

An Assessment of the needs of Domestic Abuse Victims residing in Safe Accommodation in Thurrock

Executive Summary

Background

There are some 2.3 million victims of domestic abuse a year aged 16 to 74 (two-thirds of whom are women) and more than one in ten of all offences recorded by the police nationally are domestic abuse related. Two women a week die at the hands of their partners or ex-partners, and one in five children experience domestic abuse growing up. Nationally, victims and survivors face what is viewed as a postcode lottery in accessing life-saving support. In 2017 government committed to reviewing the provision available to victims of domestic abuse. Following the completion of stakeholder engagement and responses to consultations the Domestic Abuse Bill set out 123 commitments both legislative and non-legislative. The Bill was passed into law as the Domestic Abuse Act April 29th 2021. The Act places a statutory framework for the delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in safe accommodation and provides clarity over governance and accountability. A requirement of the act is for all tier one authorities to assess the need for accommodation-based domestic abuse support in their area for all victims or their children, including those who come from outside the area. This will be supported by funding from central government titled the New Burdens Fund. This assessment consists of data from April 2018-March 2021, unless otherwise stated.

Thurrock Council is a tier one Authority, geographically placed within the two tier County of Essex. Whilst many other local authorities have been dependent on the Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government finances to fund safe accommodation on a year-to-year basis, Thurrock have prioritised this area of support. In 2016 the Housing department established a Housing Safeguarding Team, frontline professionals providing a community response supporting domestic abuse victims and survivors. More recently the housing department recommissioned Thurrock's women's refuge which is delivered by our local partner, Changing Pathways. This is the sole safe accommodation provision in Thurrock, as defined by the Act.

Across Thurrock, there are many different organisations working to protect and respond to survivors of domestic abuse. The Thurrock Violence Against Women's and Girls Strategic Board provides local strategic oversight and direction for this area of work, working alongside our community and accommodation support providers. Thurrock Council are members of the Countywide Southend. Essex, Thurrock Domestic Abuse Board (SETDAB) where all the tier one authorities across Essex strive towards achieving shared priorities in preventing and responding to domestic abuse.

Key findings from the needs assessment


1. The top four areas (unitary or district level local authority) where Thurrock's Refuge residents were most likely to come from: Southend-on-Sea (13%), Thurrock (11%), Basildon (10%) and Barking and Dagenham (8%). Combined, these areas made up approximately two-fifths of all victims staying in Thurrock.
2. There is a strong association within some data sets and the deprivation levels across wards in Thurrock. On average, 52% of residents in safe accommodation in Thurrock were

unemployed while approximately 42% of residents' employment status was unrecorded in the same time frame (based on the three year cohort). The unemployment rate is high which could be for a range of reasons, such as mental health needs, or given that 5% of residents required an interpreter and 9% of residents' first language was not English all are potential barriers in accessing and navigating employment or being financially able to continue to alternative accommodation.

3. Individuals identifying as having a disability was an emerging trend in the data. Although numerically small numbers, there is limited understanding of what these needs are and this requires greater focus. Mental health emerged as the largest need for residents, corroborated by the understanding that emotional/psychological and jealous/controlling behaviour abuse types affecting over half of residents each year.
4. The Act has defined children victims in their own right, therefore data recording across agencies will have to capture this with greater accuracy for future assessments. The specific needs of children residing in refuge is not known and will be a focus for future assessments.
5. This assessment has highlighted that there is a need for a regular multi-agency analytical product, overlaying partnership data sets and reviewing them all together rather individually within own organisations. This would be of enormous benefit to the local domestic abuse partnership board in assisting the local authority to deliver the duties under the Act.
6. Some out of scope matters were recognised in this assessment. No space/ or capacity to support was the second most recorded reason for being refused safe accommodation. There is a lack of specialised accommodation for minority groups or individuals who face additional barriers to reporting, or cannot/may not feel comfortable residing in current safe accommodation provision, such as LGBTQ+/Males/Male teenagers. Extending safe accommodation buildings/capital spending is outside the new burdens funding remit, however this has emerged as gap in current service within Thurrock and will require further exploration.

What were the characteristics of residents of safe accommodation in Thurrock?

What were the characteristics of domestic abuse victims in safe accommodation in Thurrock? April 2018- March 2021 (Source: Thurrock Refuge, 2021)



83% single, separated, divorced or widowed

13% married, civil partnered or in a relationship

Religion

- 58% No religion
- 23% Christian
- 7% Muslim
- 7% Unknown
- 6% Other religion

Average Age 35 **Age range** 21-71

Ethnicity

- Asian 8%
- Black 9%
- Mixed 4%
- Traveller 1%
- Other 3%
- White 74%

72% had children

7% were pregnant

100% Female **1%** Transgender **5%** LGBTQ+

88% were British nationals

5% had no recourse to public funds

53% were unemployed or economically inactive

6% were employed, in education or training

42% employment unknown

120 Thurrock Refuge clients

175 children

= 295 Domestic Abuse Victims

36% had a disability

1% had specific accessibility requirements

8% with primary language not English

5% required an interpreter

61% were initially 'high risk'

11% had a perpetrator living at their address all the time

2% had a perpetrator living at their address some of the time

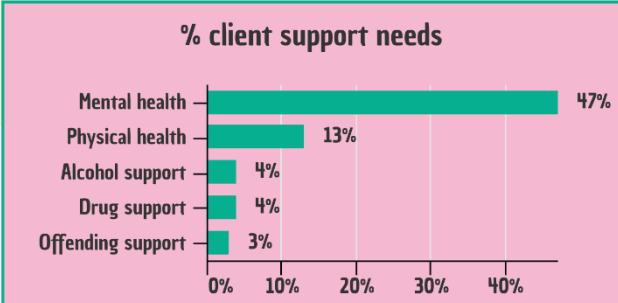
Top five local authority areas of origin

- Southend-on-Sea 13%
- Thurrock 11%
- Basildon 10%
- Barking/Dagenham 8%
- Castle Point 3%

35% were 'currently high risk' (at reporting)

56% were moving to a new address

6% were moving back to their old address



Recommendations

Thurrock Council will spend the New Burdens allocation 2021/22 to fund the following recommendations.

- Any underspend will be offset against current Thurrock Council commissioned domestic abuse services where the support offered meets the requirements of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. This approach is in line with that of Essex County Council and other Eastern Region Authorities.
- It is envisaged that any monies released from other funds as a result of offsetting will be reinvested to expand the Thurrock Council domestic abuse services offer, including, but not limited to, perpetrator provision services, noting the commissioning expectations within the draft Domestic Abuse Act statutory guidance.

Recommendations to Improve data collection and data sharing

Issue	Recommendation	Responsibility
1) Data recording of domestic abuse against adult and children victims (children experiencing at home and children experiencing within their own relationships) is inconsistently recorded across agencies.	All agencies who record domestic abuse to review recording processes to ensure that data, including children, is captured accurately and reflective of the true nature of domestic abuse concerns.	VAWG Strategic Board: A Data Task and finish group to be convened for data recommendations
2) Data is currently viewed only by the agency that records it. This does not provide an accurate view of prevalence and wider issues that are a concern across various agencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A multi-agency data analytic product to be created and updated and used by the local partnership board as an informative data source. This will provide a strengthened partnership overview of data from multiple sources. • Employ an analyst to produce data products for the quarterly board, annual reviews and 3 year assessments 	VAWG Strategic Board. Data Task and finish group Contributors will include all stakeholders contributing to this needs assessment
3) There are some discrepancies in the data pulled from the	Thurrock Housing Safeguarding Team to review the effectiveness of the system	VAWG Strategic Board. Data Task and finish group Housing Safeguarding Team

system that records the Housing Safeguarding Team data on domestic abuse cases.	used for case management of domestic abuse cases	
Recommendations to improve provision to meet the needs of those residing in safe accommodation		
Issue	Recommendation	Responsibility
1) There is a relatively strong association within police data and housing safeguarding data between domestic abuse and deprivation. Residents from Thurrock are the second largest group that reside in refuge.	Employ a financial worker within refuge to strengthen financial stability of residents in refuge	VAWG Strategic board- VAWG coordinator Changing Pathways
2) Data identified that 36% of residents in refuge within the data period had disability. This has increased as a percentage year-on-year. We do not have an in-depth knowledge of what the disabilities are and how best to support them.	Further scoping exercise within refuge to establish nature of disabilities presented and create range of support options to meet these.	Housing Department (commissioner of refuge) and Changing Pathways
3) Data identified that 41% of residents in refuge in the data period had mental health needs, this has increased as a percentage year-on-year. Respondents to national surveys also reported deteriorating mental health, less able to cope with abuse and that the pandemic triggered abusive memories.	Further scoping exercise within refuge to establish nature of mental health needs presented and create range of support options to meet these.	Housing Department (commissioner of refuge) and Changing Pathways
4) Data identified that alcohol and drug support were	Further scoping exercise within refuge to establish nature of drug and alcohol	Housing Department (commissioner of refuge) and Changing Pathways

identified needs for residents of Thurrock refuge	issues presented and create range of support options to meet these.	
5) Residents in refuge are experiencing a complexity of needs and would benefit from additional support to help assist them	Employ complex case workers to assist individuals within refuge in pursuing the additional help they require within refuge or at point of move on and resettlement	Thurrock Housing safeguarding Team to recruit 2 workers. Changing pathways to identify individuals within refuge that would benefit from additional support
6) 175 children resided in refuge during the data period. Under the Act children are now victims in their own right, experiencing domestic abuse. Children need an increased level of support as a direct victim.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counselling to be offered to all children in refuge as a victim of domestic abuse or sexual abuse in domestic settings. • Employ a Childrens worker based in refuge to work alongside existing worker • Tuition for children so they are supported whilst waiting for school places or they need extra educational support due to disruption to school provision. 	Childrens commissioning
Mental health was identified as the largest need for residents. The offer of counselling will contribute towards addressing mental health linked with trauma.	Counselling to be offered to all adults in refuge as a victim of domestic abuse or sexual abuse in domestic settings.	
Recommendations to review current safe accommodation options to increase accessibility for all		
Issue	Recommendation	Responsibility
1) Extending safe accommodation buildings is outside the new burdens funding remit, however this has emerged as gap in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thurrock Council to explore other safe accommodation and funding options to expand safe accommodation provision for specific groups who are not 	VAWG Strategic Board Housing Department (commissioner of refuge)

<p>current service in the Borough.</p> <p>No space/capacity to support' was the second most recorded reason for being refused safe accommodation and represents unmet accommodation and support need.</p> <p>There is a lack of safe accommodation for specific groups, e.g. LGBTQ, Men/ male teenagers/ Gypsy Travellers or individuals heavily using drugs and/or alcohol.</p> <p>Nationally, teenage boys are not accepted to refuge post age 16.</p>	<p>currently accessing it or are unable to reside in it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thurrock to explore opportunities to extend overall capacity of safe accommodation offer within the borough • Work with Childrens social services to have a memorandum of understanding in place with refuge provider regarding support that can be offered to children unable to stay at refuge 	<p>Childrens Social Services Changing Pathways</p>
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