tenants and landlords.
- Abolish the household benefit cap, which limits the total amount of benefits that households can receive, to tackle homelessness.
- Commit to working alongside the regulator to develop a consistent, industry-wide approach to addressing joint and several liability through the Consumer Duty, and where required, introduce legislative reform to de-link joint mortgages in cases of domestic abuse.
- Commit to recognise and respond to all forms of women's homelessness, such as sofa surfing, street homelessness and rough sleeping, as a distinct and urgent problem which requires a distinct and urgent response.
- Introduce a gender informed and anti-racist homelessness pathway and women-only accommodation offer across the country.
- Introduce the legal right to suitable emergency accommodation and adequate support for survivors at risk of street homelessness.
- Commit to the Housing First initiative and build on the existing Housing First pilot delivery by committing to deliver a full-scale rollout of Housing First. This should include ringfenced funding to ensure all services are developed in line with gender informed and anti-racist principles.
- Commit to ensure that all migrant survivors have a legal right to suitable emergency accommodation and adequate support for everyone at risk of street homelessness.
- Extend eligibility for the existing Domestic Violence (DV) Rule to ensure not only survivors on spousal visas can access a refuge space, financial support and housing.

An invitation to meet

Our group would welcome the opportunity to discuss these policy priorities with you in more detail. Please contact our Co-Chair, Nicki Clarke to arrange by emailing n.clarke@standingtogether.org.uk.

Support our manifesto

We encourage all of our supporters, partners, allies, and members to stand with us in urging all parties to implement the policies outlined in our manifesto. We can only stop domestic abuse by *standing together* to take these drastic measures, allowing survivors to live in safety and free from harm.

Contact us about DAHA Membership:

daha_membership@standingtogether.org.uk

Contact us about DAHA Accreditation:

daha_team@standingtogether.org.uk

Contact us about DAHA Homelessness & Supported Accommodation Accreditation:

daha_homelessness@standingtogether.org.uk

Contact us about DAHA Training:

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