END FURNITURE POVERTY

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FURNISHING FUTURES



Creating Homes to Rebuild Lives

The Importance of Furnished Homes for Survivors of Domestic Abuse

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Member of Parliament for Birmingham Yardley, Domestic Abuse Campaigner, and Former Minister for Safeguarding and Violence Against Women and Girls

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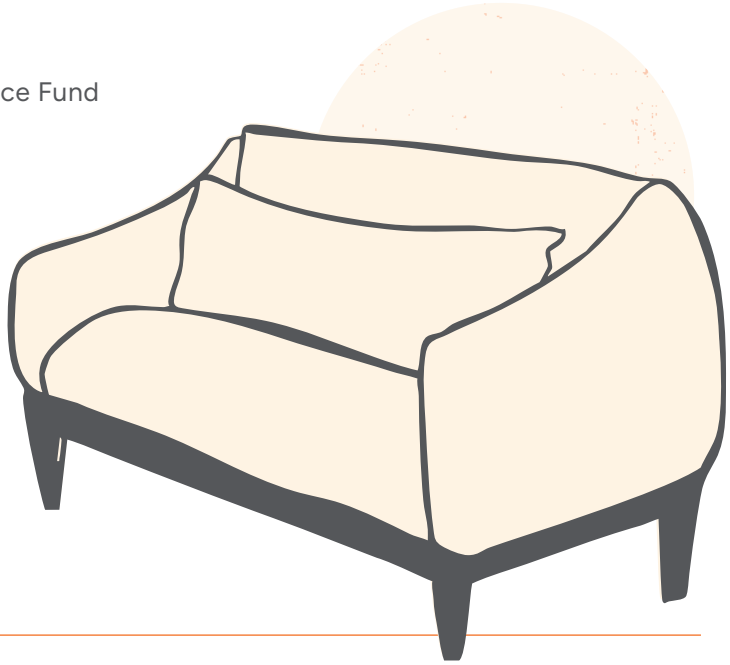
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> "I had a lot of struggle beforehand so at the time I was very worried about moving and worried about how we were going to decorate and do the flooring from a financial and physical point of view as my health was not good" – Reya







Photos: A social housing property deemed suitable for a survivor of domestic abuse to move into. All photos have been provided by the Angel's Foundation



FOREWORD BY JESS PHILLIPS MP

Member of Parliament for Birmingham Yardley, Domestic Abuse Campaigner, and Former Minister for Safeguarding and Violence Against Women and Girls

The thought of a survivor, traumatised by domestic abuse, moving into a completely unfurnished property should be unthinkable and yet this is the reality for tens of thousands of people every year.

To escape an abusive situation, to take those difficult steps to flee to safety, often with children, takes a tremendous amount of courage. However, rather than a fresh start, many are faced with sleeping on dirty floorboards, without any kitchen essentials like a cooker or a fridge, and this can mean survivors return to their abusers, where at least their child had a bed and they could prepare a meal.

For these people, this can be a matter of life and death. I have seen too many cases where women have returned only to be murdered – all for the sake of furniture and appliances.

End Furniture Poverty's report highlights the extent of this problem, with women's voices threaded throughout to share their experiences of furniture poverty – but crucially, it also provides solutions; with social landlords needing to step up and play their vital part in helping to create safer futures.

The Government's Ending Violence Against Women and Girls strategy is an important first step towards our goal of halving violence against women and girls and the strategy acknowledges that housing and financial security are key requirements to achieve this goal.

Local authorities have been given additional funding to ensure that they fulfil their role in ensuring that survivors receive priority need for housing however this positive progress is only providing survivors with four walls and a roof – a home is so much more.

I endorse this report's recommendation that all domestic abuse survivors must be given the option of a furnished tenancy by social landlords - with properties floored throughout and window coverings installed. The current reality of women being placed in empty boxes with cold, bare floorboards, clothes in bin bags on the floor, windows without curtains or blinds to provide privacy, and nowhere to sleep, cook a meal, or store food, is totally unacceptable.

I applaud the work of charities like Furnishing Futures, but they cannot, and must not, shoulder this burden alone. The Government's Crisis and Resilience Fund, (CRF), can also provide this fundamental support – but only if local authorities choose to do so. This support should not be a postcode lottery, dependent on whether your local authority has decided to offer furniture and appliances through their crisis support offer, or whether you happen to live near a charity like Furnishing Futures.

End Furniture Poverty's mantra is that we need a blended approach to ensure everyone who needs help with furniture and appliances can access support, and I wholeheartedly agree. We need every local authority to provide furniture and appliances through their allocation of the CRF, we need every social landlord to furnish at least 10% of their general needs stock and offer a furnished tenancy to every survivor of domestic abuse, and we need Government departments to work together to make this happen – this has to be a shared mission. Violence against women and girls is everyone's business, and everyone has a part to play in ensuring survivors of domestic abuse do not fall into furniture poverty as a result of fleeing their abuse.

Furniture poverty can drive women back to their abusers which can be a death sentence.
Together we can end violence against women and girls, and together we must End Furniture Poverty.







JOINT FOREWORD BY CLAIRE DONOVAN AND EMILY WHEELER

Our two charities work in very different ways, but we have a clear shared objective – to end furniture poverty.

While End Furniture Poverty strive to create scaled change through research and campaigning, Furnishing Futures works on the frontline to provide direct support to survivors of domestic abuse.

At End Furniture Poverty we continually research every aspect of this issue, from the numbers of people living in furniture poverty and its impact, to, most crucially, what we can do about it; focusing on the support that should be available for social housing tenants and through local authority crisis support.

End Furniture Poverty knows that only 3% of social homes are let as furnished, and we know that millions of people live in local authority areas without local welfare schemes. So, existing support for those living without essential furniture and appliances is woefully inadequate.

End Furniture Poverty provides direct support to social landlords across the country to establish furnished tenancy schemes that can be cost neutral and provide clear benefits for both landlord and tenant. Working with MPs at constituency level, and local authorities, we have brought groups of landlords together and helped several to set up new furnished tenancy schemes. However, many more still offer completely unfurnished properties.

Together our two charities have produced this vital report showcasing the stories of the women supported by Furnishing Futures; women who have suffered abuse and trauma, built up the courage to leave, only to be moved into an empty box. We have included photos from the Angels Foundation, showing the conditions many survivors face. Sleeping on dirty floorboards, no appliances to cook food for their children, no window coverings to make the home feel secure - all because their social housing property was entirely unfurnished

So far, Furnishing Futures has supported 257 women, all victims and survivors of domestic abuse, and 105 children by furnishing the completely empty social homes that they were allocated. On average, we furnish three to four homes each week in London so have first-hand experience of the positive impact a furnished home can have when rebuilding a life.

All of Furnishing Futures' beneficiaries are survivors of domestic abuse, and all have been allocated completely unfurnished social housing. All are in receipt of benefits or unable to afford furniture. Every survivor is offered holistic resettlement support with our specialist support team for up to six months, to help them 'stay fled' and rebuild their lives. Unfortunately, organisations like ours are not common, and so thousands of women across the UK are unable to access such support.

When we consider how furniture poverty affects certain groups, survivors of domestic abuse are clearly significantly impacted. These are traumatised people who often flee dangerous situations with nothing, frequently with children. Moving them into completely empty properties is a terrible start to their new lives which can sometimes lead to a return to an abusive and potentially life-threatening environment.

For many women experiencing domestic abuse, the most dangerous place is their own home. Fundamentally, domestic abuse is a housing issue, with safe and suitable accommodation being critical to survivors' safety, and furnished accommodation being essential in securing a fresh start.

In July 2024 the Labour Party was elected on a pledge to halve violence against women and girls within a decade. Safe and secure housing is a critical foundation for safety, recovery, and long-term independence for survivors of domestic abuse and their children. We welcome the government's commitment to ensuring that the housing system enables victims to escape abuse and rebuild their lives, and the recognition that when victims begin to recover, financial insecurity should never force them back to an abusive partner.

If the government is serious about this pledge, then survivors must be provided with the practical support they need to stay fled once they have been rehoused. Lack of money for appliances, furniture and flooring is a key barrier to victims leaving and can force survivors back to a dangerous situation. Unfurnished accommodation causes immense hardship, trauma and distress at a time when survivors and their children are most in need of safety and support.

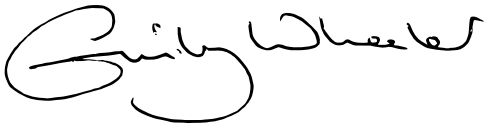
We urge the government to listen to the voices of survivors in this report, whose lived experience demonstrates the devastating impact of furniture poverty on their ability to heal and move on from abuse.

Social landlords can and must do more and we believe at least 10% of all social homes should be provided as furnished. Every local authority should use their allocation of the Crisis and Resilience Fund to provide furniture and appliances, guidance to make this happen is simply not enough. The Government must step up and make this happen to save lives.

Together we can End Furniture Poverty.



Claire Donovan, Director of End Furniture Poverty



Emily Wheeler, CEO of Furnishing Futures

ABOUT END FURNITURE POVERTY

End Furniture Poverty is the campaigning and social research arm of FRC Group, a collection of charities and 100% not-for-profit social businesses. FRC Group has been providing furniture, both new and preloved, to people living in furniture poverty for nearly 40 years; reducing and ultimately eradicating Furniture Poverty is FRC Group's core mission.

End Furniture Poverty was created in 2015 to raise awareness of the issue of Furniture Poverty; to improve our understanding of the consequences and the reality of living in Furniture Poverty; and to develop evidence-based solutions to ensure that everyone has access to the essential furniture and white goods needed to participate in society and lead a secure life.

End Furniture Poverty work closely with the grant making sector, the preloved furniture sector and the social housing sector. Currently we are undertaking a campaign to Make a House a Home by ensuring that at least 10% of social housing properties are let as furnished. Information about this campaign can be found on our website, along with a myriad of useful research, guidance and support.

ABOUT FURNISHING FUTURES

Furnishing Futures is an award-winning charity based in London that fully furnishes and decorates empty social housing that has been allocated to survivors of domestic abuse, alongside a programme of holistic wraparound resettlement support. The charity has expertise in the delivery of trauma-informed design, creating fully furnished and equipped homes that give hope and dignity to women and children rehoused after domestic abuse.

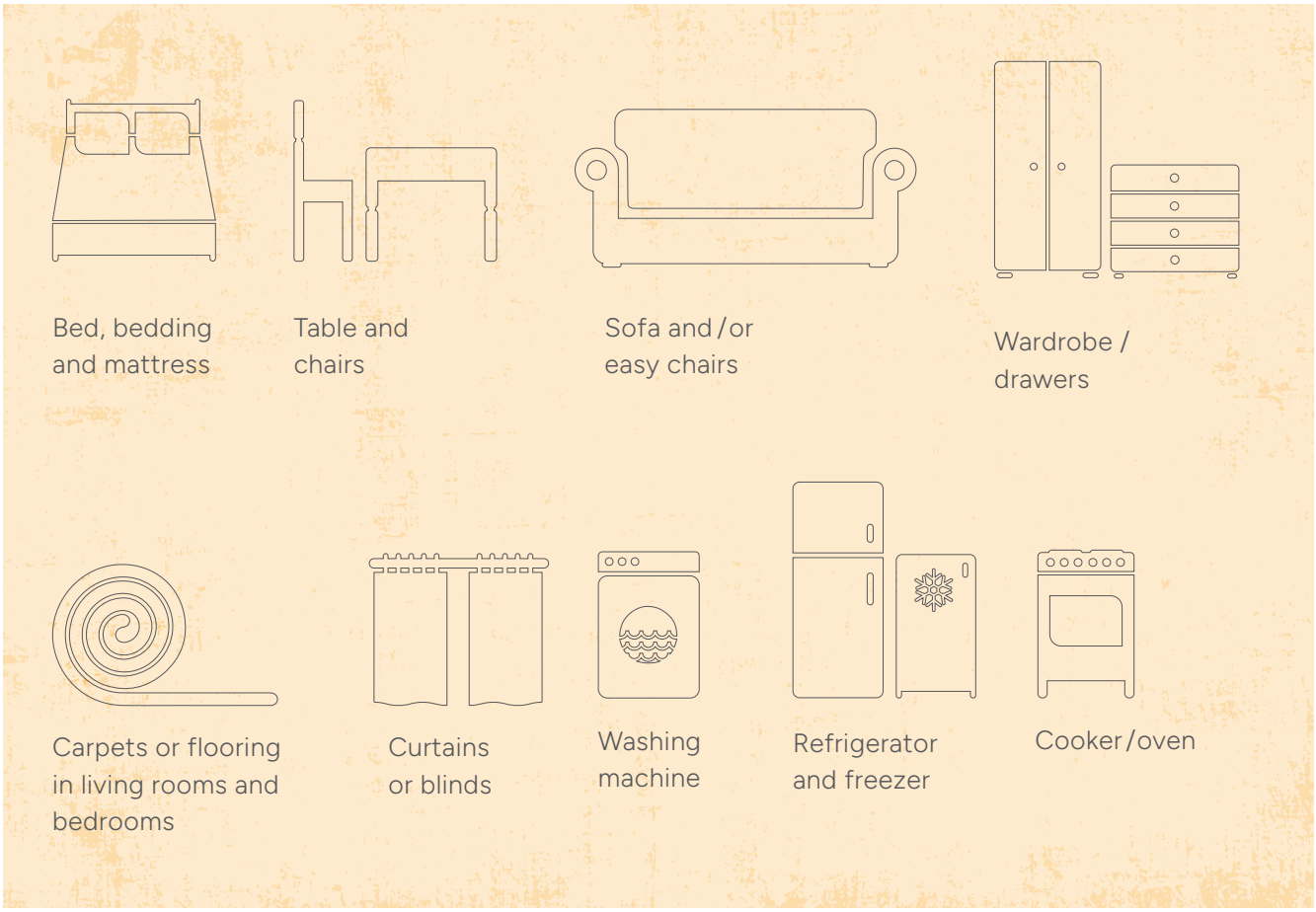
Furnishing Futures has a sustainable model, using new products that have been donated by brands and retailers that could otherwise be destined for landfill, and using these to create well-designed, comfortable homes tailored to provide everything a survivor and her children need to start again in safety and comfort.

Emily Wheeler, CEO of Furnishing Futures, founded the charity in response to the poverty that she saw as a frontline child protection conference chair, particularly after supporting women to leave perpetrators only to be rehoused in cold, empty flats without even any floor coverings, a bed to sleep on or an oven to cook a meal for their children, which compromised their safety and recovery. The poor state of unfurnished accommodation can also lead some survivors to feel they have no choice but to return to an abuser in order to meet their children's basic needs. Furnishing Futures was founded to fill this gap.

ABOUT THE ESSENTIAL FURNITURE ITEMS

End Furniture Poverty's list of the essential furniture items was drawn up through a national survey, to establish an informed consensus on which items are necessary to achieve a basic standard of living.

The Essential Items are:



For a full discussion, please see End Furniture Poverty (2018) 'Essential Items List', Available at: https://endfurniturepoverty.org/research-campaigns/understanding-furniture-poverty/ the-essential-items/

KEY TERMS

Domestic abuse - an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence and economic abuse, in most cases by a partner or ex-partner, but also by a family member or carer.[1]

Economic abuse – often occurs in the context of intimate partner violence. It involves the control of a partner or ex-partner's money and finances, as well as the things that money can buy. Economic abuse can include exerting control over income, spending, bank accounts, bills and borrowing. It can also include controlling access to and use of things like transport and technology, which allow us to work and stay connected, as well as property and daily essentials like food and clothing. It can include destroying items and refusing to contribute to household costs.[2]

Furniture Poverty – the inability to access, or afford to buy or maintain, any household furniture or appliance item that is essential to achieve a socially acceptable standard of living (including floor and window coverings).

Furnished Tenancy – landlords provide tenants with all the essential furniture and appliances they need and a weekly charge is added to the service element of their rent, all eligible to be covered by Universal Credit and legacy benefits. The property can be provided with furniture and let as a furnished tenancy, or the furniture can be provided to the tenant through a separate furniture rental agreement. The agreement can be fixed term or flexible, due to DWP regulations the items can never be owned by the tenant, and the landlord or supplier is responsible for the replacement of items or any necessary repairs. Furnished tenancies can be for new and existing tenants and tenants should be able to only take the items they need, from a single item to a full furniture package. Tenants can return items and remove the charge if/when they move off benefits.

Local Welfare Assistance (LWA) - all types of discretionary crisis support that is administered by the local authority. The scheme provides direct grants (cash or in-kind) to an individual/household, and members of the public can apply to it.

Priority need – a special reason why the council must give someone more help if they are homeless. Some people always have priority need, such as people who are pregnant or have children, homeless because of domestic abuse, aged 18 to 20 and were in care at 16 or 17.

Temporary accommodation – housing provided to people experiencing homelessness while they wait for a permanent home. It can include hotels, hostels, or privately rented flats and houses, and is arranged by local authorities in the short to medium term. A key feature is that tenants often have limited rights and may have to pay rent.

The Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF) - a new, multi-year government funding scheme in England that replaced the Household Support Fund in April 2026. The goal is to reduce hardship, help people stabilise after financial shocks, and reduce dependency on emergency assistance such as food banks.

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) - covers a wide range of crime types and behaviours that are disproportionately experienced by women and perpetrated by men. For more information on this please see Freedom from Violence and Abuse: A Cross-Government Strategy to Build a Safer Society for Women and Girls.[3]

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the survivors of domestic abuse who have bravely shared their stories with us and whose voices have driven the direction of this report. We know that reliving a period that is fundamentally traumatic is incredibly hard, and what you have shared will help us to drive real change.

Emily Wheeler, CEO of Furnishing Futures, also deserves enormous thanks for her work and the stories she provided from her frontline work has helped make this research possible.

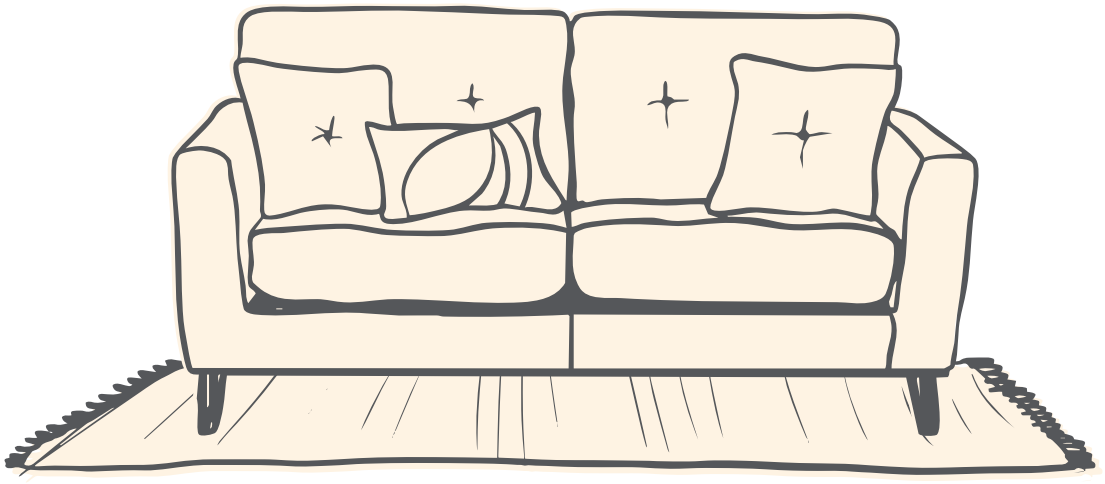
We would also like to extend our gratitude to Angela Rayner, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government who is supporting our work by sponsoring our Parliamentary reception to launch this report. Similarly, we want to thank Jess Phillips, MP for Birmingham Yardley and former Safeguarding and Violence Against Women and Girls Minister, who has written a foreword for this report and has devoted her life working to end violence against women and girls.

The people and organisations who assisted us in creating this report deserve tremendous thanks. They are Caroline Deeprose, CEO of the Angel's Foundation, Professor Katherine Brickell from King's College London, Emma Storey and Nicki Clarke from Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse and Jessica Privilege from the office of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner.

Additionally, we thank Paula Barker, MP for Liverpool Wavertree, and Danny Beales, MP for Uxbridge and South Ruislip, who have championed the work of End Furniture Poverty in Parliament, as well as all of the MPs who have taken the time to meet with us and are supporting our campaign.

We also wish to thank Procurement Hub, part of Places for People (PfP), who are supporting End Furniture Poverty as one of their charity partners.

> "I had no idea that homes came completely empty like that. I had absolutely no way of sorting it myself. What I thought would be a fresh start suddenly felt impossible to make liveable. I honestly didn't even know where to begin. I felt stuck. My mental health got really bad during that time. I wasn't sleeping and I cried constantly because something that was meant to be a positive new beginning turned into another huge mountain to climb on top of the debt and stress I already had" – Ivy



CONTEXT

This report builds on our previous short policy paper, Furniture Poverty: A Challenge for Domestic Abuse Recovery and Resettlement, published before the Government's landmark 2025 Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy, by setting out in greater depth why safe housing alone is not enough for survivors. The new strategy has placed renewed emphasis on support, recovery and long-term independence for victims and survivors.[4] Therefore, this longer report is both timely and necessary to make the case for furniture and appliance provision as an essential part of recovery, including flooring. Drawing together evidence on housing, homelessness, economic abuse and furniture poverty, alongside case studies from Furnishing Futures, we show that survivors need more than a roof over their head: they need homes that are safe, liveable and properly equipped to move on from domestic abuse.[5]

Set against that policy backdrop, the evidence in this report shows why housing outcomes remain such a decisive part of whether survivors can leave abuse safely and begin to rebuild their lives.

The VAWG Strategy provides an important policy frame for this report. It recognises that support for victims and survivors must be available at the right time, that housing is central to safety, recovery and long-term independence, and that economic insecurity should not force anyone back to an abusive situation. The Strategy's aim to halve violence against women and girls within the decade deserves praise for its ambition, and its recognition of the epidemic of VAWG crimes in the UK is crucial.

However, it does not sufficiently address the material conditions that make a home safe and liveable. For survivors moving into empty or poorly equipped accommodation with the absence of beds, flooring, appliances, curtains and other essentials can undermine the very recovery the Strategy seeks to support.

Domestic Abuse is a Housing Problem

It is widely acknowledged that while every survivor's experience is different, housing is often a critical factor in being able to escape an abuser or abusers.[6] It can mean women seek help much later due to not being able to secure adequate housing, it can increase the risk of return to the perpetrator, and it is a huge risk factor for homelessness.

Survivors of domestic abuse are overrepresented among people who experience homelessness. For the year ending March 2025, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) found that people who had experienced homelessness at some point in their lives were much more likely to have experienced domestic abuse in the last year: 22.1%, compared with 7.2% of those who had never been homeless.[7]

This includes women staying with family members and couch surfing but, also, rough sleeping. New research from the Rough Sleeping Questionnaire 2025 shows that nearly 70% of women experiencing rough sleeping in the past year had experienced domestic abuse since age 16.[8] This disproportionate representation is also seen at a local authority level. In 2024/25, local councils supported 35,990 households facing homelessness because of domestic abuse, representing 11% of all households homeless or at risk.[9]

The problem seems to be getting worse, not better: temporary accommodation usage, as a result of domestic abuse, has risen by as much as 28% in some council areas.[10] By every metric we see survivors of abuse being forced from one dangerous situation to another, life with an abuser to life without a home. This is unacceptable.

In recent years, the government has taken steps to mitigate any harms survivors may incur when fleeing. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 amended housing law to deem anyone made homeless by domestic abuse automatically in priority need for temporary accommodation, not just children.[11] This is a landmark piece of legislation, and it is worth acknowledging its positive impact.

However, there are still barriers to be overcome. The rising costs in the private rented sector combined with insufficient income from benefits are keeping women trapped in the temporary accommodation they have been given. The cycles of freezes on Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates have left survivors of domestic abuse on low incomes with limited options in the private sector: Crisis found that only 2.7% of properties were affordable at LHA rates across Great Britain.[12] Similarly, the benefit cap is having a disproportionate impact on survivors of domestic abuse. It limits the total amount a part-time, low-earning or out-of-work household can receive in benefits and means private rentals and sometimes even social rents are unaffordable.[13]

Similarly, despite the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, there are some survivors who still find it incredibly traumatic to navigate the housing system. The lack of social and affordable housing supply incentivises housing officers to find reasons to turn down homelessness applications. The ways in which they do this are known as 'gatekeeping'.[14] A recent study by Solace Women's Aid found that were still gatekeeping practices in place at some local authorities. For example, the most common form of gatekeeping was requiring police corroboration, with 71% of frontline staff reporting that this happens in at least some cases.[15] The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 specifically says that domestic abuse cases do not require police evidence.

Furthermore, there are some survivors of domestic abuse who are barred from accessing permanent social housing altogether.[16] Many allocation policies still exclude or deprioritise households who are in rent arrears and other housing related debt from waiting lists.[17]

It is widely agreed that domestic abuse, homelessness, and household debt are intrinsically linked – and economic abuse is also common among this. Surviving Economic Abuse has found that one in six women in the UK have experienced economic abuse from a current or former partner, and almost all (95 per cent) domestic abuse survivors have experienced economic abuse, with 60 per cent experiencing coerced debt as a result.[18] This means that survivors of domestic abuse who have incurred debt or rental arrears as a result of their abuse could potentially be pushed into the private rental sector.

In their National Plan to End Homelessness, the Government has acknowledged the unfairness of domestic abuse survivors being excluded from social housing due to debt incurred because of their abuse. They have committed to updating the statutory guidance on social housing allocations which 'address the barriers faced by survivors of domestic abuse with debt when applying for social housing, highlighted by recent research'.[19] We may see legislative progress towards this, in June 2026 Baroness Neate put forward an amendment in the House of Lords to the Social Housing Bill that would ensure that debt accrued through domestic abuse does not prevent access to social housing.[20]

The Social Housing Bill has also outlined plans to protect tenants who are victims of domestic abuse. Matthew Pennycook MP, Minister for Housing and Planning, said that:

"The bill will give landlords and the courts new and strengthened grounds to address domestic abuse and, in joint tenancy cases, remove a perpetrator from the tenancy where there has been domestic abuse, allowing victims to remain in their home or move to suitable alternative accommodation where this is available". [21]

This step has been welcomed by charities and campaigners, but there is concern that protections will be limited. Refuge said that "given the extremely low proportion of perpetrators who are arrested, charged, and convicted, linking housing rights to the criminal justice system risks creating a significant barrier for survivors".[22] Many survivors will still need to flee their abuser, and they will need support in the housing system to do so.

End Furniture Poverty recognise the difficulties in temporary and permanent housing. There is a significant shortage of refuge spaces for women fleeing domestic abuse, and local authorities are also struggling with the cost of temporary accommodation. The Local Government Association (LGA) predicts that the cost to councils for providing temporary accommodation in England is set to double to almost £4bn by 2029-30,[23] and there is a record 135,000 households currently living in this predicament.[24] Government data for October to December 2025 shows that 6,060 victims of domestic abuse were owed a homelessness 'relief duty by reason for loss, or threat of loss, of last settled home' – comprising 14% of all households in England.[25] Alongside this, there is a tremendous shortage of social homes for people to move into. Even households that are in a high-priority band, such as those fleeing domestic abuse, could be waiting months before securing a permanent home.

Andy Burnham used his first speech after becoming Prime Minister to commit to tackling homelessness and get people off the streets at 'the earliest opportunity'.[26] He has made his intention to adopt a 'national housing first philosophy' which would mean moving away from the crisis-driven responses, like temporary accommodation, that are temporary by their very nature.[27] If successful, this pledge will result in survivors of domestic abuse who have been forced into homelessness being moved into permanent accommodation more swiftly.

However, while these plans are being implemented, many survivors of domestic abuse will end up in temporary accommodation. While it can be fully furnished, End Furniture Poverty and Furnishing Futures have routinely seen cases of domestic abuse survivors being moved into unfurnished temporary accommodation. This is supported by research from Solace Women's Aid; they found that 50% of survivors reported that their temporary accommodation was completely unfurnished – including appliances.[28] One survivor said: "when I came, I didn't have anything, floor, nothing, no bed, no fridge, nothing".[29] While options of accommodation are undoubtedly limited, the absence of essential items - such as beds, seating, and cooking or food-storage facilities - can significantly undermine safety, dignity, and recovery.

For some parents, the abuse does not end when they flee the relationship. Survivors reported to Gingerbread that abusive parents actively weaponise the Child Maintenance Service to continue coercive and controlling behaviour post-separation, and to deny children the financial support to which they are entitled.[30] Recent research from Surviving Economic Abuse found that a third (33%) of women with children under 18 who experienced economic abuse from an ex-partner reported that their ex-partner refused to pay child support, or paid it unreliably, despite being able to afford it.[31]

Taken together, this evidence shows that survivors of domestic abuse face a web of pressures when trying to rebuild their lives. These can be homelessness risk, insecure or unsuitable housing, unaffordable rents, debt, gatekeeping, and the ongoing effects of economic abuse. Against that backdrop, survivors should not also be expected to find additional money for beds, flooring, appliances and other essentials, then source, deliver and install them. That is not a minor extra challenge; it is a serious barrier to safety, stability and recovery. If the Government is serious about delivering the ambitions of the VAWG strategy, it must recognise that recovery depends not only on access to housing, but on access to a home that is properly equipped to live in. As Caroline Deeprose, CEO of the Angels Foundation, a domestic abuse charity based in Cambridgeshire said, "leaving the relationship is just the beginning".

WHAT FURNITURE POVERTY IS AND WHY IT MATTERS



Photos: A social housing property deemed suitable for a survivor of domestic abuse to move into. All photos have been provided by the Angel's Foundation

This is where the question of furniture poverty becomes critical. As the previous section has shown, survivors of domestic abuse can face multiple housing and financial barriers even after they have escaped abuse, and those pressures do not end when a tenancy is secured. Furniture poverty describes the inability to afford or access the basic furniture, appliances and furnishings that provide a household with a socially acceptable standard of living. End Furniture Poverty consider someone to be in furniture poverty when they are living without at least one essential item of furniture. When a household is missing three or more items, which is the situation those moving into unfurnished social housing often face, we call this 'deep furniture poverty'.

This matters because, in practice, the gap between being allocated a home and being able to live in it is often where furniture poverty takes hold. For survivors of domestic abuse, the problems do not end when they get a roof over their head. If a survivor has been given a new social home, the overwhelming likelihood is that it will be unfurnished; only 3% of social housing is let as furnished, compared to 30% in the private sector.[32] Often, this will include a lack of flooring and window coverings.

Emily Wheeler, the CEO of Furnishing Futures, sees these issues regularly in her work.

"Being rehoused should feel like a positive step for survivors that marks the beginning of their journey to recovery, but for many it is the start of years of struggle and stress that affects their physical and mental health and undermines their safety. The lack of floor coverings and furniture has direct consequences, including reduced safety, increased poverty, and social and economic exclusion".

This is vital to understand, as it can be felt acutely by those fleeing domestic abuse. Women often escape a dangerous environment with little to no possessions, much less bulky essential items such as a cooker or a bed. The acquisition of these items can also be particularly challenging for those fleeing domestic abuse, as they are also extremely likely to be a victim of financial exploitation or economic abuse. This can often leave survivors facing significant hurdles when trying to build a new home.[33] Caroline Deeprose said many survivors start from "less than zero" for this reason.

The essential items of furniture are often the most expensive items someone on a low income can need to buy, and this is particularly challenging if a survivor of abuse is attempting to do this with debt that may have been accrued because of their previous relationship. Research by Refuge and the Co-operative Bank, published in 2020, found that survivors of economic abuse were burdened with an average of £3,272 of debt.[34] As an example, End Furniture Poverty estimates that it costs an average of £8,500 to furnish and floor an entire two-bedroom property, so it is an impossible task for some survivors who have incurred those debts or are on low incomes.





Flooring

Flooring is one of the nine essential missing items of furniture listed in the About the Essential Furniture Items section, but it needs a particular focus. Survivors of domestic abuse are sometimes placed in temporary or permanent accommodation with no fitted flooring at all. Bare concrete, exposed floorboards, or heavily worn carpets can present risks to health and safety.

Caroline Deeprose talked about working with a family whose child had to wear a snowsuit around the property, so they did not hurt themselves crawling on the bare concrete. The simple tasks of keeping a house warm, children being able to play, and even walking around the home are made more difficult because of a lack of flooring. As well as this, a lack of floor coverings does not make a home feel habitable. It feels unfinished, neglected and derelict and the psychological impact is significant. We have not encountered any examples of private lets which have been let without floor coverings as private landlords clearly believe no tenant would pay to rent them, so why are social lets?

Sara Blakemore, from the charity Hackney Playbus, says that a lack of flooring for survivors of domestic abuse is a consistent theme. She said: "I work with so many families who are experiencing furniture poverty…they are often sleeping on inflatable mattresses on the floor with no carpet or suitable flooring". Furnishing Futures have many case studies of survivors of abuse who are missing flooring, the following is just one example.

Reya talked about being excited but nervous to be offered a permanent home: "I had a lot of struggle beforehand so at the time I was very worried about moving and worried about how we were going to decorate and do the flooring from a financial and physical point of view as my health was not good". She said that without the help from Furnishing Futures it would have taken six months to a year to get the flat into a liveable condition: "continuing to live without flooring…would have made me and my child depressed". So many others talked about their new homes being 'cold and empty'.

Despite all the evidence and stories showing that a lack of flooring affects safety, warmth, and dignity, the Government has confirmed that floor coverings will not be included in the reformed Decent Homes Standard, which will apply to social and private rented housing from 2035. The Government is looking at flooring in social housing in more detail but are only proposing guidance which landlords will be free to ignore.

There is evidence from Wales that flooring has a positive impact on a tenancy. The Welsh Housing Standard includes flooring provision in all habitable rooms, and it has created clear benefits for both tenant and landlord.[35] It is not realistic or reasonable to expect a survivor of domestic abuse to rebuild their life in a house that does not even have a proper floor for them and their children to walk on.

When delivering the new Decent Homes Standard to the House of Commons, the Minister for Housing and Planning, Matthew Pennycook MP, said that "we recognise that some landlords are already providing floor coverings, but many residents struggle to provide their own basic furnishings. As such, we intend to work with landlords and tenants to rapidly identify cost-effective ways in which landlords can better support tenants in need".[36]

End Furniture Poverty and Furnishing Futures believe that flooring provision should not be a postcode lottery and should not depend on who your landlord happens to be. Furthermore, there is a belief within the Government that those struggling to floor their properties or afford essential furniture items can get assistance from the Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF) that is distributed by local authorities.[37] Again, survivors of abuse find themselves facing a postcode lottery. In 2024/25, only 1% of the Household Support Fund, which preceded the Crisis and Resilience Fund, went towards furniture and appliances and it remains to be seen whether it will be a similar story with the CRF.[38]

End Furniture Poverty have published a Best Practice Guide for local authorities to understand why and how to use their Crisis and Resilience Fund allocation for essential furniture and appliance provision. Furniture provision meets both the crisis and the resilience strands of the fund and has substantial benefits to the local authority with overall cost savings across several budget headings.[39] Local authorities are strongly encouraged to use this guide to support survivors of domestic abuse with key furniture and appliances in a time of crisis, to enable them to rebuild their lives when moving on from abuse.



"At times, I considered returning to the abusive relationship so my daughter would have a bed to sleep in" – Shannon

IMPACT OF FURNITURE POVERTY ON SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

"I felt scared, isolated, and overwhelmed in a flat with no curtains, no flooring, and no idea what to do next".

End Furniture Poverty has shown in the latest Extent of Furniture Poverty 2026 report that furniture poverty has a tremendously detrimental impact on health and wellbeing, for the individual and the family unit.[40] This can affect survivors of domestic abuse for months and years to come when they are already experiencing significant trauma. We have laid out the journey a woman may take when leaving a dangerous abuser, and how they may face having to move into a social home that contains nothing in the way of essential furniture and appliances. They are often the most expensive items someone on a low income may need to acquire, and survivors and their families could face living without essential items for a long time.

This could mean an extended period sleeping on bare floorboards; being unable to cook or store food and medication; being forced to keep clothes in bin bags due to lack of storage and being unable to wash clothes or bedding because of the lack of a washing machine. The resulting impact on physical and mental health can be severe. The Extent of Furniture Poverty report found that of those in furniture poverty, 27.5% reported that it caused them to experience extremely or very negative effects on their physical health. The picture is even worse for mental health; 32.3% of those in furniture poverty experienced extremely or very negative effects on their mental health due to living without those essential items.[41]

Unfortunately, this is a situation that is all too common for survivors of domestic abuse, particularly those who are allocated social housing. The mental health of survivors is already poor due to their experiences of abuse, but it is further compounded and worsened by the dehumanising living conditions of an unfurnished property. Many women have told Furnishing Futures that the state of their new accommodation has made them consider taking their own lives as it makes them feel worthless and that there is no hope for the future.

As we have said time and again in this report, acquiring a social home is not the safe ending many victims and survivors were hoping it would be for themselves or their children. In the Extent of Furniture Poverty 2026, we undertook subset analysis to examine the physical and mental health impacts of furniture poverty across different population characteristics, one of them being housing tenure type.

Social housing tenants were a group who reported extremely or very negative physical health effects of furniture poverty much more in comparison to other tenure types. This was seen in just over half of social renters in furniture poverty (51%) compared to 21% of homeowners and 17% of private renters. We see similar proportions with mental health. Of those in furniture poverty, 62% of social renters report a very or extremely negative impact, versus 23% of homeowners and 21% of private renters.[42] We need to face the reality that we may be worsening the health of survivors of domestic abuse by placing them in unfurnished social housing.

Ivy's story is a sobering example of this. She was delighted to be offered a new permanent home after going through domestic abuse, having a child so young, and being homeless. She said she felt devastated when she found out the home had no furniture:

"I had no idea that homes came completely empty like that. I had absolutely no way of sorting it myself. What I thought would be a fresh start suddenly felt impossible to make liveable. I honestly didn't even know where to begin. I felt stuck. My mental health got really bad during that time. I wasn't sleeping and I cried constantly because something that was meant to be a positive new beginning turned into another huge mountain to climb on top of the debt and stress I already had".

It is unacceptable that we are putting victims and survivors in this position. As Paula Barker MP so aptly said: "We cannot in good conscience tell a woman she is safe now, hand her the keys to a flat, and then leave her standing in an empty shell of a home with no cooker, no bed, and no washing machine".[43]

Risk of Return to the Perpetrator

It is unconscionable that we risk making survivors more deprived because they fled their abuser and sought help. The VAWG strategy has declared that financial insecurity should never force a victim back to an abusive partner, and no one should be forced to remain in an unsafe situation because they fear becoming homeless. Heartbreakingly, Furnishing Futures help many victims and survivors who considered returning to their abusive partner because of furniture poverty. Emily Wheeler said:

"The lack of support with floor coverings and furnishings can contribute to victims feeling unable to leave perpetrators, as well as feeling they have no choice but to return because they can't survive in such dehumanising living conditions. Unfurnished accommodation and the lack of support undermines survivors' safety".

Nyla said that she "endured years of torment" at the hands of her abuser and she "walked away from a well-paid job, a beautiful home, and an area I knew well, sacrificing everything for safety and peace of mind. But suddenly, I found myself with absolutely nothing". She was moved into an unfurnished social home with no appliances, no flooring and no curtains and said that without the support from Furnishing Futures, she "quite frankly might have considered returning to my abuser".

Nyla is not the only one. Shannon talked about feeling as though she had let her daughter down because she could not afford to furnish their home. She said: "at times, I considered returning to the abusive relationship so my daughter would have a bed to sleep in". The fact that we are putting victims and survivors in a position where they are choosing between material deprivation and theirs and their children's safety is utterly unacceptable. There is no provision in the VAWG strategy to ensure that survivors are moving into proper homes rather than empty boxes.

This situation is life and death; according to Refuge, one woman is killed by a current or former partner every five days in England and Wales.[44] Many more are driven to take their own lives or die in suspicious or unexplained circumstances. For victims who died by suicide in 2022-2023, 26% of the reviews recorded financial abuse as an aggravating factor.[45] We cannot allow furniture poverty to push more survivors to risk returning to dangerous perpetrators of abuse.

Emotional and Psychological Recovery

"Every time I was viewing the properties I was already in mental stress about how I will be converting this one into a home".

Our latest Extent of Furniture Poverty report showed in detail the heavy toll that furniture poverty has on the mental health of individuals and households. When someone with already fragile emotional and psychological wellbeing, such as a survivor of domestic abuse, experiences furniture poverty, the effects have the potential to be even worse. It cannot be underestimated what significant trauma domestic abuse creates, and the huge effect this has on the nervous system. The inability to recover properly from this trauma is a consistent theme among survivors. Hannah shared her story by saying:

"As a victim of domestic violence and being heavily pregnant, I already felt alone and unsupported and although I was grateful for somewhere to come home to with my child, this empty space did not feel like 'home', and it certainly didn't feel suitable for a baby".

Victims and survivors often talk of feeling retraumatised by the process of leaving their abuser and going through the housing system. Jemma described leaving her abuser and beginning the search for a new home as "like I walked into another hell". After a "long battle" to leave temporary accommodation, she finally got a one-bedroom council property and said that discovering that "it was a shell and nothing like a home" left her "heartbroken".

Emma also described how she felt hopeful for her future when she was offered a social home, but this was quickly dashed when she learned that the home was unfurnished.

"After escaping a DV relationship, I was relieved to be offered a safe home, but when I saw it, I felt so anxious. It was completely bare, with no flooring and I was so worried about how I was going to make this house feel like home. It felt cold and empty, especially for my son. The burden of having to do everything on my own was causing me panic and anxiety".

Furthermore, for those fleeing domestic abuse, the absence of window coverings can add to their unease and worry. Survivors can experience harassment and stalking when ending an abusive relationship, so to give them a home with no curtains or blinds to prevent people from being able to see inside the home is intolerable. Nyla, who we heard from earlier, had no permanent window coverings when she first moved into her property: "it had drapes/sheets at the window which left me feeling exposed". Another spoke about how being given curtains by Furnishing Futures "made the house feel more secure". Survivors of abuse deserve to live in a home that is safe, as that will give them an opportunity to rebuild their lives.

The provision of furniture can have a transformative impact on victims and survivors' mental health. Furnishing Futures developed a pilot with Peabody housing association and the London Borough of Waltham Forest, with the aim of transitioning survivors of domestic abuse from refuge accommodation straight into a fully furnished and equipped secure tenancy, without going through temporary accommodation. During the pilot, Peabody supplied and fitted flooring and appliances, while Furnishing Futures provided all the furniture, decoration and homewares to create a trauma-informed home for each family. The findings of the pilot show that participants had reduced anxiety, improved emotional wellbeing, and increased feelings of stability.[46] One survivor even reported that she stopped taking anxiety medication because the home environment brought such a profound sense of relief. For many survivors, the provision of furniture and appliances that they may have had to leave behind is key to their recovery.[47]

However, one small charity cannot begin to shoulder the burden of furnishing sufficient homes for survivors. While there is an acknowledgement by some housing providers that furniture provision is vital for survivors, it is disingenuous to suggest that they are substantively tackling this problem when they are delivering a small pilot for an even smaller number of those who need this support. The social housing sector must also play its part by offering furnished tenancies to survivors of domestic abuse. Ending furniture poverty for survivors is going to need a whole of society approach and it cannot only fall on the third sector.

Children and Family Outcomes

For the first time in the UK, the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 recognised that children living in a household of domestic abuse are also victims.[48] Young people are also profoundly affected by the furniture poverty that may occur because of fleeing that abuse.

Living without the essential items of furniture impacts every stage of child development, from infant to adolescent. End Furniture Poverty hear reports of babies who have underdeveloped muscles due to not being able to have 'tummy time' because of unsafe flooring.[49] Laura, a survivor of abuse, stated that her baby was referred to physiotherapy because he was behind in his development, but once flooring and furniture were installed in her home he met his developmental milestones.

Similarly, lack of flooring can be a safety hazard for older children too. One respondent to the Resident Voice Index Survey, an independent survey and research initiative for social housing residents in the UK, said: "I felt bad for my children as they kept injuring their feet on the floorboards and nails that were left".[50]

Children being without their own bed is also a detriment to their physical and mental health. Our latest Extent of Furniture Poverty report found that up to 640,000 adults are missing a place for their child to sleep.[51] This has devastating consequences. Tracey slept on a mattress on the floor with her children for "a long time" as she tried to save bit by bit to furnish her new home. She said it affected their "comfort and confidence" and "not having a proper home environment made it harder for them to relax, play, study and feel secure". Furniture poverty also has immediate and harmful effects on a child's wellbeing. A lack of a bed, and other essential items, can cause sleep deprivation, emotional distress, reduced concentration at school and a lack of safe, personal space.[52]

Former Children's Laureate Frank Cottrell-Boyce summed it up best when he gave evidence to the Education Select Committee about children reading for pleasure. While discussing the "different subsections" of poverty:

"The one that most strikes me is furniture poverty. If you are moved into social housing as a result of an emergency, it tends to be let void, which means it is literally empty. No child is going to have a bedtime story if they have not got a bed. No child is going to dream that they are going to Narnia through the wardrobe if there is no wardrobe. No child is going to relate to "Little House on the Prairie" or think, "There's no place like home," if their clothes are stored in a bin bag because they might have to move again. The general instability of children's lives is definitely a factor".[54]

Moreover, knowing that their children are living without the essentials they need takes a massive toll on the mental health and self-esteem of victims and survivors. Melissa talked about how overwhelming she found knowing that her new property did not have furniture, white goods, or flooring. She said that: "The idea of having to source funds that I didn't (don't) have, left me feeling like a failure. Not being able to provide my daughter with the basic home necessities, isn't something I wish on any mother". This was a consistent theme in Furnishing Futures' case studies. Emily Wheeler said:

"Survivors with young children tell us that they feel enormous guilt for taking their children to an empty, unfurnished property. They are left with no choice but to sleep on the floor and eat takeaway food until they can afford to buy furniture and appliances and worry about the impact on their children during a time at which they should feel safe and supported".

Similarly, the effect on children who receive the essential furniture they need is enormous. Tracey, who we heard from earlier, spoke about the profound impact having the furniture the family needed had on her children: "My children feel settled and proud of their home. They can study properly, sleep peacefully, and invite friends over without feeling embarrassed. They have regained a sense of stability that every child deserves."

Economic Impacts

The VAWG strategy has rightly pointed out that the economic cost of domestic abuse is enormous. The Home Office has estimated that the annual socio-economic cost in 2025/26 was £89.3 billion.[54] Furthermore, this expense is only estimated for adults. Most costs are due to the consequences of the crimes on victims and survivors, including the physical and emotional harm victims and survivors suffer as a result.[55] Similarly, poverty puts high burdens on society, the economy, and local authorities. Trussell found that the overall cost of hardship in the financial year 2022/23 was £75.6 billion.[56] Addressing both blights on society is not only a moral imperative that will keep scores of women free from abuse, but the benefits will be felt in wider society.

End Furniture Poverty were keen to find out exactly how much money would be saved by investing in helping people access essential furniture and appliances. This led us to carry out a Cost Benefit Analysis of Local Welfare Assistance (LWA) and Furnished Tenancies, which showed that helping people to access essential furniture and appliances saves the Government significant sums of money. The table below shows the analysis of Liverpool and Cambridge councils' local welfare schemes.

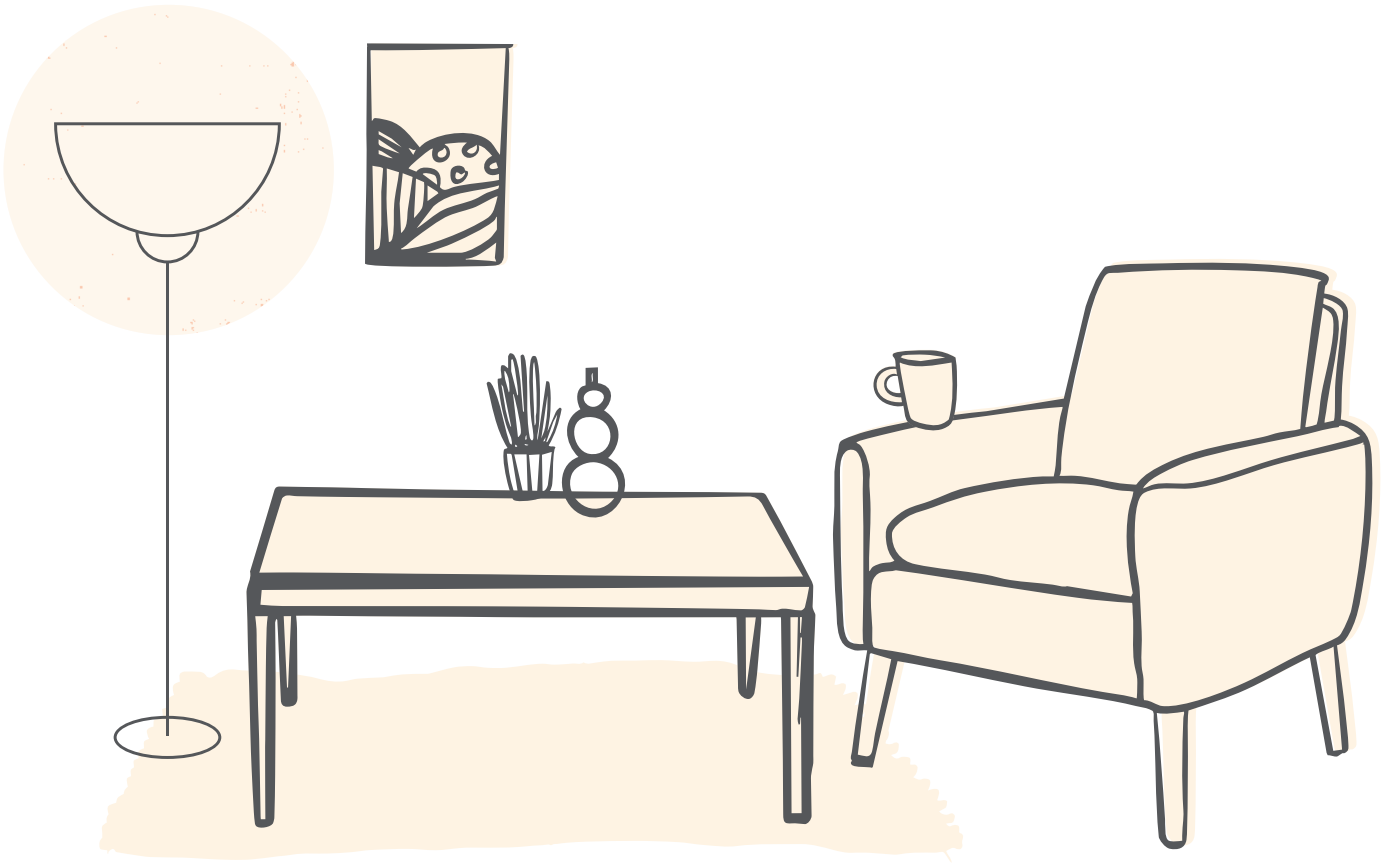
LWA Scheme	Local authority ratio	Wider public purse ratio
Cambridgeshire	£1 cost gives £12.90 benefit	£1 cost gives £16.50 benefit
Liverpool	£1 cost gives £9.70 benefit	£1 cost gives £14.20 benefit

We commissioned Local Partnerships, who are co-owned by HM Treasury, the Welsh Government, and the Local Government Association to carry out the analysis. It found for every £1 invested in LWA by local authorities with furniture and appliance provision, over £9 is saved in reduced demand for homelessness and social services support at local authority level. It also found that over £14 is saved by the wider public purse through reduced demand for other services such as health (NHS), criminal justice, and benefits (Department for Work and Pensions).[57]

Furnished tenancies, where the cost of the furniture is added to a service charge and covered by Universal Credit or legacy benefits, are beneficial for both tenants and landlords. For tenants, they are provided with a furnished home which creates an improvement in wellbeing through living in a stable environment where their basic needs are met. This means they also have greater capacity to sustain the tenancy. For landlords, tenancies are less likely to terminate if they are furnished, leading to fewer voids and their associated costs, with rental arrears likely to reduce as well.

Furniture poverty also carries a direct personal cost for survivors. If public services invest significant time and money in helping someone flee abuse, secure permanent accommodation and begin to rebuild their life, it makes little sense to leave them facing unaffordable costs for the basic items needed to make that accommodation liveable in order to sustain their safety. Without furniture, appliances, flooring and window coverings, survivors may be pushed into debt, forced to rely on high-cost credit, or left unable to live in their home safely and with dignity. This undermines the value of the wider support already provided and risks turning a moment of beginning anew into another period of financial crisis and increased risk.

> Nyla said that she "endured years of torment" at the hands of her abuser and she "walked away from a well-paid job, a beautiful home, and an area I knew well, sacrificing everything for safety and peace of mind. But suddenly, I found myself with absolutely nothing". She was moved into an unfurnished social home with no appliances, no flooring and no curtains and said that without the support from Furnishing Futures, she "quite frankly might have considered returning to my abuser".



EVIDENCE GAPS: WHY FURNITURE POVERTY AFFECTING SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE REMAINS INVISIBLE

While End Furniture Poverty has built a strong picture of furniture poverty across the UK, there is more to learn about how it affects survivors of domestic abuse moving through the housing system. As mentioned previously, the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 gives survivors of abuse priority need for housing. However, recent attempts to access data on local authority waiting lists have been mixed, so it remains to be seen whether local authorities or housing associations can target survivors with furnished homes. As a result, survivors needs are often invisible at the very point when decisions are being made about where and how they will rebuild their lives.

Local authorities are responsible for managing social housing waiting lists, deciding who gets priority, and making offers of accommodation. Councils will take the personal information of a survivor of domestic abuse when they apply for social housing. However, not every local authority records this data centrally, so analysis of which kind of homes survivors are being allocated and how they are furnished becomes very difficult.

Other research has found that this leaves major gaps. The London Assembly Housing Committee reported on Freedom of Information (FOI) research which comprised requests to every London borough about social housing waiting times broken down into specific categories, and also disqualification data, including cases where applicants were refused because of rent arrears or other priority debt.[58] The data was so poor that the Committee could not compare boroughs or carry out proper analysis. Some London boroughs in response to the FOI on housing-related debt said that they would have to conduct a manual 'trawl' to respond to the FOI, and they did not hold all their data in one place.[59]

This makes it much harder to see which groups are being affected by local housing policies, and how badly. The Committee findings went as far as to suggest it is possible that, in some cases, statutory obligations are not being fulfilled.[60]

This matters especially for survivors of domestic abuse. The VAWG strategy is clear that housing is vital for safety, recovery and long-term independence. But survivors' experiences show that local authorities and housing associations do not always know which groups are being impacted by their own policies.[61] The fact there is no standardised approach to allocation data means that comparisons across local authorities is impossible. Daniel Reast, Senior Research Officer at Centre for London, said that it was "important for policymaking and important for tackling those issues of equality and human rights".[62]

We recognise the severe shortage of social housing, but it is not reasonable to expect women leaving abuse with little or nothing to rebuild their lives from scratch in a completely unfurnished property. In 2025, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) guidance said that accommodation should meet the needs and circumstances of the survivor and their household and, wherever possible, their preferences.[63] Too often, the reality falls far short of that, and the lack of data available for analysis means that local authorities can struggle to track whether survivors are being allocated housing that is suitable for their circumstances.

There are examples of this with the survivors helped by Furnishing Futures. Natalie described how the council gave her a house that was entirely unfurnished and all she could afford were the beds they were sleeping in. The house was so large they could not afford to heat it, and this negatively affected her mental health: "I was depressed…I was even going to my doctor for medication so I could sleep properly at night". Partly because of being given an unsuitable property, all her spare money went towards immediate essentials and meant she struggled to lift herself out of furniture poverty: "Money that I was planning to save for household goods, was just used for food".

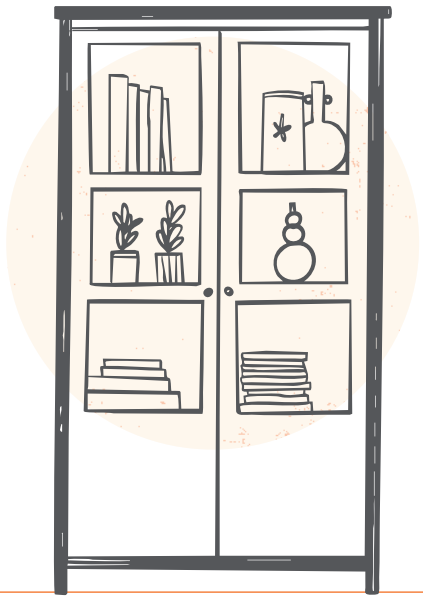
Many more survivors describe being offered unsuitable accommodation, being given little information about housing options, and struggling to navigate complicated systems. This suggests that the problem is not only a lack of social housing. It is also a lack of information about people's needs, including whether a survivor needs help with furniture, appliances, flooring or other essentials.

We also cannot access robust data on what happens after a survivor moves into social housing. Safe and suitable housing is widely understood to be central to recovery from domestic abuse, but there is no consistent data showing whether survivor households are doing well after they move, whether their wellbeing improves, or whether they can sustain the tenancy.

This means the Government cannot properly understand whether the VAWG strategy's aim of giving survivors the support they need in safe housing is being delivered. Without reliable information on how many survivors are on waiting lists, how they are prioritised, and what kind of housing they receive, the Government is left with an incomplete picture. The lack of data on whether homes are furnished also makes it much harder to tackle furniture poverty through the housing allocation system.

Better data collection is therefore an important first step. We echo the recommendation of the London Assembly Housing Committee report that a standardised framework for social housing allocation should be developed, but this should be nationwide. This should include data on the characteristics of the people allocated housing, and it should also include the furnishing status of the property; whether they have furniture, appliances, flooring, window coverings. This would make it easier to understand need, make fairer decisions, and offer furnished tenancies as a standard option for survivors fleeing abuse.

Without this data, it is much harder to get the right support to the right people, and survivors may continue to be placed in homes that do not meet their basic needs for safety, dignity and recovery. Similarly, the experiences of Furnishing Futures echo those of the Solace Women's Aid report we referenced earlier. There is a lack of training of housing staff on domestic abuse, the impact and needs of survivors, and how this affects survivors trying to access safe and suitable accommodation.



> "After escaping a DV relationship, I was relieved to be offered a safe home, but when I saw it, I felt so anxious. It was completely bare, with no flooring and I was so worried about how I was going to make this house feel like home. It felt cold and empty, especially for my son. The burden of having to do everything on my own was causing me panic and anxiety." – Emma

WHAT SUPPORT CURRENTLY EXISTS FOR SURVIVORS?

The VAWG Strategy is now an important part of the landscape of support for survivors because it recognises that help for survivors is currently too fragmented, inconsistent and difficult to navigate. Support for victims and survivors is one of the Strategy's core objectives, alongside prevention, early intervention, and the pursuit of perpetrators. It also acknowledges that survivors often experience multiple disadvantages; including homelessness, poor mental health, contact with the criminal justice system, and economic insecurity.[64]

There are welcome commitments in this area. The Government has announced a £55.8 million investment in a new multiple disadvantage programme, intended to transform how local public services respond to people facing or at risk of overlapping disadvantage. It has also provided £160 million of funding in 2025/26 for the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Duty, a £30 million uplift from the previous year. This is for local authorities to provide accommodation-based support to domestic abuse survivors and their children. These commitments matter because they recognise that survivors need more than a short-term crisis response; they need coordinated support that enables safety, stability and long-term independence.

The Home Office funds Women's Aid to deliver the Flexible Fund, which provides direct cash payments to victims of abuse to help them flee and stay fled from their abuser. The Future strand enables payments of up to £2500 for a range of provision to help victims secure long-term stability, including rent, deposits and furnishings.[65]

There is also a recognition of the importance of survivors having access to furniture and appliances from the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA). The Alliance works to embed standards of best practice across a range of social housing, supported accommodation and homelessness settings. The Bronze Accreditation has been updated to include support for survivors to access furniture and appliances, a hugely positive move.[66]

However, there are still clear gaps. Current support is largely focused on access to accommodation and specialist services, while furniture, appliances, flooring and window coverings are still treated as discretionary crisis support rather than a core part of recovery. Our previous policy paper, written in 2024, found very little dedicated furniture help for survivors, with local authority support often difficult to access and third-sector provision vastly over-subscribed.[67] Two years on, there has been little improvement. In the absence of a dedicated national route, survivors are still too often left to navigate local welfare schemes, (where they still exist), overstretched charities or personal debt to make a new home liveable.

Local Authority Crisis Support

In English local authorities, there has long been a postcode lottery of support dedicated to crisis situations, such as being forced to flee an abusive partner. Local Welfare Assistance (LWA) schemes are well established in some areas while others have no scheme at all. When our previous policy paper on domestic abuse was published, our data at that time found that 36 local authorities in England had closed their LWA scheme.[68]

The landscape has deteriorated since then. In 2024/25, End Furniture Poverty found that 48 authorities had no LWA schemes at all, leaving 17.9 million people without access to essential furniture and appliances.[69] Furthermore, at least 25 more authorities look set to abandon their LWA schemes as they are subsumed into the Government's new Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF). We will be publishing our seventh report on crisis support which examines 2025/26 data before the end of 2026.

Local authorities across the country who do have a scheme are also spending less overall on LWA. In 2022/23, £90.5 million went towards LWA across the country. This fell to £79.2 million in 2023/24, and in 2024/25 just £68.2 million was spent. As well as less money overall, local authorities are using less of their core spending power; just £23 million was spent on LWA, 34% of their overall budget. The Household Support Fund (HSF) made up the rest of the allocation at 66%, meaning LWA across England was supported by a temporary government fund.

Within existing LWA schemes, the level of provision for furniture and appliances varies hugely. In 2024/25, the highest per capita spend on these items was £3.58 (Islington), yet the lowest was £0.03 (Derby), among those local authorities with operational schemes who provide the essential items of furniture.[70] Furthermore, it is not clear whether the HSF supplemented the provision of the essential items. End Furniture Poverty estimates that as little as 1% of overall spend was allocated for this in 2024/25. Local authorities were not required to record their furniture and appliances spend through the HSF.[71]

Our research shows that any past assumptions that the Government has made surrounding the ability of those in a crisis to receive support, including survivors of domestic abuse, via their local authority HSF allocation are wide of the mark. In written and oral Parliamentary questions, the Minister for Housing and Planning, Matthew Pennycook MP, has made this very conjecture.[72]

End Furniture Poverty is urging all local authorities to use their allocation of the Government's new CRF to provide essential furniture and appliances. There is specific mention in the Fund's guidance that a crisis includes "an applicant experiencing domestic abuse and leaving an abusive relationship/partner and needs immediate help, such as moving into an unfurnished property and needing help with furniture and appliances".[73]

The fact that local authorities are being explicitly encouraged to use the CRF to help survivors needing furniture and appliance support is positive, and councils are also being required to track their spending on this provision through the CRF for the first time. End Furniture Poverty are calling for all local authorities to use at least 20% of their CRF allocation for furniture and appliances, and we have written a Best Practice Guide to help them achieve this goal.

Crisis support is often one of the first ports of call for survivors of domestic abuse, even though it is not specific help for their situation, it is available for all people going through an emergency. As we have demonstrated, policy makers often believe that it is the route that is always open and available, but its effectiveness and existence is a postcode lottery. Melanie described the difficulties in receiving help from her local authority to furnish her new property after fleeing her abusive relationship:

"Even my Housing Officer told me about the Council fund, but I was not sure how to apply for that because I spent two weeks just trying to communicate with them. The emails they were sending me, I was not finding how I can apply. They also mentioned that maximum help, if they would help me, is £500. I was very stressed out about how I would do everything with only £500".

Where local authorities do offer support with furniture and appliances, it is often capped at an amount far too low to furnish a property, and often only enough for a single appliance. Melanie said she went as far as considering refusing the offer of a home due to the stress of knowing she needed to furnish it. Subjecting survivors to navigating this complex and often contradictory system is unacceptable.

Moreover, very few local authorities offer direct support with flooring through either their LWA scheme or previously with the HSF. It remains to be seen whether the CRF will be utilised to support those in crisis, including those fleeing domestic abuse, with flooring. In any case, survivors should not need to rely on discretionary crisis support of any kind to be able to live in a property with flooring, as an absolute minimum.

As we have said in previous sections, the Government has missed a huge opportunity by failing to include flooring in the new Decent Homes Standard, and we will continue to search for ways that they can legislate for furnished tenancies in social homes. In the meantime, survivors of domestic abuse should, at the very least, be let homes with flooring.

The Third Sector

In areas where there is no LWA scheme and the local authority is not using the CRF for furniture and appliances, survivors must look to the third sector for support, be that grant-making charities or furniture reuse charities. There is very little support out there aimed at survivors of domestic abuse who are experiencing furniture poverty. Relying on the third sector is not a sustainable solution for ending furniture poverty for survivors of domestic abuse, Furnishing Futures eloquently explained:

"Charities like Furnishing Futures are often the only places survivors can turn to for support with floor coverings and furnishings, but we are few and far between. Our resources are limited and it should not fall on the voluntary sector to provide basic amenities that should be provided by social landlords as the bare minimum. It also should not fall to the voluntary sector to provide necessities for living with dignity, particularly where lives are at stake, as is the case with survivors of domestic abuse and their children".

End Furniture Poverty found that 6 million people were in furniture poverty in 2022, and we found no change to this number when we investigated again in 2025.[74] The third sector cannot meet this overwhelming level of demand, and we should not expect it to.

Help in the Devolved Nations

England is also lacking in comparison to the other countries in the UK with both crisis support and specialist domestic abuse support. The per capita spend on LWA in England is much lower (£1.17) than the counterpart schemes in Scotland (£8.39) and Wales (£7.84). This is not due to level of need; local authority funding hugely constricts spending in England. Due to the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) in Scotland and Discretionary Assistance Fund in Wales being centrally run, lack of local level funds is not a problem they need to contend with. The picture does not improve when accounting for the HSF; spend per capita in England rises to £4.80 when accounting for spending on direct applications for 2024/25, still almost half of spending in Scotland.[75]

There are also other features of the safety net in the Home Nations that are not present in England. For example, the Welsh government included the requirement for social landlords to ensure their properties are floored throughout in the revised 2023 Welsh Housing Quality Standard.[76] This has made a huge difference to both tenants and landlords. While there is not this provision in Scotland, flooring can be accessed through the SWF. In fact, it was the essential furniture item that was most accessed through the Community Care Grant side of the SWF in 2024/25.[77]

England, in comparison, has woefully inadequate flooring provision. It is rarely offered by councils through their Local Welfare Assistance schemes. In 2022/23, when End Furniture Poverty last asked local authorities which items of furniture they supply through their LWA, 71% of local authorities did not offer flooring.[78] This figure will be updated in our 2026 local welfare report. From the perspective of furniture and appliance provision for survivors of domestic abuse, England is severely lacking compared to our Scottish and Welsh counterparts.

Finally, Scotland and Wales have more specific domestic abuse support than England. There is already legislation in place in the Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Act 2021 that allows social landlords to apply for a court order on domestic abuse grounds to end an abuser's tenancy, and there is corresponding guidance from the Scottish Government to help landlords navigate this.[79] Similarly, Part 5 of the Housing Act (Scotland), which passed in November 2025, requires social landlords to have a policy which sets out how they will support tenants who are at risk of homelessness due to domestic abuse.[80]

For help with cash, The Fund to Leave is a Scottish Government initiative managed by Scottish Women's Aid that provides up to £1000 to help women and children safely escape an abusive relationship.[81] This is alongside furniture and appliance help through the SWF. In Wales, domestic abuse survivors who have 'urgent housing needs' are given priority over other groups, and they are owed a statutory homelessness duty regardless of whether they are found guilty of any unacceptable behaviour.[82]

Northern Ireland should also be considered separately within this comparison. Domestic abuse protections have been strengthened through the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021, which created a domestic abuse offence covering a course of abusive behaviour, including coercive, controlling, psychological, emotional and economic abuse.[83] Housing support is also organised differently: the Northern Ireland Housing Executive is the single strategic housing authority and assesses homelessness applications, including where a person cannot safely remain in their home. Crisis support is available through Northern Ireland's Discretionary Support scheme, which can provide help with short-term living expenses and basic household items in extreme, exceptional or crisis situations, but this does not amount to a clear statutory route to a furnished, floored and properly equipped home for survivors.[84] As in England, there remains a need to ensure that survivors leaving abuse in Northern Ireland can access furniture, appliances, flooring and window coverings as part of a safe and dignified transition into settled accommodation.





> [On the lack of efficacy of cash when used for furniture and appliances from crisis support] "Even my Housing Officer told me about the Council fund, but I was not sure how to apply for that because I spent two weeks just trying to communicate with them. The emails they were sending me, I was not finding how I can apply. They also mentioned that maximum help, if they would help me, is £500. I was very stressed out about how I would do everything with only £500" - Melanie

CONCLUSION: HOW CAN WE END FURNITURE POVERTY FOR SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE?

As the stories of the courageous women we have heard throughout this report have illustrated, furniture poverty has a severe impact on survivors of domestic abuse. The prospect of having to afford the cost of furnishing an entire home of expensive items can be immeasurably overwhelming for those looking to move on with their lives. As we have shown, it causes significant amounts of stress and anxiety and some women even consider the unthinkable, returning to the perpetrator of their abuse, because of furniture poverty.

The VAWG strategy is an important step towards the ambition of halving violence against women and girls in the next decade, it is vital that we acknowledge that. However, the support journey for women fleeing abuse cannot end at the moment they access social housing. Survivors deserve more than just a roof and an empty box, and more needs to be done to ensure no one ends up in this situation.

Furnished Tenancies

It is crucial that, in the first instance, more social housing properties are furnished. As we have mentioned in the report, only 3% of social housing is let as furnished compared to 30% in the private sector. This is an enormous disparity between the rental tenure types.

To address this gap in provision, there must be legislation that ensures at least 10% of general needs social housing stock is let as furnished. This will ensure thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of people, are lifted out of some of the worst cases of furniture poverty. Our new Extent of Furniture Poverty report found that social housing tenants were four times more likely to be in furniture poverty than homeowners, so those entering social housing are immediately more at risk of missing one or more essential item.[85] A large proportion of those new and existing social housing tenants are survivors of domestic abuse.

It is absolutely a positive that the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 ensures survivors have priority need status in securing social housing. However, as we have said time and again in this report, we need to do more than provide survivors of domestic abuse with an empty box. Support for victims and survivors is a key focus area of the VAWG strategy, it says that "supporting victims of VAWG crimes is more than just a moral duty, it is essential if we are going to break the cycle of offending and bring more perpetrators to justice".[86] A key element of this support is ensuring that survivors of domestic abuse who move into social housing can access the key furniture and appliances they need. As an absolute minimum, the properties that are let out to survivors should be fully floored. There should also be an option for landlords to clean and leave in place flooring that is considered fit for purpose.

The furnished tenancy model is a crucial mechanism to ensure that no survivor of domestic abuse who is moved into social housing is forced into furniture poverty. It can be very costly for a social housing tenant and landlord to provide essential furniture items directly, but the furnished tenancy model can bypass this burden. It allows the cost of furniture and appliances to be added to the service charge element of Universal Credit, so there is no expense to the social housing tenant or landlord.

Furniture Flex

End Furniture Poverty has carried out extensive research into furnished tenancies and provides a wide range of support for landlords who introduce new furniture schemes. They have also worked with colleagues in their sister charity, FRC, to develop Furniture Flex, a furniture service designed to overcome all the barriers landlords say they face when considering a new scheme. This includes a rental option, meaning landlords require no capital outlay, the flexibility for tenants to return items and remove the service charge easily and quickly if they move off benefits, and enhanced administration support. This is a sustainable and workable solution to provide furnished properties for tenants and one which is supported by homelessness charities.

The CEO of one domestic abuse charity said: "Many of the women we support leave abuse with nothing — no belongings, no savings and no safe space to call home. The option of a furnished tenancy would be a true lifeline for them. It would mean they could move into a fully furnished property with everything they need straight away, allowing them to begin to move forward with their lives."

A Whole Society Approach

We acknowledge that a furnished tenancy will not suit all survivors of domestic abuse, but there should be the option there at the very least. The VAWG strategy repeatedly emphasises that achieving its ambitious targets is going to take the collective efforts of the whole of society, and End Furniture Poverty and Furnishing Futures believe that this must include the social housing sector too. Survivors and their families must be given the best possible chance to rebuild their lives following their trauma, and housing associations and stock holding local authorities need to play their part by letting at least part of their properties as furnished.

The benefits to the landlord and wider society are enormous. We have already covered the significant cost domestic abuse has to the economy, with the Home Office estimating that, in 2025/26, it cost £89.3 billion. End Furniture Poverty believes that, by ensuring survivors can move on from their abuse with the essential furniture and appliances that they need, we can help mitigate some of those costs. Our cost benefit analysis found that furnished tenancies improve the ability of vulnerable tenants to sustain social tenancies and therefore continue to benefit from the wide range of support offered by social landlords in comparison with the private rented sector. Furnished tenancies therefore act as a preventative measure; they avoid survivors of abuse potentially falling into crisis again because of furniture poverty and the subsequent personal and societal costs involved in this.

Local Welfare Assistance and the Crisis and Resilience Fund

The other route towards acquiring essential furniture and appliances is local authority crisis support. We have talked in this report about the postcode lottery of help that exists in England, and that help with essential furniture and appliances has not been available to everyone through Local Welfare Assistance and the Household Support Fund.

There is a more explicit focus on furniture and appliances in the Crisis and Resilience Fund, and this is a welcome shift. Local authorities are required to record their spending on essential furniture, and they are being encouraged to go down this route to support survivors of domestic abuse. However, the CRF is still a temporary fund, the Government has only committed to the CRF up until 2028/29. In the meantime, local authorities are diverting more core funding away from Local Welfare Assistance. This runs the risk that if the CRF is not renewed, there will be no local authority crisis support left to support survivors of domestic abuse.

The ability to access essential furniture and appliances when fleeing should not depend on where a survivor happens to live, whether a local scheme still exists, or whether an overstretched charity has capacity to help. The Government should therefore use the CRF as a bridge towards a stronger national system of Local Welfare Assistance, underpinned by a statutory duty to provide crisis support. This duty must be backed by adequate, ring-fenced funding, available in every local authority, protected from short-term funding pressures, and clearly expected to provide furniture, appliances, flooring and window coverings for survivors who need them. Without this, the promise of the VAWG Strategy will continue to fall short at the point when survivors are trying to turn safety into stability.

Social Security

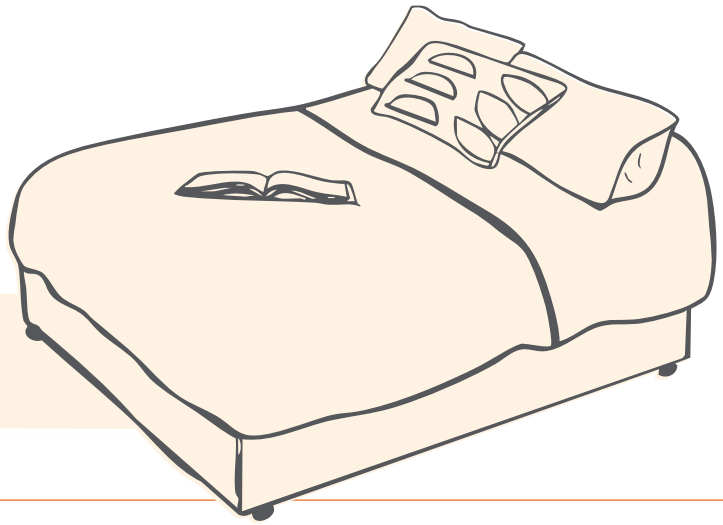
The wider social security system is also central to whether survivors can move on safely from abuse. As set out earlier in this report, repeated freezes to Local Housing Allowance have left survivors on low incomes with extremely limited options in the private rented sector. This pushes survivors into temporary accommodation for longer, narrows their housing choices, and can make it harder to secure a stable home near support networks, schools and services.

The benefit cap compounds these pressures. For survivors who are out of work, in low-paid work or working part-time because of trauma, caring responsibilities, disrupted employment or the practical realities of fleeing abuse, the cap can make both private rents and, in some cases, social rents unaffordable. It also reduces the income available to meet the basic costs of starting again, including beds, appliances, flooring and other essentials. In practice, this means the social security system can undermine the very safety and recovery that housing and domestic abuse policies are trying to achieve.

The Government should therefore ensure that Local Housing Allowance is set at a level that genuinely reflects local rents and gives survivors realistic options to move on from temporary accommodation into secure housing. Survivors of domestic abuse should also be exempt from the benefit cap, so that the decision to flee abuse does not result in further financial punishment or force women to choose between safety, rent and the essentials needed to make a home liveable. Without reform, the VAWG Strategy's commitment that economic insecurity should never force a victim back to an abusive partner will remain out of reach for too many survivors.

Ending furniture poverty for survivors of domestic abuse therefore requires action across housing, local crisis support and social security. Furnished tenancies should become a mainstream option, crisis support must be available consistently wherever survivors live, and the benefits system must not punish women for fleeing abuse. Without these changes, too many survivors will continue to be offered safety in name only, rather than the secure, dignified and liveable homes they need to recover and rebuild their lives.

> "Every time I was viewing the properties I was already in mental stress about how I will be converting this one into a home"



RECOMMENDATIONS

This report highlights that Ending Furniture Poverty for survivors of domestic abuse needs to be a collective effort by the whole of society. End Furniture Poverty will continue to work with all relevant partners, politicians, social landlords, businesses and the third sector to develop the necessary solutions. In the meantime, there are some crucial steps that we believe should be immediately implemented:

Social Landlords

- Social landlords must work with all survivors of domestic abuse to ensure they are able to access all the essential furniture and appliances that they need, including flooring and window coverings, with the option of a furnished tenancy.
- At a minimum, all properties let out to survivors of domestic abuse should be fully floored.
- At least 10% of general needs social housing stock should be let as furnished.

Local Authorities

- Local authorities should be directed to use the Government's new Crisis and Resilience Fund to provide furniture and appliances for those experiencing homelessness for whom a furnished tenancy is not suitable, for example those who are not in receipt of full means-tested benefits. Items should be provided rather than cash or voucher equivalents.
- Local authority staff should receive training to rehouse survivors of domestic abuse in a sensitive and trauma-informed way.

Government

- The Government needs to make Local Welfare Assistance a statutory duty with adequate ring-fenced funding – this will ensure LWA is available in every local authority, and it is shielded from turbulent Government finances.
- Domestic abuse survivors should be exempted from housing-related debt rules in social housing allocation processes.
- Domestic abuse survivors should be exempted from the benefit cap.
- The Government should work with the Regulator of Social Housing to develop a standardised framework for data collection on social housing allocations so the impact of policies can be analysed.
- The VAWG strategy is a cross-government strategy – we need that collaboration to continue with input from the Home Office, Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government, and Department for Work and Pensions to ensure we achieve all the above recommendations.

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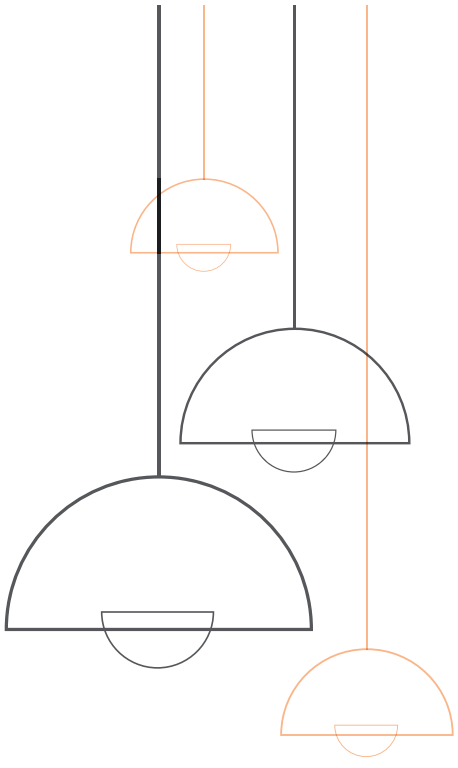
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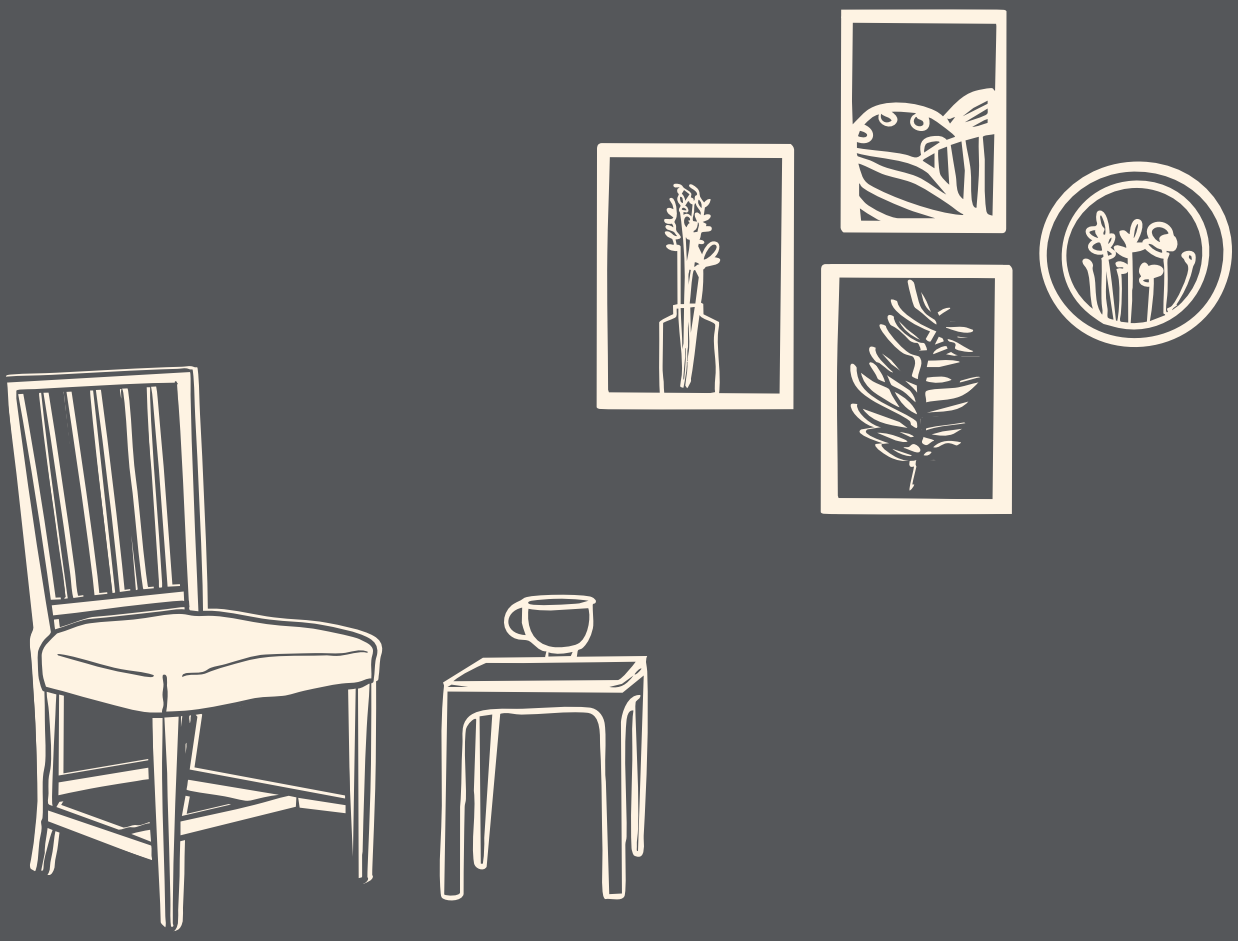
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