

## **Response to Consultation**

### **Improving Access to Social Housing for Victims of Domestic Abuse**

#### **Question 1: Do you agree with the proposal to use statutory guidance to recommend the exemption of victims of domestic abuse housed in refuges, and other forms of safe temporary accommodation, from any residency requirement?**

Yes we agree with this proposal but request the guidance covers how the below points could be managed:

Many districts do not have a refuge and some victims might wish to move to such a district and should not be penalised purely because there wasn't a refuge in their chosen area or there wasn't a vacancy at the time they needed to flee from the abuse.

Also, prior to agreeing to the exemption, the local authority or organisation managing the housing register should be in agreement that it is safe for the victim to be within its district.

Some local housing authorities seem reluctant to have a refuge in their district due to the additional work it creates through an increase in housing and homelessness applications. This council is not one of them and did financially contribute towards the development of the refuge that's in our district. However, the government might wish to consider whether removing local connection criteria could result in some local housing authorities being even more reluctant to have a refuge in their district and how this could be overcome.

We would like the guidance to include what is meant by "other forms of safe temporary accommodation".

If a victim of abuse applies to go onto the housing register within another district, does this automatically create an application for assistance under the Homelessness Reduction Act which the authority will also need to manage? If yes, this could open up other housing options such as assistance to obtain private sector accommodation.

#### **Question 2: We would also like to find out how local authorities who currently apply a residency test, or local connection test, as part of their qualification criteria take account of the needs of victims of domestic abuse who are housed in refuges.**

We allow victims of domestic abuse who have been accepted as statutorily homeless by ourselves or any other Lincolnshire Housing Authority to go onto our housing register whether or not they are accommodated in a refuge.

**Question 3: Views are sought on the advantages and disadvantages of this proposal to apply the 'medical and welfare' and the homelessness reasonable preference categories to victims of domestic abuse who are living in refuges.**

Advantages

- Increase prospects of rehousing
- Increase prospects of receiving an offer of housing in chosen area
- Reduce bed blocking within refuges
- A quicker throughput will enable more victims to be helped and possibly reduce the overall number of bed spaces required

Disadvantages

- Quicker turnover will increase void costs for the refuges – loss of rent and increase in cleaning and maintenance costs
- Some refuges have to keep very high occupancy levels to meet their contracts and any increase in voids will make it harder for them to meet this condition
- Could the victim be offered social housing too soon i.e. before they are either mentally ready or have the funds available

**Question 4: Local authorities are invited to provide details of how their current allocation policies ensure that those who are living in refuges are given appropriate priority.**

Applicants are placed into band 1+ (Highest band) if this council has accepted a statutory homelessness duty.

They are placed into band 1 if the duty has been accepted by any other Lincolnshire local housing authority.

They are placed into band 1 if the duty has been accepted by any other local housing authority outside of Lincolnshire and the applicant meets the local connection criteria.

This applies to those in refuges as well as other victims of domestic abuse.

**Question 5: Do you agree that the guidance should encourage local authorities to use their existing powers to support their tenants who are the victim of abuse to stay in their homes if they wish to do so? We are also interested in finding out how local authorities are currently using existing powers to help tenants who are victims of domestic abuse stay in their homes.**

Yes guidance should ensure stock holding local authorities use their existing powers to support their tenants who are victims of domestic abuse. This needs to be extended to cover all social housing, not just local authority housing.

The guidance could also cover what assistance could be offered to support the victim to safely remain in their home such MARAC, legal remedies and sanctuary schemes.

**Question 6: Please provide details of how your authority take advantage of the existing powers to enable victims can stay in their homes.**

NA – we are a stock transfer authority.

Although we don't have any housing stock, we work closely with MARAC and IDVA's to support anyone within our district and do have a Sanctuary scheme. We will assist victims to move if this is their wish or we consider it is unsafe for them to remain in their current home.