

NEWS

Boost to domestic abuse services in South West

June 2020



Amid the recent rise in domestic abuse figures – and a new report confirming that fears around homelessness prevent domestic abuse survivors from leaving – specialist services in the south west have boosted support measures.

Teams from domestic abuse services based in Plymouth and Torquay, which are run by Sanctuary Supported Living, have been working hard on a range of additional services designed to provide even more protection and access to housing.

In Plymouth, staff from Plymouth Domestic Abuse Services (PDAS) have been working

closely with the city council to support families who are ready to move on from the 11-bed refuge, ensuring there is space available for those who are most at risk.

This provision has been boosted thanks to a government grant secured in partnership with council colleagues, which has seen the addition of four new safehouses – secure, private accommodation – based around the city.

Alongside this, the funding will also go towards a new multi-occupancy property to support local women, working with housing association BCHA.

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Innovative ways for victims of domestic abuse to get in contact with support services are being trialled too. Recognising that people living with abusers cannot always safely make a phone call, especially during lockdown, a text messaging service is being piloted which victims will be able to use to get an instant response.

And making sure offenders are obeying Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs) is also a priority. Since lockdown began, police in Plymouth have been visiting specified homes to make sure perpetrators are not breaking DVPO terms by attempting to visit or intimidate any victims. In partnership with Devon and Cornwall Police, a new Domestic Abuse Safeguarding Car staffed by PDAS and police officers will be working from July to offer support during a domestic abuse crisis.

Katy Fisher, PDAS local service manager, said: "We've all been saddened and concerned to see the increase in domestic abuse cases during lockdown, and wanted to do what we could to make sure the most effective support possible was available for residents in need across Plymouth.

"The boost to our safehouses means we have even more places where families can

make a real home for themselves, and in partnership with the other new measures we hope this will go a long way towards supporting victims of domestic abuse."

Across the bay in Torquay, a grant from the Police and Crime Commissioner will be used to fund an out-of-hours specialist staff member based in the police domestic abuse unit. This will enable them to make immediate contact with victims while the perpetrator is in custody.

Di Pooley, area service manager for Sanctuary Supported Living in the south west, commented: "This new post will have a real impact on the number of people we can support. Being based with the police means we will be able to make contact with victims at the earliest possible opportunity and let them know how much support is out there for them.

"Government funding has also seen the addition of a further three safehouses in Torquay. I'm so proud of the difference our team makes to the lives of so many families."

Councillor Sally Haydon, Cabinet member for Customer Focus and Community Safety, said: "Supporting the victims of domestic

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abuse has never been more important so I'm naturally delighted to bolster our offering to people who have left unhappy and dangerous homes.

"Although there is still more work to do, I'd like to thank our partners at Sanctuary, BCHA and Devon and Cornwall Police for all of their dedication and hard work on this cause. You've made a difference to so many people's lives and I'm eternally grateful."

Nicola Greenfield, BCHA's Head of Homelessness, Health and Wellbeing, added: "As part of the Plymouth Alliance, BCHA is excited to be working collaboratively, sharing its experience of supporting women in accommodation across the south west to deliver female-only accommodation and to support better outcomes for women in Plymouth."

Detective Inspector David Eames, from Devon and Cornwall Police, commented: "It's important that we are able to change the way we work to better suit the needs of victims of abuse in our local area. By working collaboratively with PDAS we will be able to provide specialist joint follow-up at a time of crisis, and it is hoped that by doing so we can provide the best possible service to victims."