



A Safe Home

Ending Homelessness by ensuring people fleeing domestic abuse have access to a safe home



Together
we will end
homelessness



Crisis and the APPG on homelessness:

2016 – APPG on homelessness established with Crisis as secretariat

2017 – evidence heard into domestic abuse and homelessness

2019 – Domestic Abuse Bill amendment supported through APPG

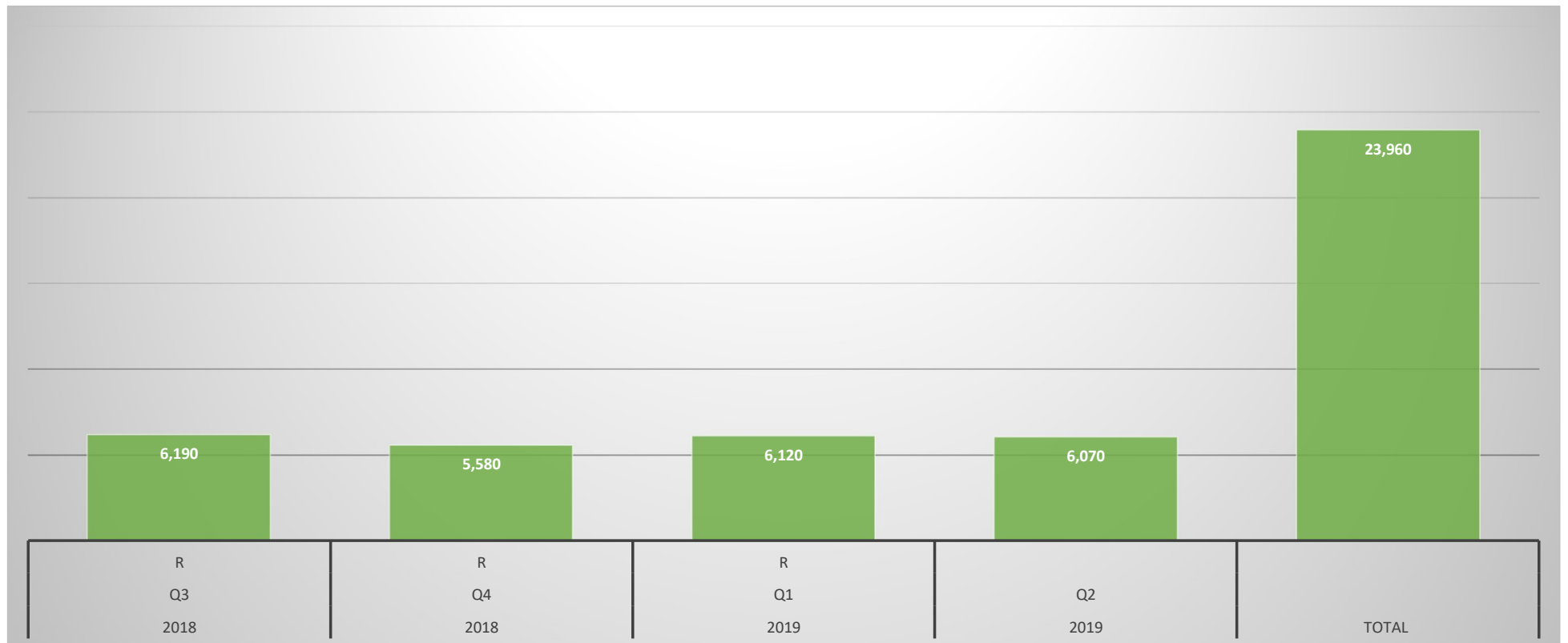
2020 – ongoing work on Domestic Abuse Bill (media and campaigning support)

Statistics & LA responses

Homelessness and domestic abuse

- Official statistics for England show that in 2017/ 18, 6,850 people were accepted as homeless by their local authority because of a **violent relationship breakdown** – 12% of all acceptances
- This is pre-HRA and only includes people accepted as homeless and owed the main homelessness duty.
- In England, in the year to June 2019, 24,000 people were assessed as being owed the prevention or relief duty after being made homeless as a direct result of domestic abuse

Table A2 - Reason for loss of last settled home for households assessed as owed a prevention or relief duty by quarter England, 2018 Q3 to 2019 Q2



Local Inconsistency

- LAs can provide very different experiences
- Some will seek to provide safe spaces as soon as possible; Part 4 of the 2020 DA Bill requires LAs to provide refuges and safe accommodation – but still disconnect between unitary and 2-tier authorities
- Some use local connections to limit access to refuges
- Others have asked women to return to perpetrators to provide them with proof of being unable to stay
- Temporary accommodation – may be shared, insecure, and unsupported
- Fear of being homeless and receiving no help may trap people into staying in dangerous situations

Behind the official statistics...

- 24,000 people owed a prevention or relief duty as a result of domestic abuse is less than 10% of the total 272,000 total applications where these duties were owed
- One in five of Crisis' members who are women have had their homelessness directly caused by domestic abuse.
- Similarly, research by St Mungo's found that a third of their female clients said that domestic abuse had contributed to their homelessness
- Crisis' Nation's Apart report (2014) found 61% of homeless women and 16% of homeless men had experienced domestic abuse
- Hestia (just one agency providing refuges, community outreach, IDVAs and MARAC support) worked with 2,225 people recovering from the trauma of domestic abuse in 2019, including 668 children
- Alongside the hidden nature of many women's homelessness and a reluctance on behalf of some people to report abuse, it is likely the official figure is an underrepresentation of the true scale of the problem.

A safe settled home?

- July 2018 – June 2019:
- 120,690 households were provided with settled housing (6m+) following the end of the prevention or relief duty. Of these:
- 39,170 were in the PRS, but
 - 5070 were in HMOs
 - 1160 were lodging (not with friends of family)
- 33030 were in social housing, but
 - 19,130 were in supported housing or hostels

Shared housing lacks the security and privacy that people homeless due to domestic abuse need – unless in specialist high quality refuges

Refuge: safety and expert support

Safe spaces (response to lockdown risks)

- Hestia's UK Says No More campaign helped highlight the increased challenges faced by victims who are forced to isolate at home with perpetrators.
- Developed a partnership with Boots so that victims of domestic abuse are able to seek help in Boots pharmacies in a bid to make it easier for them to access support during the [coronavirus](#) lockdown.
- Safe spaces have been installed in Boots consultation rooms where survivors can contact domestic abuse support services, the charity Hestia said.

Turned away

- Adequate investment in good quality and specialist refuges is vital part of any response to domestic abuse.
- The Government's announcement in Summer 2019, that it will place a legal duty on local authorities to provide and fund refuge spaces was welcome, but...
- ...it followed a period since 2010 when one sixth of refuges have been closed due to lack of funding (APPG 2017) and funding for domestic violence refuges was cut by 25% between 2010-2017

Risk upon risk, trauma upon trauma

- Women's Aid (2018) found that a shortage of refuge spaces meant:
 - 45% of people fleeing domestic violence end up sofa surfing – putting pressure on them, friends and family, and leaving people unsettled, lacking privacy and in distress
 - 12 % of women reported sleeping rough, putting them at risk of assault
- The average age at which a homeless woman dies is just 42

Refuge provision

- Refuges are essential services offering physical safety and access to specialist support and risk assessments through:
 - DASH assessments
 - Counselling
 - MARAC referrals and liaison
 - Support with parenting skills
 - Trauma-informed approaches
 - IDVAs
- Support that goes beyond the usual “commissioned service model”, such as
 - Therapeutic recreation
 - Children’s workers
- Support with accessing accommodation



H1st for women with complex needs

- Refuges which accommodate women and children may not be appropriate for women with more complex needs (mental health, drug or alcohol problems, difficulties in regulation emotions)
- Services need to be trauma informed and able to include people who may be unable to regulate their emotions
- Housing First services are an evidence based response to ending the homelessness of people who may find it difficult to cope in shared housing settings, and who will be left to a cycle of homelessness, repeated exposure to risk through returning to dangerous relationships, custody and emergency hospital admissions

Long term safe & stable homes are needed for refuges to operate effectively

- On 17th February the government announced that 75 councils across England will share £16.6 million to help fund domestic abuse refuge services. Further money announced in May.
- However, refuges become full and may still turn people away if there is nowhere for people to move on to.
- And, while refuges are an incredibly important resource, in the long term people fleeing abuse need safe and stable homes to rebuild their lives in...

I lost money, I lost a house, I lost a car, I lost friends, I lost extended family, I lost routines. I lost all I had known for the last six years and traded it for a single room in a women's refuge far from anywhere we knew, sharing a bathroom with three other families, universal credit and fear of the unknown.

All those things I lost but I felt free, I had a taste of happiness in that small room. It was our haven and safe place

Things started to look better and brighter every day. Through the support of the charity we were rehoused after a year of battling with the council.

It was a joyous yet scary moment when we walked in our new two bedroom flat. It felt BIG. Now we were all alone. [My children] followed me around from room to room and [for some time] wouldn't play in their own bedroom without me close

When we had been living in our flat for about three months, I'd fallen into a routine of school runs, going to the gym and was slowly starting to gain confidence in myself. I began to love myself again and was proud of what I had achieved and was ready to start the rest of my life ...



Priority need

For all people homeless as a direct cause of domestic abuse

The legal position & its shortcomings

- The Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) means that local authorities now have a legal duty to provide meaningful support to everyone who approaches them as homeless. This includes support to help prevent their homelessness from occurring in the first place, and for those people who are already homeless, help to find them a home.
- Despite this welcome change, there is no guarantee that people fleeing domestic abuse will receive an offer of settled housing if these two options fail to prevent or resolve their homelessness

Proving “vulnerability”

- Currently, unless a person experiencing domestic violence can prove they are “significantly more vulnerable than an ordinary person would be if they became homeless” then they would not be defined as being in priority need and eligible for an offer of settled housing.
- The broad nature of this definition means it is very difficult to apply consistently. There is concern that the vulnerability test is being applied in a way that is driven by resources, and that it creates a perverse incentive in that respect as legal entitlement is difficult to establish.
- It retraumatizes people and emphasises the damage done by perpetrators – not strengths based!

It doesn't have to be like this

- Despite evidence showing that domestic abuse is too often a direct cause of homelessness, only 2% of people accepted as homeless and in priority need were considered to be a priority because they were vulnerable as a result of domestic abuse in 2017 (many will have had children).
- People who are not found to be vulnerable enough face the unconscionable choice of returning to an abusive or potentially life-threatening situation, or the devastating consequences of homelessness.
- We are not meeting survivors' need for secure and longer-term accommodation through the current legislation in England, under which many survivors are not seen as a priority for settled accommodation as they are not deemed vulnerable enough.
- Following changes introduced in the Homeless Persons (Priority Need) (Wales) Order (2001), automatic priority need for housing was extended to people homeless due to fleeing domestic abuse in 2001.
- In 2017/18 11% of households in Wales were eligible for help due to domestic violence... a very similar level to England. Survivors are entitled to the help they need, without significant additional costs to local authorities.

We can and should do better

- A FOI request submitted in Spring 2019 on behalf of the APPG found that if all cases presenting with domestic abuse were made priority need Crisis' research team estimated that 1,960 additional households per year, or approximately 490 per quarter, would be owed main homelessness duty across local authorities.
- This number is in addition to households who currently present as homeless as a result of domestic abuse and are already found in priority need.
- It's not a huge number, but...
- Under the current system survivors of domestic abuse are not automatically entitled to help with finding permanent housing, and this is leaving nearly 2,000 people who are not deemed vulnerable enough for an offer of permanent housing
- Access to safe, secure housing is vital to supporting survivors in moving out of dangerous situations, protecting them from further abuse.

Increasing risks during lockdown

- Reports of domestic abuse sent to UK police forces by [Crimestoppers](#) [have surged by nearly 50 per cent during the lockdown](#)
- Hestia has seen a 47 per cent rise in victims using its free domestic abuse support app Bright Sky.

A positive outcome

- Speaking at the government's daily [coronavirus](#) briefing on 2nd May, Local Government Secretary Robert Jenrick announced that the Domestic Abuse Bill going through parliament **will ensure victims "get the priority need status that they need to access to local housing services much more easily"**.
- Mr Jenrick said it will be fully-funded - ensuring that no one has to choose between staying somewhere they know is unsafe or becoming homeless.
- Domestic Abuse Bill passed the 3rd reading on 6th July 2020
- However, access to housing still needs strengthening – especially enabling “3rd party applications” so people know they will have somewhere safe to go at the point they leave

Crisis' key asks

Automatic priority need



No one should be retraumatized by having to “prove” they are “more vulnerable” than the average person who becomes homeless after surviving domestic abuse

All people homeless as a result of domestic abuse should be automatically considered to be in priority need for a secure, safe home from which they can rebuild their lives.

BUT: still need to work to ensure 3rd party applications possible to ensure people have somewhere safe to go at the point of leaving



Duty to refer

Public bodies have a duty to refer to local authorities if they believe someone is homeless or at risk of homelessness

Hospitals, ambulance services and police should be trained to recognise domestic abuse and supported to make referrals

(Scope to learn from the Safe Spaces initiative?)



Housing supply

There should be investment in 90,000 new affordable social homes each year (for the next 15 years) to ensure core homelessness is addressed.

In addition, there needs to be access to safe & secure:

- Refuge accommodation – with sustainable strategic funding, not pots and short term initiatives
- Housing First for people fleeing domestic abuse who need long term support



THANK YOU