

WHAF Key Asks to support women experiencing or at risk of homelessness during Covid-19

The following key asks emerged from discussion had at the virtual **Women's Homelessness Action Forum (WHAF)** held on April 7th 2020 and attended by 27 practitioners to discuss support for women experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness in London during the Covid-19 pandemic. With reports of violence against women increasing in the current lockdown, it is vital that women are provided with safe emergency and longer-term housing.

KEY ASKS

1. Women-only hotels need to be an option

We ask London boroughs and the GLA to work together to give all women in need of emergency accommodation the option to be accommodated in a women-only hotel with trained staff and appropriate safeguarding measures. Front-line workers in London raised serious concerns over the risk for homeless women hastily placed in male dominated mixed-gender hotels, including risk of domestic abuse, sexual exploitation and violence, and trafficking. Evidence from Greater Manchester highlighted the provision of women-only hotels coordinated by the Women's Support Alliance, with female security staff trained on trauma and domestic abuse.

Where women-only hotels are not an option, local areas should ensure that appropriate, gender informed support is in place as much as possible for women in mixed environments. Women's only floors, the provision of toiletries and sanitary products, and above all, appropriate support for women are essential. If staff in hotels do not have capacity to provide support, there should be provision for caseworkers to do this remotely, and both sides should work closely together. Fact finding and information sharing around women's needs and risks is essential at allocations stage, before a decision is made on where to place someone. [Guidance on domestic abuse and sexual violence in homelessness settings](#) should be followed.

2. Suitable move-on options need to be available now and after the crisis period is over

We ask Local Authorities to provide safe and suitable move-on options such as social housing or affordable private rented accommodation for women who no longer need emergency accommodation. Lockdown measures are resulting in a significant increase in violence against women, leading to an increase in women in need of emergency housing. Discussions need to be taking place now to plan for safe and suitable move-on options such as social housing or affordable private accommodation. This is essential to free up emergency spaces now, and after the crisis period is over to prevent women from facing homelessness or returning to their perpetrator.

3. Social housing providers need to prioritise women at risk of domestic abuse and sexual violence

We ask Local Authorities and Housing Associations to prioritise women at risk of domestic abuse or sexual violence in their allocations decision and to carry out welfare checks with existing tenants. Social housing providers have a vital role to play during and after the Covid-19 period to support the increasing number of women in need of safe housing. Social housing providers should make their voids ready and available for move-on housing including new social tenancies. Social housing providers should also increase their welfare checks with tenants and residents to spot the signs of abuse and prevent homelessness. [DAHA guidance for housing providers](#) should be used.

4. Women with No Recourse to Public Funds need to be included in the response

Local Authorities and the GLA need to include women with no recourse to public funds in their emergency housing response. Women with no recourse to public funds can be more vulnerable to exploitation or trafficking due to their insecure immigration status. Local Authorities and the GLA should issue a clear statement to give clarity on housing rights for women with insecure immigration status during and beyond Covid-19, outlining what information will be shared so women can make informed decisions.

5. Funding for specialist domestic and sexual violence services to support homeless women

There needs to be emergency funding for specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence services to provide assertive outreach support to homeless women. There should be trauma-informed wrap-around support from specialist services available for all women in temporary accommodation.

What is WHAF?

The **Women's Homelessness Action Forum** (previously Pan-London Women's Outreach Network) is a London-based forum for workers in the homelessness and women's sectors to discuss issues relating to women's homelessness including rough sleeping, insecure housing, emergency or temporary accommodation, or any housing situation where a woman is not safe.

The overarching aim is to ensure that women in homelessness or at risk of homelessness have access to a range of housing options to enable them to access safety, wellbeing and dignity.

The forum is co-chaired by **St Mungo's, Women at the Well, Standing Together and Safer London** and includes over 50 practitioners from different organisations working directly and indirectly with women in London.

Chairs' logos on behalf of WHAF:

