

***A Woman's Place: Women and Hostel  
Provision in London***

**Policy toolkit - combating violence against  
women in hostels**

**The Lilith Project**

**2007**

## Introduction

From 2003-6 the Lilith Project conducted a survey of more than two hundred projects that identified existing services for women in London and gathered information on the exact nature of services provided. The report focused on the needs of homeless women and how single mixed hostels addressed these needs.

Lilith found that as few as nine per cent of hostel respondents had appropriate violence against women policies in place, with 74 per cent having no gender-sensitive safety policies at all and 26 per cent admitting to having no protection from harassment policies, despite this being an integral requirement of Supporting People funding requirements. (See Appendix 1)

Many hostels were acutely aware of their omission of vital policies and between 60 and 70 per cent asked for assistance on developing policies to protect female service users. This toolkit has been specifically designed to assist the hostels sector and includes guidelines and policy templates. (See Appendix 2)

**For more information on the report *A Woman's Place: Women and Hostel Provision in London* or other aspects of the Lilith Project's research work, please contact:**

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### **Using this guide**

To help you to improve services for women as quickly and easily as possible, this toolkit is structured as a woman's journey through the hostel system, from referral to moving on, but can also be used for immediate reference.

There are short, medium and long term policy recommendations in each section to help you develop a sustainable policy structure in line with the requirements of the Gender Equality Duty, Supporting People, and any new gender legislation. The policy recommendations and examples of good and bad practice are marked in different colours to make it easier to find what you want.

Any further information to assist you in identifying areas of policy improvement is highlighted in pink boxes.

### **Legal definitions**

Any legal definitions that may help you are in blue boxes.

### **Short term examples and recommendations**

Each section has a short term recommendation or policy example that should be easy and cost-effective to implement. Short term examples are highlighted in green boxes.

### **Medium term examples and recommendations**

Medium term recommendations are highlighted in yellow. You should be looking to implement these examples in about four to six month's time.

### **Long term examples and recommendations**

Long term requirements are highlighted in orange. They require more planning and you should be looking to implement them in six to twelve months.

### Glossary of terms – A-Z

**Domestic violence:** this is the term for violence that occurs within current or past relationships. It can cover sexual, financial, physical, mental or emotional abuses, and is often a trigger for female homelessness.

**Female genital mutilation (FGM):** the removal of part or all of the female genitalia. This may take place in a surgical or non-surgical environment and is practiced globally with high prevalence rates in African countries and some areas of the Middle East and Asia. FGM is often carried out in childhood and can have long-term physical and mental health effects, including menstrual problems, incontinence, complications during pregnancy, birth and afterwards, and post-traumatic stress disorder and sexual dysfunction.

**Harassment:** this covers direct or indirect behaviour that is intended to make the target of the harassment uncomfortable or frightened. A lot of harassment is discriminatory, because the harasser is targeting someone of a different race, gender or sexuality in a way that he would not treat someone that he identifies with.

**Mixed hostels:** this term is used in the guide to refer to accommodation housing men and women over the age of 16, often with some degree of support. It does not cover refuges or bed and breakfast accommodation.

**Prostitution:** many providers understand prostitution to be the exchange of sex for money. We define prostitution as a sexual act (including phone or internet sex, pornography/glamour modelling, lapdancing/stripping and peep shows) undertaken for the purpose of material gain (money, drugs, food, accommodation etc). This is a more inclusive definition.

**Self-harming:** this term covers self-harming behaviour, including injuries to the body such as cutting or burning, but also covering other self-harming behaviour such as over-sexualised behaviour, risk-taking behaviour, substance and alcohol abuse, starving and bingeing, or self-destructive behaviours.

**Sexual violence:** this encompasses all violence perpetrated with sexual intent and includes rape, sexual assault, groping, sexual victimisation or bullying, stalking and indecent exposure (flashing). Sexual violence is often linked with domestic violence, but is also an offence in its own right.

**Single homeless woman:** a woman who has no accommodation, and has no dependents with her. Single homeless women may have children, but for her to qualify for single homeless status these children will be cared for elsewhere.

**Substance Misuse:** the use of substances (such as illegal drugs, prescription medicines or alcohol) in such a way that results in harm to the individual user or to the wider community. The range of harm includes physical health problems; psychological health problems; violence; financial problems; family problems or social problems.

**Trafficking:** this term describes the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of women, by means of the threat or use of force or any other form of coercion, for the purpose of exploitation (sexual or otherwise). Cases of trafficking are increasing in the UK, and it is likely that you will encounter a woman who has been trafficked.

**Victim/survivor:** some agencies prefer to refer to women as ‘survivors’ of violence, because they feel that ‘victim’ implies passivity. This guide sees the term ‘survivor’ as implying that the woman has completely recovered from her experience, which is rarely the case. Therefore we use the term ‘victim’ of violence to move responsibility of violence from victim to perpetrator.

**Violence against women (VAW):** a term describing the continuum of violence that women experience, from harassment and bullying, through to domestic violence, female genital mutilation, rape and murder.

## Your requirements as a hostel provider

Any person has the right to access services, regardless of race, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation or disability. As part of this equality of opportunity, all public bodies are to begin mainstreaming existing equality policies into each aspect of their service provision. This means that public bodies must assess the impact of each of the equalities strands on their services and ensure that they are promoting equality of access.

### **Why provide specialist services for women who have experienced violence?**

You may already be asking yourself why you should be providing any services for women who have experienced violence. After all, hostels are housing providers, not specialist workers or counsellors. However, with one in three women being the victim of sexual violence, and domestic violence making up 25 per cent of all UK crimes, you are probably already working with women who have experienced violence.

As a group, women who have experienced violence and abuse are over represented in drug/alcohol treatment services. As such, it is important to address violence and abuse and its link with substance misuse with your hostel service users.

It is important to stress that hostels are not expected to become experts in supporting these women overnight. But with legislation protecting service users from violence developing quickly, hostels will need to start working with other agencies to provide a comprehensive service, and this toolkit is designed to help you start this process.

## **Laws and legislation applying to violence against women**

### **Service Provision**

#### **Sex Discrimination Act 1975**

The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (as amended), referred to in this guide as the 'Act', which applies to the whole of Great Britain but not to Northern Ireland, makes sex discrimination generally unlawful in employment, training and related matters (where discrimination against married persons is also dealt with), in education, in the provision of goods, facilities and services, and in the disposal and management of premises.

The Act gives individuals a right of direct access to the civil courts and industrial tribunals for legal remedies for unlawful discrimination. Northern Ireland has similar provisions.

The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) was established as part of the Sex Discrimination Act.

#### **Human Rights Act 1998**

Articles III and VIII of this Act state that it is necessary for agencies providing statutory services to act to prevent violent treatment, or to protect against violent treatment. It is possible that the Human Rights Act could be used in the future to hold service providers to account.

#### **The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003**

These Regulations are a legally-binding requirement upon service providers not to discriminate against a woman on the basis of her sexual orientation. This includes not making value judgements or offering her the same services as heterosexual women.

### **Equality Act 2006**

The Equality Act 2006 amends the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 and the Equal Pay Act 1970 (as amended by the Employment Equality (Sex Discrimination Regulations 2005), and places a statutory duty upon public authorities, which is explained in more detail below.

### **What is the Gender Equality Duty?**

The Gender Equality Duty is a statutory code. It is admissible as evidence in any legal action under the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 or the Equal Pay Act 1970, in any criminal or civil investigations. It will be enforced by the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) and by the Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR) from October 2007. Under the Gender Equality Duty all hostels that are commissioned by local authorities to provide services through Supporting People have a statutory duty to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment,
- promote equality of opportunity between men and women.

### **How is the duty enforced?**

The duty is enforced by the EOC, then by the Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR) from October 2007. Inspection bodies will also play a role by requesting evidence about compliance with the general and specific duties.

The EOC will be looking to see real outcomes for gender equality from public organisations. This includes looking at whether public authorities have collected information to allow them to understand the impact of their work on women and on men. It includes establishing whether an authority has put its efforts where they will have the biggest impact on gender equality. It will check whether sufficient consultation has taken place and whether information about the gender equality scheme has been widely available through appropriate channels and in a variety of formats. The EOC will check whether steps have been taken to implement the actions within the scheme. (EOC, 2007)

The EOC, then the CEHR, can issue compliance notices when it thinks a public body has not complied with the duty. These notices are enforceable by the courts.

### **Voluntary sector organisations**

Voluntary sector organisations may be affected by the Gender Equality Duty in four ways:

- 1 If the organisation or service is interested in campaigning or lobbying for gender equality it can use the gender duty to encourage action by public authorities.
- 2 Under certain circumstances, if voluntary organisations deliver public services on behalf of public authorities, they may be subject to the gender duty in their own right.
- 3 If organisations are providing other services to public authorities, the authority may ask them to demonstrate how they are helping them to meet their obligations under the gender duty.
- 4 If organisations make grant applications to public authorities they can ask for evidence in any funding applications of how the organisation will build gender equality into its work.

Voluntary sector organisations are not subject to specific duties in the same way as public bodies and government departments are, but may need to act in a monitoring capacity for public bodies implementing the Gender Equality Duty by asking public bodies for evidence of how they are meeting the gender duty. This would include asking for copies of gender equality schemes and equality impact assessments for those who are covered by the specific duties, or by taking part in consultation activities. There are certain cases where voluntary services may be subject to the GED, see below.

### **Delivering functions or services on behalf of a public body**

The duty applies to any organisation that delivers public functions. It recognises that many public functions are now delivered by private or voluntary organisations. In the context of the gender duty, public functions are services that would otherwise be carried out by the state and where

## Policy toolkit – combating violence in hostels

individuals have to rely upon a specific body in that role. The organisation will be covered by the duty in respect of that role, not for every service it delivers.

Procurement is the process whereby public organisations contract out services. Public sector bodies like central government, local government and health authorities procure billions of pounds worth of goods and services from private or voluntary organisations each year. This includes goods like vehicles, stationery, foodstuffs and medical supplies as well as internal services like payroll, cleaning, recruitment, training or IT support. Services to the public include school transport, taking elderly or disabled people to day-care centres, school meals, home care, residential care, parking enforcement and refuse collection.

The gender duty means that public authorities remain responsible for ensuring gender equality in services that they contract out to voluntary or private organisations. If you provide goods or services to the public sector, authorities can ask you to:

- Demonstrate how you meet sex equality legislation like the Equal Pay Act and the Sex Discrimination Act (e.g. have you carried out an equal pay review, what are your policies on sexual harassment?)
- Ensure gender equality issues are built into service design (e.g. accessible buses or accounting for men's and women's needs in training provision)
- Provide evidence of progress after an employment tribunal loss (and remove you from their list of suppliers if you refuse or have not taken sufficient remedial action)

Whether or not an organisation is exercising a public function is ultimately a matter for the courts but it would be helpful to ask yourself the following questions:

- Are you wholly or partly funded by public funds?
- Are you exercising powers assigned to you by law?

## Policy toolkit – combating violence in hostels

- Are you taking the place of central or local government in regard to that function?
- Are you providing a public service?
- Are your structures and work closely linked with the contracting-out body?
- Have you got a close relationship with any public authority?
- Are you closely supervised by a government regulatory body?

If you think you might be undertaking public functions, it may be necessary to protect yourself legally by making sure that you meet the general duty (i.e. pay due regard to eliminating unlawful discrimination and harassment and promoting equality of opportunity between women and men) with regards to those areas. (EOC, 2007)

### **When did the Gender Equality Duty take effect?**

The Duty 'went live' on **6 April 2007**. All public bodies were required to have gender action plans in place from **30 April 2007**. From this date any public body as defined by the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), including hostels, will need to demonstrate that it is providing gender-appropriate services for women and men. Examples of gender-appropriate services are:

- effective policies to address violence against women, including appropriate staff training
- designated male and female areas to reduce harassment
- provision of full time female staff at all times
- introducing women-only healthcare or advice sessions in the daytime when more women are more likely to feel safe to attend.

### **Single sex hostels and single sex services**

When the Lilith Project interviewed hostels in 2003-6, some organisations expressed concerns that they had extremely restricted resources and would find implementing gender-based policy difficult, or that they were effectively men-only.

The Gender Equality Duty does protect single-sex services by demanding that a public body gives due regard to gender equality in terms of proportionality and relevance. In the case of a women-only refuge, gender-appropriate services for men would have zero proportion (men being 0% of the service user group) and zero relevance.

However, this does not mean that hostels that are 'de-facto' men-only are included in this proviso.

Services that are not single-sex, but who have no female service users due to working practices or lack of equality of access, will be required to address these issues as a matter of priority.

### **Organisations with limited capacity**

Organisations with limited capacity will be expected to implement the Duty according to proportionality.

For example, a Rape Crisis centre with 90 per cent female service users would not be expected to provide equal services for men and women. The Gender Equality Duty would expect the centre to demonstrate that it is working to provide some gender-appropriate services that are proportional to the number of its male service users.

## Accessing homelessness services

Women often self-refer to homelessness services, which can mean that hard-to-reach groups (BMER communities, disabled women and young women) are far less likely to approach any advice or support agencies because they are not aware of their existence.

Women found that advice agencies present physical and mental barriers to accessing help, making them less likely to use the service. The majority of women approached during the research reported negative experiences of approaching local authorities for assistance.<sup>1</sup> 23 per cent of women do not access any service regularly during their period of homelessness,<sup>2</sup> often because they see advice agencies as male-dominated

### Recommendations

Agencies can undertake simple Gender Impact Assessments (e.g. using interviews, questionnaires or focus groups of service users) to identify problems. See the accompanying information pack for a sample impact assessment. Agencies can also undertake simple monitoring to expose any gaps in their profile or any groups that do not use their services. For example, if BMER women do not use a service, the agency may decide to advertise in a community newspaper or in speciality food shops.

“Agencies can operate awkward opening times, such as late at night or during office hours, which is difficult for homeless women in employment.”

**Agencies arrange to have one ‘early bird’ session beginning at 7 am and close earlier (short term)**

“There are no safe spaces to wait to be seen”

**Set up a safe private room where women can wait (medium term)**

<sup>1</sup> Crisis, 2006. *Homeless women: still being failed but still striving* (London: Crisis), p.5

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, pp. 4, 6

“Interviews are conducted in public through glass plating – there’s no privacy and everyone can hear.”

**Look at changing the service environment to meet female service users’ need for personal interaction, for example a weekly ‘surgery’ for women in a private room (long term)**

## **Supporting hard to reach groups and hidden homeless women**

Women who become homeless are rarely found on the streets. They are hidden from sight and consequently from support, funding or assistance. Many are the ‘hidden homeless’, those who do not have a permanent home, but who are not defined as homeless for the following reasons:

- They ‘willingly’ gave up housing by leaving an abusive partner. Domestic violence is cited by over 63% of women as a primary reason for homelessness.
- A history of substance misuse or mental health problems necessitating periods of residential care.
- Staying in a homeless hostel or shelter. Women represent up to 25% of hostel residents.
- Experienced a relationship breakdown, this can include separation, bereavement, fleeing childhood sexual violence, or fleeing abuse.
- Staying long term with friends.
- Not legally recognised as a resident in the UK.
- Under 18 and therefore unable to hold a tenancy.
- Residing in institutions such as prisons, long term residential care, or in the armed forces.

- Housed in accommodation such as temporary housing or bed & breakfast.<sup>3</sup>

A recent survey by Crisis found that homeless women are far more concerned with hiding their homeless status than men in similar positions. Women interviewed in the survey described how they developed strategies to survive and hide their homelessness, such as carrying a case and posing as a tourist, using public washrooms to maintain a 'neat' appearance, and sleeping in safe environments such as galleries or libraries. (Crisis, 2006) Other women sleep on acquaintance's floors or sofas (a practice known as 'sofa surfing'), which can leave them at risk of exploitation.

### Recommendations

When trying to reach hard-to-access groups, clearly it is necessary to put aside any preconceptions about homelessness. In the cases outlined above, advertising your hostel service in local Homeless Persons Units (HPUs) would be unlikely to reach your target audience, who may also object to being referred to as homeless. It may be more effective to pitch your organisation as offering advice and accommodation, and advertise in nearby schools, libraries, churches, pubs and clubs, and substance misuse agencies. Although women who are sleeping rough or sofa surfing may be safer in a hostel, they may not be convinced.

'What services?'

**Make sure your service is reaching its core service users, by ensuring you have information posted across a range of public spaces, such as shops, mosques, schools, community centres, libraries, drug/alcohol agencies etc.**

'I can't find anything I understand and I don't want to be in a shelter'

**Do the majority of your service users speak English, or another language? If yes then you will need to translate your information. In**

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<sup>3</sup> Dr Kesia Reeve, Dr David Robinson & Sarah Coward: *Hidden Homelessness: The Invisible City*, Sheffield Hallam University, 2004, 2004

**addition, look at revamping leaflets and promotional material to help break down the myth of hostel life.**

‘There’s nothing out there for me.’

**If you’re a specialist hostel, try to set up focus groups of your service users to find out why you have a low service take-up and use this as a mode of improvement.**

### **Referrals process – supporting women**

Referral agencies reported that women who had experienced violence did not feel supported by Police or Social Services and were more likely to drop out of the referral process at an early point.

#### **Recommendations**

Referral agencies can seek advice from local voluntary sector and women’s organisations on how best to support women who have experienced violence. Speaking to local community services also has the advantage of reaching more marginalised groups.

Referral agencies should also be aware that finding a woman accommodation is a priority, but that it is counter-productive to place her in an environment where she could experience further abuse. Therefore all referral agencies should know of at least one hostel which can offer a safe, suitable place.

If a woman has been raped or sexually assaulted, it is vital that she is put in contact with a Sexual Assault Referral Centre as soon as possible. If the attack was within the last 24 hours, try to make sure that she doesn’t go to the toilet, drink or eat, or change her clothes to preserve evidence. If the attack was within the last 72 hours keep any clothes that the woman was wearing.

**SARC contact details are in the accompanying information pack.**

“I felt totally lost and no one really saw how bad I felt straight after the rape, they were more interested in finding me somewhere to stay. It wasn’t safe to go home and I felt like I was the problem”

**Police and Social Services contact a local women’s service as soon as the woman discloses any violence.**

“No one understood what the abusive relationship was like, they acted like it was my fault I walked out and am now homeless”.

**Women’s organisations can offer Police, Social Services and referral agencies training on how to identify and support women who have experienced forms of violence.**

“It’s hard, these women are getting a different person every time they call and have to go through their experiences over and over”

**Police and Social Services introduce rolling training on violence against women, informed by hostels and service users. Referral agencies work to implement improved and consistent caseworker communication, so that women can talk to the same person, avoiding reliving traumatic experiences.**

## Arrival at the hostel – physical comfort

First impressions are vital, and given the stresses that homelessness can exert on women's physical and social well-being, it is important that a woman's arrival at the hostel is a smooth process into a safe environment.

Despite women representing between 30 and 50 per cent of residents in London hostels, one in ten hostels approached in the survey did not employ full-time female staff.

This raises questions of whether your hostel is meeting the Gender Duty requirements to provide an appropriate service. For example, is it appropriate for a woman to be made comfortable by male staff when arriving at the hostel for the first time, particularly if she became homeless through violence?

Agencies need to work more closely with each other and with hostels to consider gender sensitivity when deploying staff. In addition, the Gender Equality Duty will require hostel providers to examine whether their current gender balance of staff is appropriate to the mix of residents using the hostel.

### Recommendations

The majority of homeless women approached in a recent survey said that the most important things to them were a comfortable room, privacy, and knowing who to go to if something goes wrong.<sup>4</sup> Often women who are fleeing violence have nothing but the clothes they arrive in, and have no access to any toiletries, cosmetics or clothes until they can sort out benefits and allowances. Women arriving at Eaves have often said that being given a small amount of toiletries would make all the difference to them.

Hostels can meet these needs without incurring large extra costs or increasing workloads by approaching local pharmacies, supermarkets and cosmetics

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<sup>4</sup> Crisis. 2006. *Homeless women: still being failed but still striving* p. 26

## Policy toolkit – combating violence in hostels

makers for gifts. There is a list of suggested donors in the accompanying information pack.

“I want to be somewhere safe, like a home”

**Hostels can ensure that there is an appropriate member of staff to meet the new resident and that that her room is ready to move into. Induction packs can contain a list of local VAW contact agencies.**

“I came with nothing, it was awful. I had no clothes, no soap.”

**Hostels can approach local pharmacies and supermarkets to source donors and have a small number of toiletries and sanitary products for women arriving at the hostel to use.**

“I want to feel safe from the minute I arrive”.

**Management can work to increase long term recruitment and retention of female staff.**

### Arrival - assessing and supporting needs

The majority of women supported by Eaves who have experienced violence said that they benefited from quick and accurate identification of their needs by staff, and linking to appropriate services.

The majority of hostel workers spoken to in the survey showed a sympathetic response to women who had experienced violence, but were unsure of local services or lacked training to offer the right level of support.

The voluntary sector can offer specialised support for women who have experienced violence, and it is important to build good relationships with local agencies, especially if you or your service users feel that your organisation is unable to support them fully.

## **Recommendations**

Although a lot of women's organisations operate with limited resources, they are often happy to consult or take referrals from local agencies supporting women. If there are no suitable agencies in your borough, it is possible to find some cross-borough or pan-London services. Second-tier organisations such as the Lilith Project, Rights of Women or the Women's Resource Centre may be able to help you locate services.

You can find information about local services on your local Council website, by contacting one of the above agencies, or by finding out about any forums for violence against women practitioners in your area. Some substance misuse agencies have specialist women's or domestic violence workers and/or operate women only sessions. Female service users who have complex needs around drug/alcohol use may benefit from such agencies.

To identify whether any women that arrive at your hostel have experienced violence, it is best to use a standardised confidential questionnaire that will allow any disclosures to be made safely. In addition standardised questionnaires may help to pick up forms of 'hidden' violence such as female genital mutilation, forced marriage, childhood sexual abuse or previous involvement in prostitution. An example of a questionnaire is in the accompanying information pack.

You should have a list of services that can support the following issues:

- domestic violence
- sexual violence (including rape in a relationship, FGM and group rape)
- forced marriage
- 'honour' violence
- harassment and stalking
- childhood sexual abuse
- self harm behaviours, including eating disorders
- coping through substance or alcohol misuse

## Policy toolkit – combating violence in hostels

- involvement in prostitution

“We don’t know of any service users who have been victims of violence”

**If any service user does disclose experiences of violence, encourage her to access a specialist service as soon as possible. There is a list of sexual assault support services in the information pack, and you can find details of domestic violence services on the Women’s Aid website at [www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk). If you can, put up lists of support agency numbers next to any public phones, or on notice boards.**

“No one wanted to know about what I’d been through”

**Draw up a confidential questionnaire as soon as possible, and approach a women’s housing service if you do not feel confident drawing it up on your own. If possible, circulate questionnaires around your current service users too. In order to maintain gender monitoring, ensure you have a section for respondents to mark their gender.**

“We deal with the issue at disclosure”

**Set up a confidential issues and complaints service so that your service users can highlight issues that they feel need addressing.**

## Arrival at the hostel - communication

Language is often a barrier for women to disclose their experiences safely and clearly. The Lilith Project report found that women accessing hostels can speak up to 20 different languages, and are less likely to report violence if they cannot communicate effectively. In addition, many hostels did not have access to translated documents and did not know if any staff could speak the required language.

### Recommendations

If you do not already have language support in place, you should identify a linguistic support provider as a matter of urgency. There are some suggested providers in the accompanying information pack.

If a situation arises involving legal documentation, for example a tenancy agreement, injunction against a violent partner, anti-social behaviour order or drug treatment and testing order (DTTO), an interpreter must be made available, as it is vital that the woman understands the legal implications of her situation. Translating documents can be expensive, and it is worth monitoring or auditing your current service user make-up to see which translations are in most demand.

It is also worth auditing your staff, and keeping a record of who speaks what language and to what level. Sometimes a brief greeting in the appropriate language can have a huge positive impact on well-being.

“No one could understand me, my English wasn’t good and people got frustrated”

**Use a telephone language support service like Language Line for immediate support and install a sheet with ‘I speak this language, I require this service’ in appropriate community languages for service users to indicate their needs. See the accompanying information pack for a sample sheet.**

“The interpreter was rude and unsympathetic and I couldn’t understand the documents”

**If you use an interpreter, make sure that he or she is Criminal Records Bureau (CRB)-checked and if possible, give him or her a brief questionnaire on attitudes (see the accompanying information pack).**

**Keep feeding back to your service users; are they happy with the interpreter? Audit your staff’s language skills and allocate more training where appropriate.**

“It’s so much better having forms I can read easily, I feel reassured”

**Monitor your service users and have translations made of your most-used forms and information. If possible, link this in to your database of local women’s services.**

## Protection from Abuse

As recipients of Supporting People funding, all hostels are required to demonstrate that they protect their service users from abuse.

### **Supporting People Commissioning Requirement – Protection from Abuse**

This is a **core objective** of the Quality Assessment Framework (QAF) that is used to assess all Supporting People-funded service providers.

#### **C 1.4 – Protection from Abuse.**

The right of service users to be protected from abuse is safeguarded. The failure to achieve level C represents a serious potential risk to service users and/or staff. Where level C is not achieved providers must take immediate steps to bring performance up to this level.

This objective applies to all kinds of abuse, many of which are not physical in their nature, e.g. financial or material abuse or abuse through neglect or omission. Approaches to protection from abuse therefore must be appropriate to the particular type of service concerned and based on an assessment of the full range of risks faced.

The report found that 27 per cent of respondents were unable to clarify or describe their Protection from Abuse policies, and that residents could not access, or were not aware of, hostel policy.

This is a concerning situation, particularly as homeless women have frequently experienced multiple forms of abuse and exclusion, with around 40

per cent of homeless women under 25 experiencing abuse growing up,<sup>5</sup> and many women engaging in unwanted sexual encounters for food or shelter.<sup>6</sup>

### **Recommendations**

As service providers, hostels need to fulfil all of the following obligations to be considered a high-quality service.

*Up-to-date documented procedures<sup>7</sup> for avoiding and responding to actual or suspected abuse or neglect.*

The procedure must address physical, sexual, psychological, financial or material and discriminatory abuse and acts of neglect or omission in accordance with the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 and, where appropriate, with the Department of Health guidance “No Secrets”.

*Prompt action is taken in response to individual complaints or concerns from staff or service users.*

Complaints are logged and documented with outcomes and details of action taken.

*Staff are knowledgeable in protection policies and procedures.*

Staff induction and training programmes specifically address protection from abuse, and staff members are able to describe the principal elements or procedures, the reasons behind them and their implications.

*There is a documented risk assessment addressing potential for personal benefit through abuse.*

There are clear procedural steps to prevent the provision of financial advice by staff, the acquisition of power of attorney, handling service users’ money, or managing improvement works.

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<sup>5</sup> Crisis. 2006. Statistics about Homelessness, 2003

<sup>6</sup> Crisis. 2006. *Homeless women: still being failed but still striving*, p.6

<sup>7</sup> The procedures have been reviewed within the last five years.

## Policy toolkit – combating violence in hostels

*Staff are made aware of and understand their professional boundaries.*

There is documentary evidence that induction, training and supervision specifically addresses the nature and limits of relationships between staff and service users, and staff members are able to describe the policies concerning relationships with service users.

*Service users are aware of the procedures for reporting abuse or neglect.*

The existence of the protection from abuse procedure is publicised in appropriate ways e.g. in the service user induction, welcome packs or handbooks, and prominently on notice boards. Service users should understand what constitutes abuse and know who they should report any actual or suspected abuse or neglect to.

*Staff members receive appropriate training.*

Training is provided to all relevant staff. Staff can explain how to recognise symptoms of abuse or neglect and how to deal appropriately with aggression from service users.

*Service users are actively involved in reviewing the policies and procedures.*

Minutes or other records of the review processes demonstrate participation of residents and service users.

In very short-term accommodation it may be more desirable or practical to involve an alternative person or organisation in lieu of service users (e.g. a principal referral agency). The intention is to bring a perspective that is separate to that of staff involved in, or responsible for, service delivery.

*There is a co-ordinated multi-agency approach to tackling abuse or neglect.*

Notes of multi-agency working e.g. minutes and agendas, named contacts, joint action plans etc, examples of attendance at borough meetings, forums etc.

*There is a planned approach to victim support*

There is a documented means of responding to victim support including agreements with other providers to offer alternative services to victims, and providing or putting victims in touch with forms of support such as counselling, legal advice etc.

*There is a planned approach to dealing with perpetrators*

There are clear procedures in place for identifying perpetrators, informing the police and taking legal action if appropriate, terminating employment, and working with perpetrators to avoid recurrence.<sup>8</sup>

A number of these recommendations are required in order to meet basic Supporting People funding requirements. Often Protection from Abuse policies do not take gender-appropriate services into account, but this will need to change under the Gender Equality Duty.

Providing a gender-appropriate service is no more complicated than your current service provision, it simply entails looking at your Protection from Abuse policies in more detail to assess their impact on your female service users. For example, does your hostel house men convicted of sexual offences or assault against women with female service users? This policy would have a negative impact on your female service users, and is therefore not gender-appropriate.

It is important to mainstream violence against women policies into your Protection from Abuse procedures. For example, if you currently have policies in place to identify perpetrators, have you taken into account possible after-effects of eviction such as stalking, or harassment of the complainant by other tenants? If the perpetrator is a member of staff are there policies to ensure a woman's continued safety if she reports him?

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<sup>8</sup> Guidelines from Supporting People QAF guidelines (available from [www.spkweb.org.uk](http://www.spkweb.org.uk))

## Policy toolkit – combating violence in hostels

Incorporating these extra policies is not sexist or discriminating against men, it is simply recognising that some forms of violence, such as sexual violence, harassment, stalking or sexual victimisation, are largely perpetrated by men upon women, and support plans need to reflect this.

“They told me if I was being harassed that I should go in my room and lock my door.”

**Is there a safe space in your hostel for women to go? Women-only spaces are essential in mixed hostels, especially if there are significantly more men than women. Try to identify and set up a women-only common room and (if possible) outside space to help service users feel more secure.**

“I’d like to be more involved as a tenant”

**One of the key aims of Supporting People is to engender greater service user involvement. Start a partnership service user steering group or encourage female service users to set up their own women-only group to discuss services.**

“Service users are actively involved”

**Unless you are a very short-term accommodation hostel, your service users are likely to be with you for an average of a one year. Therefore you should be identifying useful training for service users involved in the advisory group. This will maximise their engagement and facilitation in the policy-making process, and improve their employment opportunities in the future.**

## Supporting women who have experienced sexual violence

In their lifetime one in three women will be raped or sexually assaulted,<sup>9</sup> yet many hostels do not have separate policies and procedures to support service users who have experienced rape. The report found that only four per cent of hostels had any formal procedure regarding sexual violence, and none of these had procedures to protect women who are raped or assaulted while living at the hostel. After the report was published several hostels implemented limited sexual violence policies, bringing the current total to nine per cent of all survey respondents who offer explicit sexual violence protection.

### Recommendations

All hostels supporting women need to write policies on sexual violence as soon as possible. Having no procedure to deal with male service users or staff perpetrating sexual violence is a direct contravention of the Protection from Abuse element of your Supporting People funding.

In addition, under the Gender Equality Duty a female service user could make a reasonable claim that her need for a gender-appropriate service (specialist rape and sexual assault support) is not being met.

#### **If your service user wishes to make a complaint to the Police**

**Immediately after an attack:** it is important that your service user does not wash, eat, drink, go to the toilet or change her clothes. This will help to preserve any physical evidence. She also needs to contact the local Sapphire team (police rape specialists) as soon as possible or go to a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (see information pack). She has the right to ask for an interpreter or a female police officer if she wishes.

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<sup>9</sup> Home Office. 2005. British Crime Survey

**At the police station/SARC:** if your service user wishes, she can have evidence recorded at a SARC and kept on file anonymously, so that it can be used if the perpetrator attacks someone else.

If the service user wishes to make a full complaint, she will need to have a physical examination (again, she can ask for a female medical examiner) and give a statement. She will also receive medical treatment if she needs it. It is important that you make sure that your service user is aware that her statement is not confidential – it will be shared with the perpetrator, as the law requires any defendant to know what he is being charged with. She may also have her fingerprints taken, but these will be destroyed at the end of the case.

**At court:** if the case proceeds to court, the perpetrator will appear before a magistrate, who will decide if there is enough evidence to proceed to the Crown Court. There is usually a gap of four to eight months between appearances at the Magistrate and Crown Courts. Your service user will appear as a witness for the prosecution, and it is probable that she will be cross-examined. She has the right to ask the judge before the trial for Special Measures (screens, giving evidence via a video link) and if she needs to stop during the trial, she or the prosecution barrister can ask for a short adjournment. She can also ask for clarification on questions at any point.

**After the trial:** If the trial results in a conviction, your service user can ask to be kept up to date with the perpetrator's release date and information.

(Information from Rape Crisis)

**For more information on legal issues please contact Rights of Women's Sexual violence legal advice line on 020 7251 8887.**

### **Supporting a service user who wishes not to make a complaint**

If your service user does not wish to make a complaint, but still wishes to have additional support, she can access a SARC, a local Rape Crisis centre, or the Amina Scheme, a befriending and support service staffed by female survivors of sexual violence.

The London-based Sexual Violence Action Awareness Network has produced a directory for London-based sexual violence support services.<sup>10</sup> It is a free publication and is available at

[http://www.eaves4women.co.uk/Lilith\\_Project/Information/Information.php](http://www.eaves4women.co.uk/Lilith_Project/Information/Information.php)

For more information on the Amina Scheme, please contact Cat Whitehouse at [amina@eaveshousing.co.uk](mailto:amina@eaveshousing.co.uk) or 020 7840 7959.

“I don’t want to keep going over it, everyone’s picking on me”

**If a woman is disclosing previous experiences of sexual violence, ensure that her key worker has details of any counselling services in the area, and that he or she is aware that the woman may face increased sexual harassment as a result of her experience.**

**Have a list of confidential numbers available 24 hours a day for women to contact local sexual violence support agencies. Find out where your nearest Sexual Assault Referral Centre is and ensure that all staff are aware of its location and contact details (see information pack).**

“We don’t have any policies”

**Write and implement a policy to support women who have previously experienced sexual violence, and procedures to take action if a woman is raped or sexually assaulted while she is a resident of the hostel.**

“We would offer support”

**Generic support may not be appropriate for supporting women who have experienced sexual violence. Find out if there are training services specialising in sexual violence support in your local area and begin a rolling programme of training for key workers, or train one key worker to be a sexual violence specialist. Consult service user groups on making the hostel a zero tolerance zone for violence against women.**

<sup>10</sup> If your service is based outside London, please visit the Rape Crisis website at <http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk> and click on ‘Centres’.

## Supporting women who have experienced domestic violence

Recent research into the experiences of homeless women and the triggers that led to them becoming homeless has found that 60 per cent of homeless women had experienced domestic violence<sup>11</sup>, and that one in four of these women had wanted help and support from homelessness agencies but were not offered assistance.<sup>12</sup>

However, the Lilith Project has found that many hostel providers are unaware that they are housing women who have experience domestic violence, thereby missing the opportunity to offer support or signposting. The most common ways to identify possible previous experience of domestic violence are referral notes, disclosure by the woman, or routine questionnaires filled in at arrival to the hostel. Domestic violence can also occur in-hostel, and this can be identified by disclosure or observation of the victim and perpetrator.

### **Recommendations:**

Hostel providers should have procedures in place to identify and offer support to women who have experienced domestic violence. These should include routine questionnaires, trained key workers, and a clear policy of zero tolerance towards domestic violence, which is prominently displayed in the hostel common areas.

Any policies or procedures that the hostel already has on domestic violence will need to be re-assessed to ensure they protect women experiencing violence in the hostel. Do you have a policy to remove offenders? Have you ensured that the women will not be negatively affected by any decision to disclose violence? Do you have a policy on stalking and harassment? These are all issues that your policy should cover comprehensively.

A high proportion of women in drug and alcohol treatment are, or have been, victims of domestic violence. A UK study of women using crack cocaine found

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<sup>11</sup> Crisis. 2006. *Homeless women: still being failed but still striving*, p.83

<sup>12</sup> Crisis. 2006. *Homeless women: still being failed but still striving*, p.24

## Policy toolkit – combating violence in hostels

that 40% reported being physically assaulted by a current partner and 75% being physically assaulted by a current or past partner (Bury, C et al, 1999). Key or support workers should be aware of such links and how the violence and abuse may be impacting on the drug/alcohol use and attempts to comply with treatment.

If your hostel runs group work in relation to substance misuse bear in mind that mixed gender groups may be unsuitable for some women who could benefit from attendance at a women only group.

**“We fit rooms with panic buttons”**

**The first issue to address is safety. Always call the police if any woman you are supporting is in immediate danger.**

**Consult the woman on what action she wants to take and what would make her feel safer. You should also be able to offer her a choice of local services to contact if she wants to. Make sure you know the contact details of your local Community Safety team.**

**“We use harassment policies to reduce male aggression against the females”**

**Develop your policies to ensure that they specifically cover domestic violence issues arising within the hostel, as well as detailing procedures to support women who disclose previous experiences. You will also need to demonstrate how you would deal with perpetrators living at the hostel and ex-partners stalking hostel residents.**

**“We’d call the police”**

**Ask a local domestic violence support provider to ‘audit’ your policies to ensure that you have met all of your legal requirements. In addition to this begin building partnerships with local legal representatives to support your service users if they make a domestic violence-related complaint.**

**Develop your partnership with your local Community Safety Unit and invite them to discuss how they deal with domestic violence and other VAW issues, so service users feel less intimidated about making a complaint and staff feel more knowledgeable.**

## Working with perpetrators of domestic violence

It is likely that at some point one of your service users will disclose perpetrating domestic violence. Most tenancy agreements now have a standard eviction clause that can be used if the service user is violent during the length of his tenancy agreement, but it is often interpreted to apply to violence against staff or service users, as opposed to violence against a partner or ex-partner within the hostel. In this case hostels have a duty to protect service users from violence, but this protection does not at the current time extend to the right to evict tenants with a history of violence who do not behave violently in their current tenancies.

### **Domestic violence legislation: Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act 2004**

It's important to note that there is no actual offence of 'domestic violence'. Instead, the Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act provides specific legislation around offences that relate to domestic violence. These include:

- breach of a non-molestation order
- common assault as an arrestable offence
- additional considerations in the case of ex-partners
- the provision of on-the-spot penalties for disorderly behaviour

### **Recommendations**

Many service providers and key workers are concerned with how to react if a service user discloses perpetrating domestic violence. Your hostel should have a clear policy of zero tolerance to violence, and explicitly include interpersonal violence in this definition. Although you may be tempted to do so, never act as a go-between for service users.

All hostels have an eviction policy, and you should ensure that violence against a service user or staff member during the tenancy is clearly defined as cause for eviction.

## Policy toolkit – combating violence in hostels

It is also important to have a victim-centred approach and to ensure your policies will not impact negatively upon a woman reporting violence. For example, will she lose her accommodation if she makes a complaint? Do you have adequate confidentiality measures in place to ensure that she continues to be safe at the hostel? Above all, you have a duty under the Human Rights Act to protect any service user from the risk of potential harm.

“No violence is permitted in the hostel”

**Post up clear notices advertising the hostel’s position as a no-tolerance zone for domestic violence and put up lists of support agencies in public areas and near phones. As always, make sure your service users know that if they are in immediate danger, they should call 999.**

“We have no policy”

**Identify local agencies who can offer training for key workers in handling disclosures safely.**

“The perpetrator is evicted and his tenancy given over”

**Ensure your domestic violence policies are updated and encompass perpetrator behaviour. If you are concerned for the safety of a service user after a perpetrator has disclosed violence, speak to the service user as soon as possible in a secure environment. If she does not wish to take action, ask if she will permit you to log the incident, with evidence if necessary, to use if she wishes to report in the future. A large number of domestic violence related prosecutions fail because of a lack of evidence, so evidence of previous incidents of violence are valuable, and ensure you are doing your utmost to fulfil your requirements under the Human Rights Act.**

## Supporting women involved in or exiting prostitution

Recent studies into homelessness and prostitution have shown that, for many women who become homeless, prostitution in exchange for accommodation, food, drugs or money is extremely common, with a large number of women participating in unwanted sexual encounters.<sup>13</sup>

In 1999 a survey of street homeless women found that 93 per cent had engaged in prostitution, with 70 per cent of these women having experienced violence before their involvement in prostitution.<sup>14</sup> Not all women who are involved in prostitution are victimised, but it is an issue that key workers need to be aware of.

“An alarming number of the women interviewed had engaged in unwanted sexual liaisons (paid and unpaid) in order to secure accommodation and in exchange for basic necessities such as food and clothing.

Many of these women would not have been engaged in any kind of sex work had they not been homeless”

Crisis, 2006<sup>15</sup>

The Lilith Project found that around 53 per cent of the hostels interviewed were aware that female service users had been involved in prostitution, or were engaging in prostitution whilst living at the hostel. 56 per cent of hostels had implemented a prostitution policy, but over half of these outlined policies were centred on the service user’s perceived problem – her involvement in prostitution – as opposed to the reasons for her engagement in prostitution.

No hostels addressed the issue of demand, despite some respondents being located near to well-known kerb-crawling zones, such as King’s Cross.

<sup>13</sup> Crisis. 2006. *Homeless women: still being failed but still striving*, p.50

<sup>14</sup> Survey carried out by The Potteries Association, quoted in I. Eden, 2006. *A Woman's Place: Women and Hostel Provision in London*.

<sup>15</sup> Crisis. 2006. *Homeless women: still being failed but still striving*, p.6

Several respondents approached the issue of prostitution as something to be 'challenged' and the threat of eviction was cited several times as a deterrent.

### **Trafficking: your requirements**

There has been a significant increase in the trafficking of women into the UK for the purposes of sexual exploitation in the last ten years, and it is possible that you may house a service user who you suspect has been trafficked.

If this situation arises, you should discuss the situation with the service user and contact specialist agencies as soon as possible, with her permission. Agencies like the POPPY Project can offer specialist support and outreach to support the unique needs of trafficked women.

Trafficking places immense strain on a victim's physical and mental health processes, and specialist agencies are in the best position to offer immediate tailored support.

Contact the POPPY Project on **020 7840 7129**

Email **[poppy@eaveshousing.co.uk](mailto:poppy@eaveshousing.co.uk)**

### **Recommendations:**

Women who are involved or have been involved in prostitution can face multiple obstacles when accessing services, including distrust, lack of respect and increased harassment from male service users. Your service should not discriminate against any woman on the basis of her involvement in prostitution, and you have a duty to provide a safe environment that is free from harassment.

If your hostel already has a prostitution policy in place, you will need to do a gender impact assessment upon it to ensure that you are offering a gender-appropriate service.

## Policy toolkit – combating violence in hostels

Does your policy take women's experiences of homelessness into account when defining prostitution (e.g. exchange of sex for accommodation) or does it view prostitution as an illegal financial transaction, which may label homeless women? Does your policy also cover the issue of demand and outline procedures for supporting a woman who wishes to exit prostitution? As this area is complex and politically difficult for service providers, it is vital that you contact a local agency working to help women exit prostitution to draw up a strategy that can work in your area.

If you do not have a policy on prostitution, you should begin implementing one as a matter of urgency, addressing the issues outlined above. In addition, you will need to assess the knowledge of your workers on prostitution, and raise awareness of the need for a non-judgemental approach. A pan-London organisation like the POPPY Project ([www.eaves4women.org.uk](http://www.eaves4women.org.uk)) will be able to advise you on suitable training courses for public sector agencies.

“Women involved in sex work tend to get hassled”

**Ensure that any women that you have already identified as being involved in prostitution are given safety assessments as soon as possible, and make them aware of specialist agencies they can go to if they feel threatened or experience abuse.**

“We warn them that they could lose their tenancy”

**Begin training key staff in identifying women who are involved in prostitution and update your routine arrival questions to include this area. Audit your policies, or implement prostitution policies if you do not have any, to provide non-judgemental support for current residents.**

“We offer support”

**Working with appropriate agencies, ensure that you have appropriate exit strategies in place and maintain your training procedures.**

## Supporting women who self-harm

Self harm includes a variety of behaviours to harm themselves, such as cutting or burning their flesh, bingeing or starving, making themselves sick, using alcohol or drugs, or acting out risky behaviour. Research into the coping mechanisms used by homeless women has found that women who are homeless are far more likely to self-harm than women in the general population,<sup>16</sup> but despite this evidence, 74 per cent of hostels surveyed had no self harm policies in place.

Women who identified as homeless and who self-harmed regularly reported facing additional barriers to accessing support, such as hostility from medical staff and exclusion from therapeutic services. In a recent report over 50 per cent of women surveyed reported being barred from services because of their self-harming behaviour.

Self harm is also a gendered issue, with hostels reporting more women self-harming than men, and some women's organisations reporting that young Asian woman self-harm up to three times as much as their white peers.<sup>17</sup>

### **Recommendations:**

Hostels supporting women who self-harm will need to develop harm-minimisation policies that are proactive in supporting the woman's current coping mechanisms, but offer less harmful alternatives. Positive policies could include making sure the woman has access to her own medical supplies and sterile equipment, and developing a contract to end self-harming backed up by sessions of therapeutic counselling. As a service provider, you are aiming to empower your service users, and your policy development should reflect this clearly.

Self-harming is often an intensely private experience, and it is not appropriate to discuss an individual's behaviour in a public setting (such as a team

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<sup>16</sup> A. Jones. 1999. *Out of Sight, Out of Mind? homeless women speak out*, p. 18

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.nawp.org/mental\\_health.html](http://www.nawp.org/mental_health.html)

meeting or group session) unless the person involved has given explicit and unforced permission, and does not feel under pressure to disclose.

**“They call the ambulance for you”**

**As a service provider, your first priority is the safety and well-being of your service users. If you are in any doubt at all, call an ambulance.**

**If your service user is not in danger, ensure she has access to sterile medical supplies and privacy to treat her injuries, or give her appropriate treatment. It is important that you remain non-judgemental, whatever your personal feelings.**

**“We offer counselling”**

**Establish links with women’s organisations offering culturally appropriate counselling. Please see the accompanying information pack for a full list. Assess your self harm procedures and update them where necessary. Ensure that you have appropriate risk assessments for support staff in place.**

**“We had to talk about it in [the] group, I was so embarrassed.”**

**Establish training for staff in supporting women who self-harm and giving advice in keeping wounds clean and uninfected. Develop your secondary strategies to encourage women away from self harm and into more positive forms of expression.**

## Supporting women who have eating disorders

For many women, homelessness is characterised by disordered eating. Disordered eating can be imposed or intentional, and may not lead to a diagnosable condition such as anorexia or bulimia. Homeless women have reported meal kitchens operating at inconvenient times or closing at weekends and on holidays,<sup>18</sup> effectively denying them food.

Some women also described deliberately denying themselves food as a form of self-punishment after a traumatic experience. In either case, it is likely that you will encounter female service users who show signs of disordered eating, and may also have additional health problems, such as reduced immunity, slow healing and increased tendencies towards infection and diabetes.

As a service provider, you are required to support women who have diagnosed eating disorders. The Lilith report found that many service providers did not feel confident supporting women who have eating disorders, with over 80 per cent of the hostels interviewed admitting to having no specific policies around this issue.

Your staff will need to be aware of these issues, and also be sympathetic to the shock that a woman with issues around eating may feel at living in an environment where she cannot control what, when or how much she eats.

Of course, not all hostels have specific mealtimes or provide food in this manner, but all women who demonstrate disordered eating are likely to need tailored support, including nutritional advice and counselling where appropriate to address the underlying reasons for her need to harm herself in this way. We encourage hostels to frame eating disorders as a form of self harm, and to develop policy in this area.

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<sup>18</sup> Crisis. 2006. *Homeless women: still being failed but still striving*, p. 67

**Recommendations:**

As an accommodation provider, you are required to care for your service users' physical well-being, and this duty extends to minimising the effects of any condition that is likely to impact upon this. However, in developing harm reduction strategies, it is easy to medicalise your support of a woman, by concentrating on creating a general medical model to fit all service users. It is also important to remember that women who self harm face additional discrimination and barriers to accessing services.

The report found that the best examples of care for women with eating disorders were individual support plans designed for the needs of each individual service user, incorporating expertise from local Primary Care Trusts and identifying the causes of disordered eating, as well as offering nutritional lessons and advice.

“Meals are served 17.00-19.00”

**If your service user is uncomfortable with shared mealtimes, offer the opportunity for her to contribute to planning or preparing her meals if possible, and be understanding if she wishes to eat privately. Link your service user into any Eating Disorder services available at your local PCT.**

“When I’ve gone to the GP they’ve been no help”

**Develop policies to offer an individual support plan offering immediate medical support where necessary, and moving support onto counselling and identifying more positive methods of behaviour.**

“She’s just doing it for attention”

**Train staff in supporting service users and building self esteem, and if you do not have organisational guidelines on healthy eating, prioritise this area in your policy development.**

## Resettlement

Resettlement is a vital part of a woman's journey through the hostel system to independent living. However, a woman entering resettlement is still in need of specialist support to assist her in her move from supported accommodation into independent housing, and it is essential to recognise resettlement as a stage of hostel service in the same way that referral, reception and tenancy are stages. Resettlement can be a confusing and even frightening experience for service users who are not properly prepared, with some service users coming from institutionalised backgrounds such as prison or long term hospital care finding the idea of managing independently overwhelming.

The report into hostel provision found that the average hostel service user remained in hostel accommodation for an average of 13 months, with the shortest stays being six weeks and the longest being three years.

### Recommendations

Resettlement policy needs to be person-centred, and should pay particular attention to the continuing needs of women who have experienced violence, and how to maintain their safety and promote their independence in non-supported accommodation.

Person-centred policies recognise that resettling women may have different requirements of 'home', with some women equating home as their own flat or house, and some women needing other elements such as a support network or community to feel 'at home'. All policies should include adequate risk management and safety measures as a matter of course (there are several local services that assist women who have experienced violence by installing home safety devices, contact your local Community Safety Unit for more information).

Women can also be empowered through appropriate preparation training, such as tenancy right workshops, cooking and budgeting courses, self

defence training and safety management. These courses can also offer an opportunity for women who are all resettling at the same time to meet and develop social networks. Social development can also be encouraged by monthly meetings, for example at local cafés, to ensure that service users do not become isolated. Domestic violence charities identify a strong social network as one of the best ways for women who have experienced violence to avoid repeated victimisation (Women's Aid, 2006), so social interaction should be built into violence against women policy.

'I want my own place but I'm scared to go in case he finds me'

**Make sure that your service users understand that they won't be alone once they move into resettlement, and undertake comprehensive risk assessments. Prepare a safety plan with any service users who are at risk of violence subsequent to leaving the hostel.**

**For women with additional support needs around drug/alcohol use it is important to assess whether a treatment agency is safe for her to attend. For example, does her abuser attend the same service; would they be able to find her?**

'What if I can't cope?'

**Prepare women who are about to enter resettlement by offering training and workshops in life-skills and safety management. Identify staff who work with resettling service users and give them additional training to cascade to other staff where appropriate.**

'We don't feel able to support resettled service users adequately'

**Ensure that you have a vision as an organisation of what the resettlement process should be, and develop a series of best practice measures with current and former service users to gain a clear picture of how you need to develop your resettlement stage.**

## Who we are - Eaves and the Lilith Project

Eaves was established in 1977 and has since grown to become London's largest provider of high-quality women-only supported housing, with a total of 155 bed spaces in nine boroughs providing medium-term supported accommodation, specialist advice and advocacy for single homeless women with a variety of support needs. Service users include women who have experienced sexual violence, women with mental or physical health needs, women recovering from substance misuse issues, women leaving the criminal justice system and women living with HIV.

Eaves manages a range of additional projects including:

- **Eaves Women's Aid**, which delivers domestic violence outreach, legal services and refuge accommodation with 66 bed spaces across four London boroughs;
- **the POPPY Project**, which provides support and accommodation for women trafficked into the country for the purposes of sexual exploitation. It has 35 bed spaces and an outreach service.
- **the Lilith Project**, a second-tier project that combines research, campaigning and development in order to combat all forms of violence against women. The Lilith Project also manages the **Kalabash Forum**, which supports organisations working with Black Minority Ethnic (BME) women, and the **Sexual Violence Action Awareness Network (SVAAN)**, which supports sexual violence services in London. The Lilith Project was established in 2002 and is already a high-profile centre of expertise on licensing, women and homelessness, harmful cultural practices, sexual violence and policy development.

Please see [www.eaves4women.co.uk](http://www.eaves4women.co.uk) for more information on any of our projects.

## Appendix 1 - Results of policy survey

The results of the survey to 115 single mixed hostels in London assessing their policies on gender equality and violence against women are shown below.

Hostel response	Rate of compliance (%)
Hostel operates Equal Opportunities policy	100*
Hostel implements Equal Opportunities training	82
Full time female staff	87
Hostel operates Domestic Violence policy	17
Hostel operates sexual violence policy	9
Hostel operates policy on childhood sexual violence	9
Hostel operates self-harm policy	26
Hostel operates policy on prostitution	56
Hostel operates substance misuse policy	60
Hostel operates eating disorder support policy	17
Hostel operates strategy for young women	17
Hostel operates gendered safety policy	26
Hostel has designated single-sex areas (bathrooms etc)	3
Hostel operates anti-harassment policy	74
Average score (out of a potential 13)	6
Average percentage (100% representing a perfect score)	46

\*Although 100 per cent of respondents said that they operated an Equal Opportunities policy, only 63 per cent could give examples or produce a hard copy document.

## Appendix 2 – Policy requests

A breakdown of the requests made by hostels to the Lilith Project for more information and guidance on the following policy areas is shown below.

<b>Policy</b>	<b>Requests made (%)</b>
Request for domestic violence policy information	60
Request for sexual violence policy information	60
Request for childhood sexual violence policy information	60
Request for policy information to support young women	70