

A strategic 'win-win': Harnessing the power of partnerships to unlock the private sector, slash TA costs, and support survivors of domestic abuse

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Article summary

Local authorities are facing a growing challenge: rising homelessness, escalating temporary accommodation (TA) costs, and increasing demand for safe housing options for survivors of domestic abuse (DA). Between emergency refuge provision and independent living lies a critical "missing middle" where many survivors become trapped in unsuitable & costly accommodation.

By partnering with Registered Providers & specialist support organisations, councils can utilise Exempt Accommodation as a strategic housing solution. This approach transforms private rented housing into safe, supported accommodation, creates a clear pathway from crisis to independence, & significantly reduces the financial burden on local authorities through full Housing Benefit recovery.

The result is a scalable, regulated & financially sustainable model that helps authorities meet their duties under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) while improving outcomes for survivors.

The Costly Reality Facing Local Authorities

Across the country, local authorities are under unprecedented pressure from rising homelessness and growing demand for temporary accommodation. For survivors of DA, the consequences can be particularly severe. Despite the best efforts of housing teams, many victims are placed in expensive bed & breakfast accommodation, nightly-paid temporary accommodation, or unsuitable hostel environments. While these options may provide immediate shelter, they rarely offer the safety, stability or specialist support required for someone recovering from abuse.

The result is a costly, reactive system that often moves survivors from one crisis to another rather than creating a pathway towards long-term independence. At a time when councils are facing significant financial pressures, continuing to rely on high-cost temporary accommodation is becoming increasingly unsustainable.

The Missing Middle in Domestic Abuse Housing

DA services have traditionally focused on two ends of the housing spectrum:

1. Emergency refuge accommodation.
2. Independent settled housing.

What is often missing is the stabilisation stage between the two. Many survivors are not ready to move directly

from refuge into independent living. They require a period of recovery, support & confidence-building before sustaining their own tenancy successfully. A successful housing pathway should, therefore, consist of three stages:

1. **Crisis Stage.** Immediate access to emergency refuge accommodation & safety planning.
2. **Stabilisation Stage.** Supported housing delivered through Exempt Accommodation, providing safe accommodation alongside specialist trauma-informed support.
3. **Independence Stage.** Move-on into settled accommodation with the skills, confidence & resilience needed to maintain a long-term tenancy.

The greatest opportunity for innovation lies within Stage 2.

Unlocking the Private Sector Through Exempt Accommodation

The private rented sector contains thousands of homes that could be utilised to support survivors of DA. However, affordability challenges, limited support provision & landlord concerns often prevent these properties from being used effectively.

Through partnerships between Registered Providers, charities & specialist support organisations, ordinary private sector homes can be transformed into high-quality supported accommodation. Under Exempt Accommodation provisions, Housing Benefit can meet the reasonable housing costs associated with providing supported housing where more than minimal care, support or supervision is delivered. This enables:

- Safe & affordable accommodation for survivors.
- Sustainable funding for intensive housing management.
- Expansion of provision without the need for new-build development.
- Rapid mobilisation of housing supply using existing homes.

Rather than waiting years for additional social housing stock, local authorities can utilise existing properties immediately.

Why Dispersed Housing Works

Traditional refuge accommodation remains essential, but it cannot meet every need. Many survivors benefit from living within ordinary residential communities



rather than institutional settings. Dispersed accommodation offers several advantages:

- Greater anonymity & reduced risk of perpetrators locating victims.
- Improved integration into local communities.
- Better educational stability for children.
- Access to a wider range of property types & locations.
- Accommodation options for survivors with pets or older male children who may struggle to access traditional refuges.

For many survivors, living in a normal home rather than a refuge can be a significant step towards rebuilding confidence & independence.

A Model Built Around Safety

This approach is about far more than providing housing.

Through intensive housing management & specialist support, properties can be enhanced with:

- Sanctuary Scheme measures.
- Reinforced doors and windows.
- CCTV & security systems.
- Personal safety planning.
- Trauma-informed tenancy management.
- Specialist domestic abuse support services.

The focus shifts from simply accommodating survivors to helping them recover, rebuild & thrive.

The Financial Case for Change

Alongside the social benefits, the financial case is compelling. Local authorities frequently incur significant net costs when placing households in temporary accommodation.

By contrast, Exempt Accommodation allows eligible housing costs to be met through Housing Benefit, substantially reducing the burden on local authority budgets.

Illustrative modelling suggests that the net annual cost of supporting a household can reduce from approximately £16,000 in traditional temporary accommodation to around £3,640 under an Exempt Accommodation model. This creates opportunities to:

- Reduce temporary accommodation expenditure.
- Improve value for money.
- Reinvest savings into homelessness prevention.
- Expand specialist support provision.
- Deliver better long-term outcomes.

At a time when every pound matters, councils need solutions that improve outcomes while reducing cost pressures.

Supporting Delivery of the Domestic Abuse Act

Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) places duties on local authorities to assess need & commission support within safe accommodation for victims of domestic abuse and their children.

Exempt Accommodation provides an effective delivery mechanism for these responsibilities. By creating partnerships between Community Safety Partnerships, housing authorities, Registered Providers & specialist charities, councils can develop a diverse network of safe accommodation options capable of meeting varying levels of need. This approach strengthens local domestic abuse strategies while increasing housing capacity & improving survivor outcomes.

A Strategic Opportunity for Local Authorities & Partners

The convergence of rising temporary accommodation costs, increasing homelessness pressures & statutory domestic abuse responsibilities has created a clear opportunity for reform.

Exempt Accommodation is not simply a Housing Benefit mechanism. It is a strategic partnership model that unlocks private sector housing, supports specialist charities to expand provision, creates new opportunities for Registered Providers & delivers significant savings for local authorities.

Most importantly, it creates a safe and sustainable pathway for survivors of domestic abuse to move from crisis, through recovery, to long-term independence. When delivered well, everybody benefits:

- Survivors receive safe housing & specialist support.
- Local authorities reduce temporary accommodation costs.
- Registered Providers expand social impact.
- Charities grow provision without significant capital investment.
- Communities benefit from improved housing outcomes & reduced homelessness.

In an environment where resources are increasingly constrained, few opportunities offer such a powerful combination of social impact, statutory compliance and financial efficiency.