

STANDING TOGETHER AGAINST DOMESTIC ABUSE

Developing Your Own Domestic Abuse and Housing Operational Group (HOG)

GUIDANCE FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES

**STANDING
TOGETHER**
against domestic abuse

Sept 2022



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About this guidance

This Guidance is developed by the [Whole Housing Approach \(WHA\)](#) programme at [Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse \(STADA\)](#) for local authority housing departments, housing and homelessness services.

This guidance will support housing providers with:

- Understanding the purpose of a Domestic Abuse and Housing Operational Group (HOG) and how this links into local housing strategies.
- The role of a Domestic Abuse and Housing Operational Group (HOG) as part of the wider systems change.
- Information on how to develop a Domestic Abuse and Housing Operational Group (HOG) bringing together Housing, VAWG and other relevant leads, in your local area.

Housing remains a significant barrier to victim/survivors in leaving an abusive partner. Domestic abuse is already one of the major causes of homelessness where victim/survivors often must flee their homes for safety reasons. For the majority of victim/survivors concerns around their housing options make it difficult to leave their abusers. They often find themselves in situations having to weigh up staying in the home with the abuse or leave to another potentially unsafe situation perpetuated by a lack of housing options and awareness of their housing rights. Additional barriers are faced by marginalised victim/survivors because of factors such as ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, immigration status or any other protected characteristics which can prevent them from accessing safe, secure and sustainable housing options.

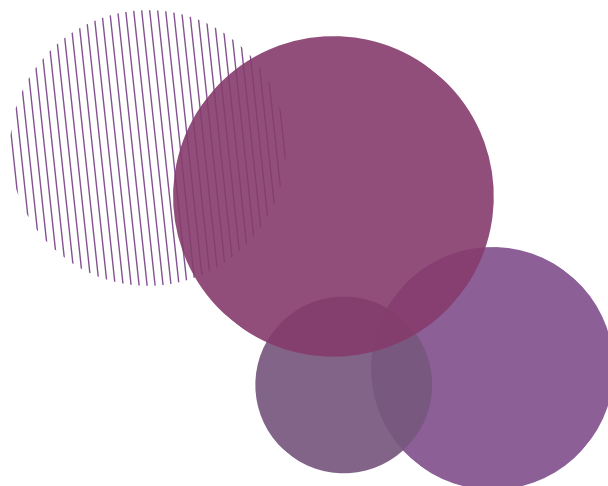
Housing providers are in a position to spot and respond to domestic abuse as a first point of contact for victims and survivors through:

- Homelessness presentations
- Regular contact with tenants around estate and tenancy management
- Repairs and maintenance service call outs
- Rent collection and management of arrears
- Anti-social behaviour (ASB) complaints

STADA's Whole Housing Approach (WHA) programme meaningfully addresses the safety and housing needs of victims/survivors, ensuring they can maintain or access safe and stable housing as quickly as possible through a suite of 14 housing options:



The WHA brings together the housing and domestic abuse sectors through a Coordinated Community Response (CCR) to keep victim/survivors safe and hold abusers to account, bringing together existing WHA components in a local area and work with key services and stakeholders to address any gaps. Victim/survivors voices and experiences are central to a CCR.



Purpose of a Domestic Abuse and Housing Operational Group (HOG)

The Domestic Abuse and Housing Operational Group (HOG) was first set up in the three West London Boroughs (Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster) in 2008 as part of Hammersmith & Fulham's local domestic abuse partnership. This was led by STADA who employed the first Housing Coordinator to initiate a robust Coordinated Community Response (CCR). The Coordinator works in partnership with local housing providers and services, to review and improve responses within their organisations. This includes developing and supporting with implementing policies, procedures, and protocols.

The overarching purpose of the Domestic Abuse HOG is to facilitate a forum about domestic abuse within and between different housing sectors to ensure that victim/survivors (with or without children) receive consistent, appropriate and professional support when approaching Housing services and Housing providers. The meetings offer a space to share information, learn and share best practice, to collaborate, to problem solve and to keep communicating and improving integrated working outside of meetings.

Housing is the primary barrier for women attempting to leave abusive situations and domestic abuse remains one of the highest causes of homelessness amongst women. For people experiencing domestic abuse, the home is often the most dangerous place. This is evident when we consider the number of victim/survivors, the majority of whom are women, are killed inside their own homes.

Housing providers are ideally placed to spot and respond to domestic abuse as a first point of contact. Effective interventions will include:

- Early identification and intervention
- Crisis and emergency assistance that increase safety and reduce risk
- Improved access to resettlement services
- On-going or long-term support
- Housing options that enable survivors to access safe and secure housing.

The Domestic Abuse HOG must be part of the CCR partnership response to VAWG across local authorities, through coordination and bringing together leads from housing providers and services homelessness organisations, VAWG services including specialist 'by and for' agencies, as well as other local specialist services. The Domestic Abuse HOG can also support and encourage Housing providers and services to deliver the Whole Housing Approach (WHA).

Creating a Domestic Abuse and Housing Operational Group (HOG)

The Coordinator will lead, coordinate and oversee the creation of the Domestic Abuse HOG. Their responsibilities will include:

- Acting as a key point of contact between the Domestic Abuse HOG, it's members and internally within the organisation.
- Mapping current responses and evaluating how their organisation is performing
- Speaking and working with the local VAWG services including the specialist by and for services, and relevant partnerships to get an idea of how victim/survivors are experiencing the service
- Planning and preparing for the Domestic Abuse HOG and ensuring actions that come out of this are completed satisfactorily and to deadline.

1. Identify Group Membership

Identify local authority Housing teams such as Housing Solutions and Housing Management, local Housing Associations, Homelessness organisations, VAWG services including the lead domestic abuse service as well as specialist 'by and for' agencies, and any other local specialist services such as drug and alcohol centres, as potential members. Members should be the strategic lead contact for their service and a deputy, if the lead cannot attend. Deputies attending the meeting should be of an equivalent level, as decisions will need to be made on behalf of their services. It is best practice to include the borough's VAWG strategic lead who can also be a part of the meetings providing the group with strategic oversight whenever required. It is suggested the Domestic Abuse HOG should have a strategic chair/co-chair to ensure accountability for the development, implementation, and delivery of the action plan and to provide strategic support in escalating issues.

2. Mailing list

Create a mailing list containing details of all members, adding in new members as and when identified and ensuring the list is kept up to date. Consider asking partner agencies to support with this by sharing relevant contacts.

3. Documents

The main documents needed for an effective and smooth functioning HOG are:

Terms of Reference (TOR)

The Terms of Reference (TOR) can be quite broad but should be detailed enough to clearly outline the principle, purpose and aims of the Domestic Abuse HOG, and how these aims will be met, roles and responsibilities of group members and with core group members listed under Membership. Please refer to the TOR section in the 'Resources to Develop Your Domestic Abuse and Housing Operational Group (HOG)' document.

Ways of Working Guidance

The TOR can be accompanied by a Ways of Working Guidance document which references the definition of VAWG that your borough has adopted, either the United Nations definition of VAWG which defines this as:

“Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”

or the Government definition of domestic violence and abuse:

“Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass but is not limited to the following types of abuse: psychological; physical, sexual, financial and emotional”

“Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour. Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim”

This document should also detail the multiple forms of VAWG. It should not be assumed that all group members will be familiar with the definition and multiple forms of domestic violence including:

- coercive control
- rape and sexual violence
- forced prostitution and sexual exploitation
- sexual harassment
- stalking
- ‘honour’ based abuse

- early and forced marriage
- spiritual abuse
- female genital mutilation
- modern slavery

Consider including an explanation of the borough's VAWG Partnership structure and what this looks like in terms of the Strategic Partnership Board, Statutory Boards, Operational Groups and Specialist Expertise Groups. This document can also include the borough/organisation's statement on Equality, Diversity & Inclusion. Suggested additional documents can include an Information Sharing protocol, Confidentiality Statement and an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion mission statement. Please refer to the 'Ways of Working' section in the 'Resources to Develop Your Domestic Abuse and Housing Operational Group (HOG)' document.

Agenda

A comprehensive agenda will include recurring items such as Data/Monitoring updates including Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) data for example reflecting number of domestic abuse approaches, number of referrals made to specialist domestic abuse services and reporting on trends. Data of equality of access to professional support for all under-represented groups including Black and Minoritised communities, LGBTQ+ communities, those with Disabilities, Gypsies, Travellers, and Roma communities, and those with other protected characteristics should be included. This EDI data should incorporate the Anti-Racism Charter to ensure that it is intersectional. Additional data can include reporting on projects such as the Sanctuary Scheme and any other borough specific projects. Other recurring agenda items can include:

- Part 4 Domestic Abuse Act 2021 updates
- Policy updates
- Updates and progress reporting on the VAWG action plan
- Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) learnings
- Best practice (organisations can report on what they are doing that distinguishes them nationally)
- Areas of concern to provide the opportunity to troubleshoot arising issues
- Training and guest speakers

Group members can also add presenting issues to the agenda as and when the need arises. Please refer to the agenda template.

4. Additional documents

VAWG Strategy

A core focus of the Domestic Abuse HOG is to identify priorities and activities for the annual action plan specific to the group that contributes to the overall delivery of the borough's VAWG strategic objectives. This will focus on the strategic objectives of preventing domestic abuse, supporting

victims/survivors, partnership working and holding abusers to account. A copy of the borough's VAWG Strategy should be sent out all members ahead of the first meeting and periodically thereafter.

Annual Action Plan

The Domestic Abuse HOG is the ideal setting for group members to start conversations on:

- Identifying the strategic priorities
- Preventing domestic abuse
- Effectively supporting victims/survivors
- Ensuring strong partnership working
- Holding abusers to account from a housing perspective

The Whole Housing Approach (WHA) recommends using the Theory of Change model in line with the borough's VAWG Strategy, to develop the Domestic Abuse HOG action plan for the year ahead and beyond. Group members can start by considering what the top three priorities for their organisation are, under each of the objectives, this can be done as an exercise in break out rooms in the first meeting and re-visited in subsequent meetings. The action plan should incorporate the Anti-Racism Charter to ensure that it is intersectional.

It is possible that the main Domestic Abuse HOG meetings may be large in terms of size and given the number of items to be discussed within the allocated timeframes, it may be considered creating a smaller Working Group with one front-line operational staff representing each of the main organisations. The purpose of this working group is to continue working on the action plan's priorities outside of the main Domestic Abuse HOG meetings. These meetings can be held on a quarterly basis and in between the main Domestic Abuse HOG's with overall accountability remaining with the main HOG. It is suggested that group members identify operational staff from their organisations who are best suited to be a part of these meetings. Please refer to the action plan template.

5. Ensuring an intersectional approach

Anti-Racism Charter

The Anti-Racism Charter should be used to implement meaningful anti-racist practice, to ensure Intersectionality at all stages and to inform discussions within the Group. The Anti-racism Charter should be sent out to all members ahead of the first meeting and periodically thereafter.

To find out more please visit:

- [Charter: Anti-Racism Working Group call to action](#)
- [Safety Across Faith and Ethnic \(SAFE\) Communities project - Impact Report](#)

6. Frequency of Meetings

It is recommended that Domestic Abuse HOG meetings are held on a quarterly basis with meeting papers sent to group members at least one week prior.



Benefits of the Domestic Abuse and Housing Operational Group (HOG)

The Whole Housing Approach's (WHA) mission is to improve the housing sector's response to domestic abuse and one of the ways it does this is through a Domestic Abuse HOG which offers housing providers a framework and set of standards within the CCR approach, for how they can effectively support victims and survivors.

Why should Housing be part of the response to domestic abuse?

The following quotes are from current Domestic Abuse HOG members:

"The example of housing attending refugees has inspired us to think about doing the same. In attending refugees it is recognised the sooner housing and move-on needs are discussed with survivors, the better outcomes there are" - Local Authority

"We have been able to work cross borough with a range of interventions which we had not considered doing before" - Local Authority

"It's been a pleasure taking part in the HOG, listening to all the conversations about how we can work together, and we are so pleased to be working with other services" - VAWG service

"Measuring the impact of work in the boroughs is helpful, seeing what difference the Whole Housing Approach and the DA Act has made" - Housing Association

How has the DA and Housing Operational Group (HOG) influenced practice?

Social housing providers have been able to share a collective voice in sharing best practice, learnings from other services, going on to incorporate these into their processes when supporting victims and survivors. Over the last few months, housing providers have been considering implementing STADA's Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation embedding the principles of:

Non-judgement - Creating an enabling environment where victim/survivors know they will be listened to. Housing providers can achieve this by allowing victim/survivors to disclose abuse without judgment, and by reassuring them that they will be believed, listened to and heard.

Being person-centred - How the work is done is as important as what is done. Housing providers will work with empathy, integrity and transparency. Housing providers are committed to empowering their staff to build knowledge, skills and confidence to identify and respond to domestic abuse in the most appropriate way that puts the victim/survivor at the heart of the intervention and support.

Amplifying victim/survivor voices - Valuing feedback from people with lived experience of domestic abuse. Housing providers seek to learn from victim/survivors, both staff and tenants, and work to amplify their voices to inform our development and improvement of practice.

Intersectionality - Domestic abuse is different for everyone and will never be all of one person's experience. Housing providers recognise that they may face barriers related to their identity such as race, gender, age, sexuality, faith, disability and marital status. Housing providers will take an intersectional approach that recognises a person's unique experience.

Safety - Creating safe homes and communities where perpetrators are held to account for their behaviour. Housing providers recognise that the safety of those who are experiencing domestic abuse is paramount and that safe intervention starts by talking to them and asking them what they need and want to happen.

Working towards a Coordinated Community Response (CCR) - Committing to working together to end domestic abuse. Housing providers will be part of a coordinated community response to domestic abuse by working collaboratively with local agencies to share information and to meet the needs of the individuals and families experiencing domestic abuse. Housing providers will communicate and build meaningful relationships with tenants, with colleagues and with those who have specialist knowledge, experience and powers to act to support housing providers to keep victim/survivors and their families safe and well.

Within a year of Domestic Abuse HOG membership, one local authority has successfully achieved DAHA accreditation and continues to share these principles with regular updates at the Domestic Abuse HOG. Other Domestic Abuse HOG members are going through the accreditation process and strengthening their response to domestic abuse as well as enabling a consistent DA approach between the Domestic Abuse HOG members going through DAHA. There has been a marked increase within the CCR approach by way of sharing best practice with complex domestic abuse cases and the recognition that support from other services at the Domestic Abuse HOG is available.

Housing providers have reported a positive change with front-line support for victims and survivors. There are regular requests for training ranging from learning about modern slavery and exploitation, harmful practices, housing options for perpetrators of domestic abuse to case management and domestic abuse awareness training. Housing providers and their operational staff are directly involved with the strategic annual action plan, working alongside the VAWG services, providing the opportunity to learn from best practice and help improve housing options.

The Domestic Abuse HOG has provided an ideal platform for VAWG by and for services to be a part of the CCR approach working with a range of housing providers and in turn, resulting in an increased awareness of these specialist services and an understanding of the roles they play in the lives of victim/survivors. The wealth of experience, knowledge and skills that these highly specialised services bring to the Domestic Abuse HOG is incalculable.



Useful Resources

What is the Whole Housing Approach (WHA)?

This provides an overview of the Whole Housing Approach (WHA) as well as its missions and aims.

<https://www.dahalliance.org.uk/who-we-are/whole-housing-approach/what-is-the-whole-housing-approach/>

- **Whole Housing Approach (WHA) Year 2 Report**

This guide provides our findings from the second year of running the Whole Housing Approach (WHA).

https://www.dahalliance.org.uk/media/11066/whole-housing-project-report_year-two_final.pdf

- **Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA)**

this will provide with you a range of information about the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation and membership.

<https://www.dahalliance.org.uk/>

- **Coordinated Community Response**

This provides an overview of the Coordinated Community Response (CCR) as well as our wider CCR Network.

<https://www.standingtogether.org.uk/what-is-ccr>

- **Anti-racism charter**

This charter calls for an end to unequal partnerships where unhealthy power dynamics operate creating inequality for Black and minoritised women and how to do this.

https://www.endingracisminvawg.org/ARWG_Call_to_Action.pdf

- **Safety Across Faith and Ethnic (SAFE) Communities project - Impact Report**

This report presents findings from The Safety Across Faith and Ethnic (SAFE) Communities project, which builds the capacity of voluntary and informal networks within faith and Black and Minoritised Communities to respond to domestic abuse and VAWG safely and appropriately.

https://www.standingtogether.org.uk/blog-3/blog-post-title-one-g9jmw_

Glossary of Terms

ARC – Anti-Racism Charter

The Anti-Racism Charter was formed by the Anti-Racism Working Group to address racism in the VAWG sector. The Charter calls for end to unequal partnerships where unhealthy power dynamics operate creating inequality for Black and minoritised women.

CCR – Coordinated Community Response

The Coordinated Community Response brings services together to ensure local systems truly keep survivors safe, hold abusers to account, and prevent domestic abuse.

DA – Domestic Abuse

Domestic Abuse is as an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence, in the majority of cases by a partner or ex-partner, but also by a family member or carer.

DAHA – Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance

The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance's (DAHA) working with housing providers to improve the housing sector's response to domestic abuse through the introduction and adoption of an established set of standards and an accreditation process.

HOG – Housing Operational Group

The Domestic Abuse and Housing Operational Group (HOG) brings together local agencies in one forum to address domestic abuse within and between different housing sectors.

TOR - Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference (TOR) is an agreed document which sets out the working arrangements for a network or forum and outlines the purpose and commitments of this.

V/S – Victim/Survivor

Victim/Survivor refers to the individual who is being subjected to domestic abuse. We know that different individuals have different language preferences. We have chosen the words victim/survivor for consistency, but we respect how individuals want to be identified.

VAWG – Violence Against Women & Girls

Violence Against Women & Girls (VAWG) is defined by the United Nations Declaration (1993) on the Elimination of Violence Against Women: “Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”

WHA – Whole Housing Approach

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.

