



Survey of Domestic Abuse Refuge Provision

May 2016

This report has been prepared for the Domestic Abuse Housing Related Support Services Modernisation Group, which has been convened by the Local Authority Homelessness and Supporting People Networks.

Contact

Local Authority Homelessness and Supporting People Networks

The Local Authority Homelessness and Supporting People Networks are made up of local authority managers and practitioners working in the field from across Wales. Their central aim is to improve homelessness and supported housing services.

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Acknowledgements

- Thanks to the Domestic Abuse Housing Support Services Modernisation Group for their input into the questionnaire and report
- Thanks to the accommodation staff who completed and returned the questionnaires
- Thanks to the Regional Development Co-ordinators for distributing and collecting the questionnaires
- Thanks also to the members of the group for their help in collating the response

Survey of Domestic Abuse Refuge Provision

Findings of the questionnaire investigating the standard of accommodation available for people within Domestic Abuse Services.

Introduction

In November 2013, the Domestic Abuse Housing Related Support Services Modernisation Group was re-convened in order to take forward the recommendations outlined in its original implementation plan created in May 2012. Recommendation 5 within this implementation plan focussed on the physical structure and condition of accommodation. It stated:

- that capital monies are top sliced to provide funding to develop suitable emergency accommodation in each region where it is evident that existing refuge provision does not meet temporary accommodation and suitability standards
- that the physical environment of longer term supported accommodation is improved to provide more self-contained units to meet the needs of service users (e.g. disability requirements)
- that existing resources be reconfigured to provide 'safe houses'/refuge type provision in recognition of the current economic situation where resources are scarce

In order to take this recommendation forward, it was agreed by the group that a questionnaire be developed to investigate the suitability of the property for direct access emergency refuge accommodation. For the purposes of this questionnaire the definitions used for refuge type accommodation were:

Refuge:

Refuge provides safe, secure, gender sensitive accommodation for female and male survivors and their children escaping domestic abuse. The accommodation is either in a shared environment (shared utilities with personal rooms), in self-contained accommodation within the same building (personal bathroom, kitchen etc), or in 'dispersed units' which is separately appointed accommodation. There is a wide range of options available across the UK's refuge network, and the decision on where a survivor is accommodated will be based on safety and any additional needs.

Safe Housing:

Some support providers across Wales also provide temporary safe houses that can be direct or non-direct access. The accommodation is fully self-contained in flats or houses, and is usually offer longer term stay residency for survivor or move on from refuge accommodation and often offer up to a 6 months Assured Short hold Tenancy. The accommodation can be either grouped together in a small cluster or dispersed within the community. As part of the provision the tenant would also receive a package of support to address their needs.

The questionnaire (**see Appendix 1**) was subsequently developed by the Local Authority Homelessness and Supporting People Networks and approved by the group. There were four parts to the questionnaire relating to:

- general questions about the project
- questions about the physical condition for the building
- questions about the house management, and finally
- questions about the location of the accommodation

This questionnaire was circulated to all DA providers during February and March 2015 and collected via the Regional Development Co-ordinators. The results have been analysed by the Networks' Senior Project Officer and this document outlines the key findings.

Analysis: Questions and Responses

The findings from the questionnaire which focussed on the suitability of emergency and support accommodation for survivors of domestic abuse and their children are outlined below.

There were a total of **43 respondents** to this questionnaire providing **206 places** which represents approximately **75%** of the rooms available as refuge accommodation across Wales. This is a very good level of response from the sector.

General Information

There were 17 different landlords providing refuge/safe accommodation and 21 different providers. Of the 43 accommodation services questioned 11 consisted of self-contained units and 32 were communal. The self-contained refuges were newer accommodation units. The oldest refuge was over 200 years old and had been a refuge for 19 years and the newest refuge was just a year old. Most were not planning any works to the accommodation due to a lack of available investment from funders or landlords to improve the standard of the accommodation although a few were in the process of carrying out rolling repairs and upgrades.

Physical Condition

Nearly all of the refuges fulfilled the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (Wales) Order 2006. Where refuges didn't fulfil the Order it was through lack of shared bathroom and/or kitchen space. All rooms had lockable doors and heating.

Although nearly all of the accommodation fulfilled most of the accommodation order the sizes of the bedrooms for the allocation of the number of people in each room were small according to the specifications within the Order. This is because many of the refuges state that they can and may accommodate more people in some of their bedrooms than the actual room size allows. This is the case even when counting under 10 year olds as half. This is often due to a lack of available, suitable accommodation and the wish to accommodate a victim and their family if at all possible.

The majority of communal refuges have separate playrooms and a room for one to one meetings. There are separate staff offices and a communal lounge for residents. All have at least one communal living room and many have a separate dining room as well. All self-contained accommodation met the requirements of the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (Wales) Order 2006.

House Management

All refuges present tenants with a written copy of the house rules on entry into the refuge and provide or display information about the facilities in the local areas. However, several do not provide written instructions for the equipment within the accommodation. Several refuges only provide verbal instructions.

In all of the accommodation units tenants have access to their rooms at all times and all staff spoke of the importance of getting the permission of residents before allowing the commissioning team access, and informing them before commissioners visited. Only 3 of the 43 refuges/safe houses were staffed on a 24 hour basis but all had a telephone number which could be called at any time of the day or night. For many of the refuges this was the national domestic abuse helpline number. Despite it being a requirement of the Suitability Order several refuges did not display the contact details of the management for the benefit of residents.

All had a complaints procedure and evacuation process which was available for all residents.

Although 3 did not have CCTV coverage all had working outside lights around the buildings. 26 had a door entry system and 23 had an intercom system.

Only one response didn't have an area outside where children could play and all had adequate boundary protection, but 21 responses were not accessible to people with disabilities.

Locality

All refuges/safe houses were in walking distance of a local shop and many were in walking distance of the local schools. The facility furthest away from each refuge was generally the police station.

Most of the refuges were not monitored by any service standard but several specified that the Housing Association had their own standard or that they were subject to Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS).

Key Findings

1. A quarter of all those refuges/safe houses that responded now consist of self-contained units
2. Although all of the accommodation fulfilled the requirements of the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (Wales) Order 2006 this does not necessarily mean that the accommodation was “fit for purpose” as refuge/safe accommodation for victims and their families fleeing domestic abuse. There are several quality standards which could be referred to when assessing this suitability
3. Many people in refuge accommodation are still sharing bathrooms with other families within the accommodation
4. Half of the refuges that responded were not suitable for people with a disability
5. Although all refuges offered 24 hour support nearly all did not have this support available “on site”

Funding

When analysing the provision of support accommodation for domestic abuse survivors and its conditions in Wales it is key to note the financial support of this provision. The main funding of refuge/safe accommodation is via local supporting people commissioning or grant funding. On average this has been cut by 7.6% in 2015/16¹ and services are facing further cuts to funding of provision in the coming year. This has implication for the sustainability and maintenance of the current provision as well as impacting on any recommendations on improving provision and meeting further needs.

In addition for the direct funding of accommodation being reduced, funding for related services such as floating support which enable survivors to move on from refuge support and maintain new tenancies is also being cut. This can lead to longer stays in refuge, reducing the frequency in which space is available to new service users.

In 2014/15 284 women were turned away from refuge services due to lack of space.

¹ <http://gov.wales/docs/caecd/research/2015/151019-supporting-people-programme-managment-charges-en.pdf>

Recommendations

The Domestic Abuse Housing Support Services Modernisation Group has put together the following recommendations in light of this report:

Welsh Government:

1. Commission guidance and develop physical standards specific to emergency refuge accommodation either by specifying standards for Wales or adopting existing quality standards

Commissioners/Funders:

1. Consult specialist DA services and service users to establish need. Ensure funding for provision of specialist DA refuge/safe house provision in their locality based on local need and meeting the 1 in 10,000 spaces per population as recommended by the Government Select Committee 1997 on domestic violence. All local authorities should be aiming to maximise the number of refuge spaces to meet local needs
2. Make provision within the budgets to improve the provision in their locality in reference to current and potential increase in need
3. Fund a mixture of single and family accommodation to mitigate the impact of Housing Benefit changes

Landlords:

1. That all RSLs consider their refuge provision in their capital improvement plans and asset management
2. Where buildings are old and/or unsuitable plan to replace with more suitable, accessible accommodation
3. That all landlords work with specialist domestic abuse services to make plans to convert all of their refuge provision to self-contained
4. That all landlords provide sufficient units of accommodation which are accessible for someone with disabilities

5. That all rooms are of a sufficient size to accommodate those staying in them
6. That every family in refuge accommodation has access to a bathroom solely for their own use

Specialist DA Refuge/Safe House Providers:

1. That all refuge providers display the contact details and information of the management
2. That all refuges provide written instructions for all equipment used by tenants
3. That all refuge/safe house provision has a suitable door entry system and CCTV facility particularly where 24 hour provision is not available on site

Domestic Abuse Housing Related Support Services Modernisation Group

1. To reconsider the wording of the initial recommendation in the light of this research, changes to Housing Benefit regulations and the use of refuge as short term, emergency accommodation with the option of suitable, sustainable move on options

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Survey of Domestic Abuse Refuge Accommodation

In accordance with its Implementation Plan The Domestic Abuse Housing Related Support Modernisation Group is surveying all landlords and providers of refuge provision to benchmark the suitability of the property for direct access emergency refuge accommodation.

This survey has been based on the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (Wales) Order 2006 and feedback from discussion with service providers and service users.

We would be very grateful if you would complete the attached survey regarding your properties. Please return all completed surveys to the person who sent you this document or to joy.williams@swansea.gov.uk no later than Friday 2^h February 2015.

Many thanks for your co-operation with this exercise. We shall, of course, inform you of our findings once we have collated all the evidence returned to us.

The Domestic Abuse Housing Related Support Modernisation Group

General information

1. Name of Landlord
2. Name of service provider
3. Name of project/property (optional)
4. What is the age of the building?
5. For how long has the property been used as a refuge?
6. Are there any plans in place for major works to the property?
7. Is the accommodation self-contained or communal?

Physical Condition

8. How many bedrooms are there in the property?
9. Please list the floor area of each room and the maximum number of beds in each room:

Room	Floor area (m ²)	Maximum number of beds

Please continue on a separate sheet

10. What is the minimum ceiling height of your rooms?
11. Please list all the bathroom and toilet facilities in your property stating which amenities are in each room e.g. bath, shower, toilet, wash hand basin.

Item	Number

Please continue on a separate sheet.

12. Do all of your rooms have a source of heating?

If not please state those which don't:

13. Please state the numbers of each item listed below in the food preparation area(s):

Item	Number

Please continue on a separate sheet.

14. Do you have a designated playroom?

15. How many children can safely play in this space?
16. Do you have separate office space?
17. Do you have a separate room for 1-1 sessions etc?
18. Are all the entrance doors to each unit of accommodation lockable?
19. Can all entrance doors to each unit of accommodation be opened from the inside without use of a key?
20. Please state the area of each of your communal living areas:

Communal space	Area

Please continue on a separate sheet.

21. Do any of your units of accommodation have their own exclusive living areas (own sitting/dining areas)? (if so how many)

House Management

22. Do you issue residents with a copy of the “house rules”? How are these set and reviewed?
23. Do you issue residents with written information relating to the operation of equipment within the premises including heating and hot water systems and fire fighting equipment?
24. Do you issue residents with information about the local area including details of local facilities, doctors’ surgeries, schools, laundrettes etc?
25. Do all of your residents have access to their rooms at all times? If not, what is your procedure for access.
26. Do you allow access to your property from the service commissioning team? If so, please detail on what basis this occurs:
27. Are staff members on site 24 hours per day?
28. Can residents contact a member of staff at all times?
29. Are the contact details of the scheme manager displayed for all residents to see?

30. Do you have a complaints procedure? Are all residents issued with a copy of this?
31. Do you have safety and security evacuation plans for your property? If so where are they displayed?
32. Does the property have working cameras/CCTV? Please detail the **rough** locations of these cameras:
33. Does the property have working outside lights? Please detail the **rough** location of these lights and state how they are switched on:
34. Does the property have a door entry system?
35. Does the property have an intercom system for entry?
36. Does the property have a safe place to play outside? (please describe):
37. Does the property have access for individuals who may be disabled? (please describe):
38. Does the property have adequate fencing/boundary protection? (please describe):

Locality

39. Is the property on a bus route?
40. What is the distance to the nearest grocery shop?
41. What is the distance to the nearest school? (primary and secondary)
42. What is the distance to the nearest police station?
43. What is the distance to the nearest doctors' surgery?
44. Do you use a service standard to monitor the standard of this property? (if so, which one)

Thank you for your co-operation in completing this questionnaire.

