

# The Westminster VAWG Housing First service: why it works

28th March 2023

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TOGETHER**  
against domestic abuse



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# Who are we?

**Standing Together** is a national charity bringing communities together to end domestic abuse. We exist to keep survivors and their families safe, hold abusers to account, and end domestic abuse by transforming the way organisations and individuals think about, prevent, and respond to it.

We do this through an approach that we pioneered, and which we are known across the UK and internationally for, called the **Coordinated Community Response (CCR)**.

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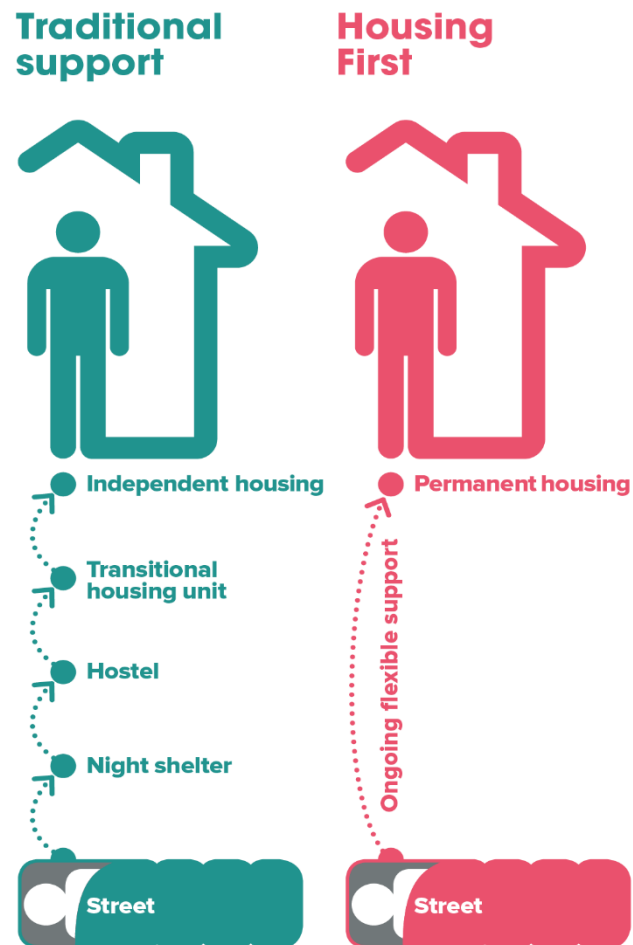


A Coordinated Community Response (CCR) **brings services together** to ensure local systems truly keep survivors safe, hold abusers to account and prevent domestic abuse.

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# What is Housing First?

- A Housing and Support model for people with multiple disadvantage
- Developed in 1990s in New York City
- Adopted internationally; currently 105 services in England
- Based on a set of 7 principles
- 70% - 90% tenancy sustainment rate and improved outcomes in health and wellbeing



# About the Westminster VAWG Housing First project: three key elements



Housing coordination and  
evaluation



City of Westminster

Commissioning (funded by DLUHC RSI)

Southern  
Housing  
Group



Sanctuary  
Supported Living



L&Q

OCTAVIA 



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saha  
Transforming Lives

About the  
Westminster  
VAWG Housing  
First project:  
three key  
elements

# About the Westminster VAWG Housing First project: three key elements



solace

Specialist VAWG provider  
delivers the support

## Referral criteria :

- Experience of long term or recurrent homelessness
- Affected by VAWG
- Poor mental health and/or substance or alcohol misuse.
- Have a history of non-engagement with services

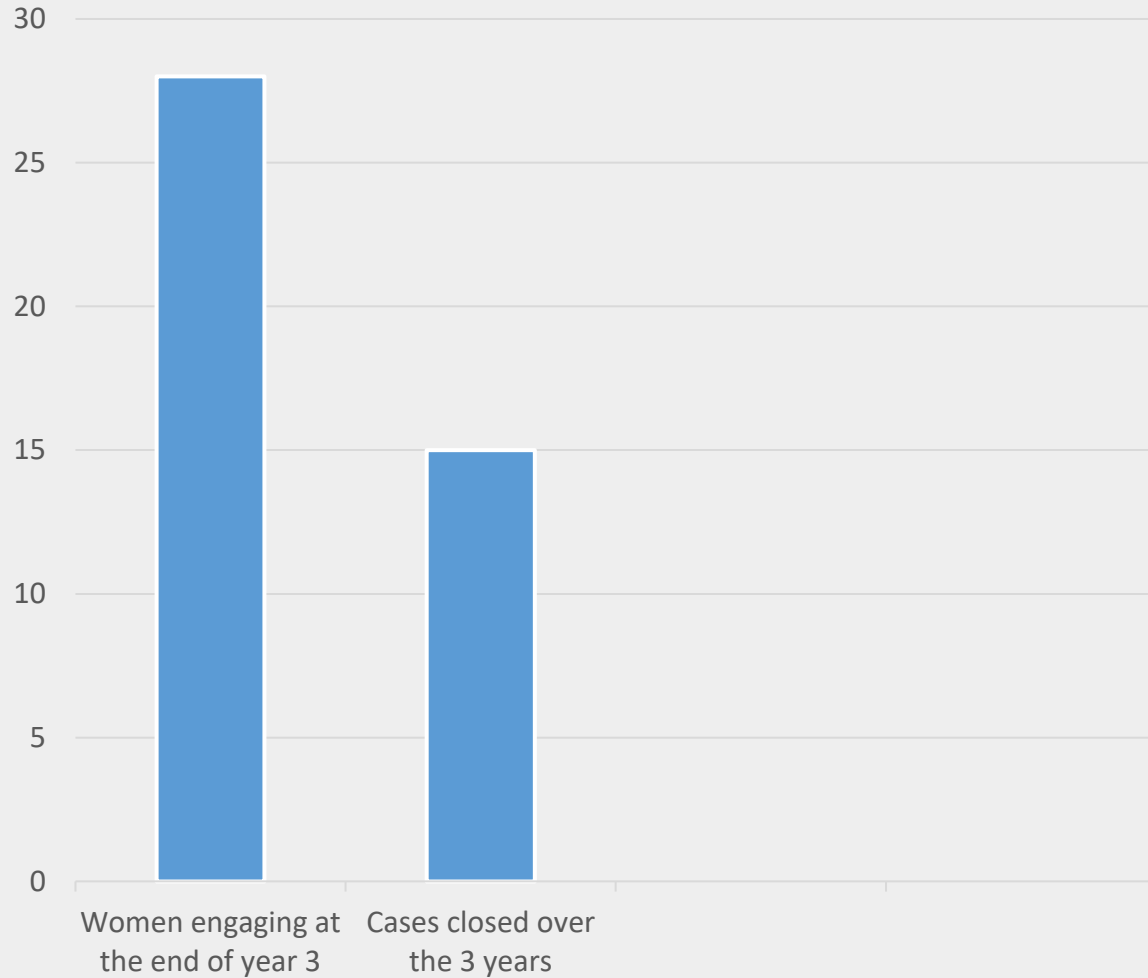
## Demographics:

- Majority aged between 31-50 years old
- Majority white British/white other
- Majority identified as cis-gender women (1 non-binary)
- Majority identified as heterosexual
- 13/28 recorded as having a disability

**28 women  
supported at the  
end of year 3**



Engagement stats



**Engagement**

Since it opened to referrals in September 2019 the project has housed **25 women**.

Overall tenancy sustainment rate across the three years is **93%**

## Housing and Tenancy sustainment



*“I have sorted out all my benefits, got my flat, got my cat and I am happy”*

*Westminster VAWG Housing First client*

# Experience of domestic abuse/VAWG

- 8 women were supported around door guarding once they have moved into their flats.
- 14 women were at risk from a current or ex-partner. 10 were openly discussing it with the Solace team.
- One woman was sexually assaulted in her flat and has since been offered another property.
- The team were supporting 5 women who were currently sleeping rough and at risk of VAWG on the streets.
- The team were supporting 5 women who were at risk of VAWG when selling sex.

# Experience of domestic abuse/VAWG

What worked	Challenges
Specialist VAWG support – adapted safety planning	DA and VAWG a key factor in many of the closed cases
Coordinating a multi-agency response	Lack of response/judgement from other professionals
Working with the perpetrator/professionals supporting the perpetrator	Emotional and physical safety of support team

## **Alcohol use – 11/28**

## **Substance misuse – 23/28**

- 14 on script/engaging with drug or alcohol services
- All actively discussing issues with support team

## **Physical health – 19/28**

- All registered with a GP

## **Mental health – 28/28**

- 5 engaging with some form of support
- 21 actively discussing issues with support team

# **Health and wellbeing**

# Financial integration

In year three the Solace team supported:

- 7 women to open bank accounts
- 12 women to maximise their income by applying for benefits, cost of living payments, winter fuel payments etc.

# Social integration

16 out of the 28 women open to the service at the end of year three were recorded as having had one or multiple children removed from their care

## In year 3 the Solace team supported:

- 5 women to connect with children (this includes adult children).
- 8 women to engage with family or friends.
- 5 women to engage with education, training or volunteering.
- 11 women to engage with 'meaningful activities' (other than education, training, or volunteering).



*“So, one of my women, I took her bowling for the first time in, like ages. She said she's not had a birthday without someone, you know, controlling what was happening. So, that was really fun for her. And then another client, actually, we took her on one of those Uber boats to Greenwich, and it was the first birthday that she's had in years, probably decades, where she was sober. So, it was a huge, huge milestone for her”*

*Solace team member*



# Recommendations from the year three learning report



# Recommendations for service delivery

- Start from the recognition that women will come to the service with historic and/or current experience of domestic abuse and/or VAWG, that their experiences of homelessness will have been different - upskill
- Be prepared to lead/coordinate a multi agency response around the woman.
- Educate – VAWG/DA awareness and safety planning – with women and other professionals.
- Recognise women who are mothers – work with this.
- Hold perpetrators accountable – identify them as perpetrators, work with their needs and support providers.

## Recommendations for commissioners/those in strategic roles

- Map and audit to ascertain need – where are the women? Work with partners to identify less visible groups e.g. black and minoritized, LGBTQ+
- Be hands on – support services to escalate systems barriers and blockages in statutory pathways. Collate this data.
- Commission specialist housing coordination.
- Housing First relies on strong partnerships – trauma and gender informed commissioning makes a difference.

- **Housing First for Women must be one element of a wider strategy to identify and respond to the unmet and unseen needs of women sleeping rough.**
- **Wider response to perpetrators across the homelessness sector and input from perpetrator specialist services.**
- **Understanding and meeting the needs of Black and Minoritized Women impacted by multiple vulnerabilities.**
- **Housing First for Couples**

**Wider  
policy/strategic  
recommendations**



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**Thank you  
for attending**

**General Enquiries:**

[Hf.homelessness@standingtogether.org.uk](mailto:Hf.homelessness@standingtogether.org.uk)



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# BCP Respite Rooms Pilot

Amy Smith



# Background

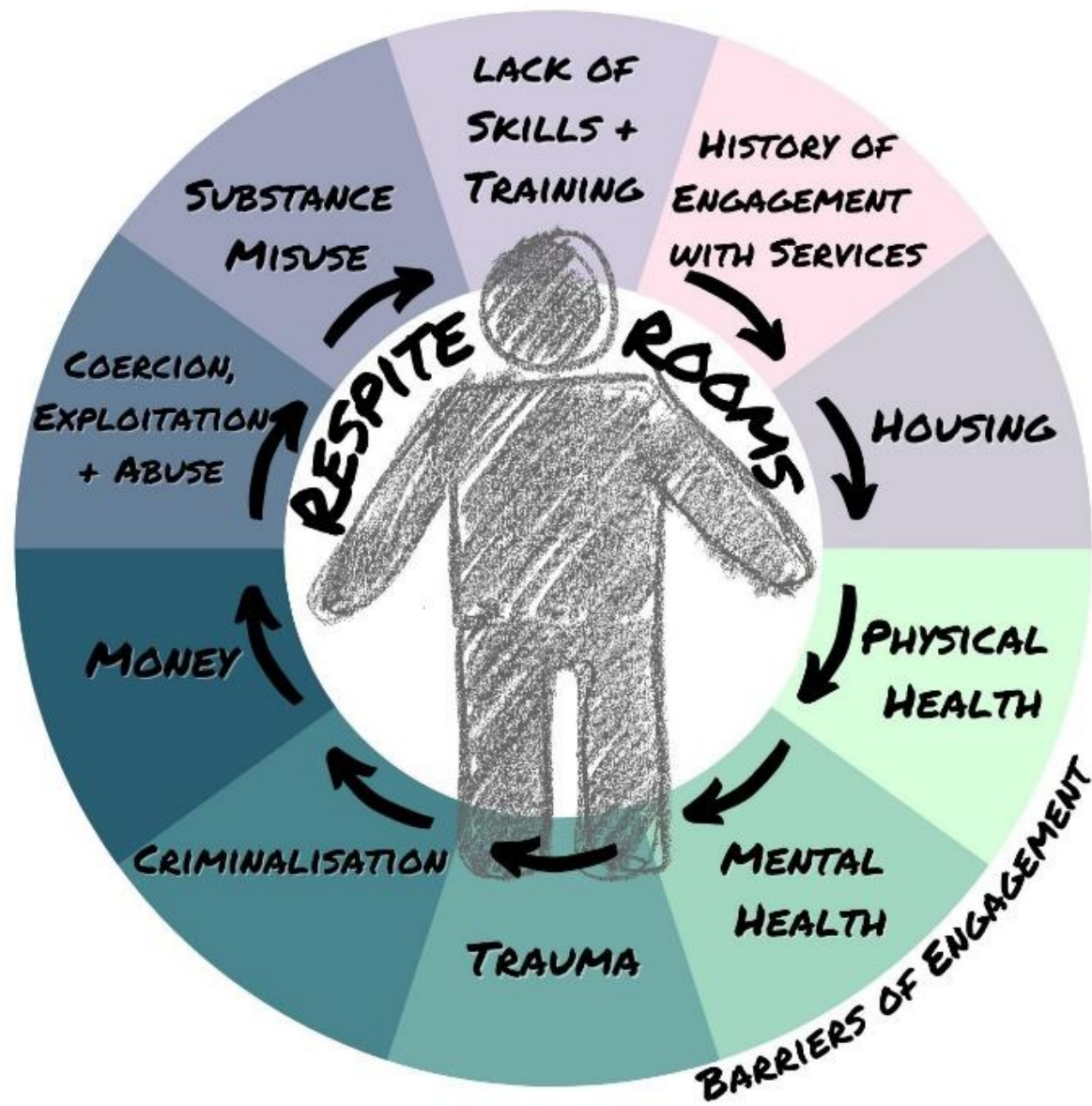
- DLUHC funded 12-month pilot
- Identified gap in service provision in local area
- 12-bed spaces across 3 properties



# Customer Group

- Single female
- Verified as rough sleeping or at risk of homelessness
- Experiencing VAWG
- Higher/complex support needs that would act as a barrier to other services
- Have a local connection to BCP area





# Support Offer

- Short 6-12 week stay
- Flexible, person-centred, intensive support
- Trauma-informed support
- Safety planning and harm minimisation

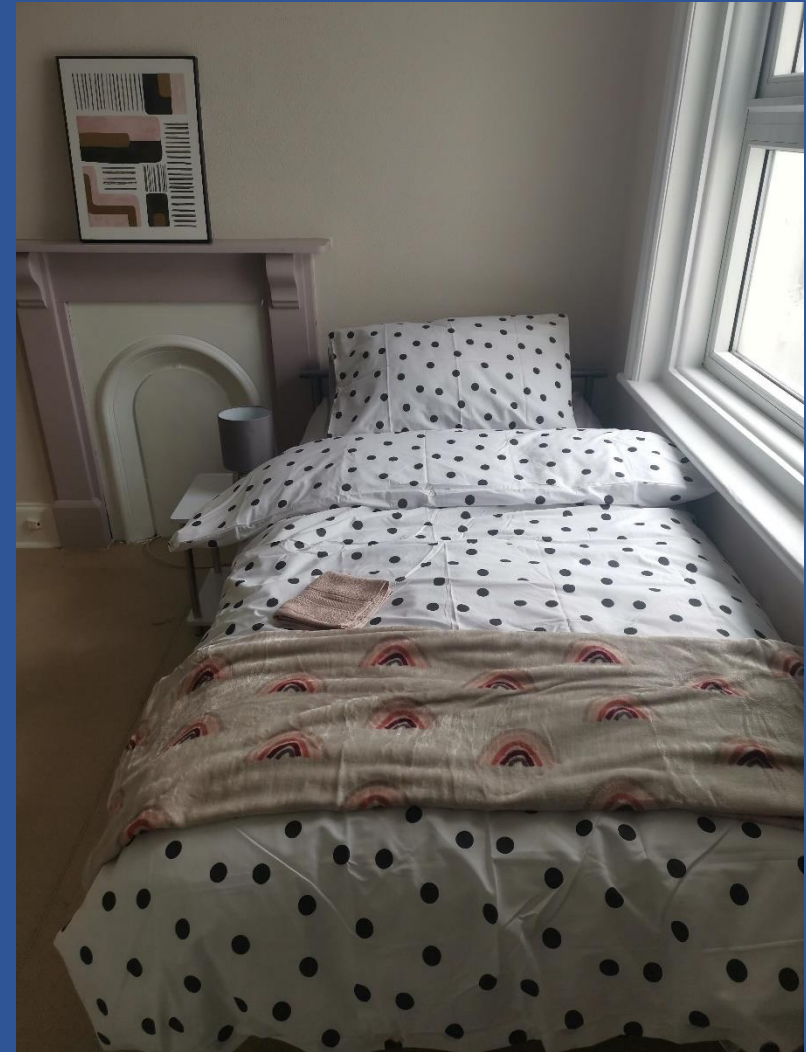
# Outcomes So Far

- 41 women supported in the service
- 76 referrals received
- No repeat admissions
- 88% positive move-on



# Learning & Best Practice

- Increase length of stay
- Move on challenges
- Respite Rooms running alongside existing DA service.
- Focus on PIE



# What's next?

- Service extended for 3 more years
- Hybrid IDVA/ISVA worker to be brought into the service from April, to expand support reach for women experiencing VAWG in the community.
- Service evaluation report from DLUHC.