# Developing Housing First for women experiencing Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

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City of Westminster

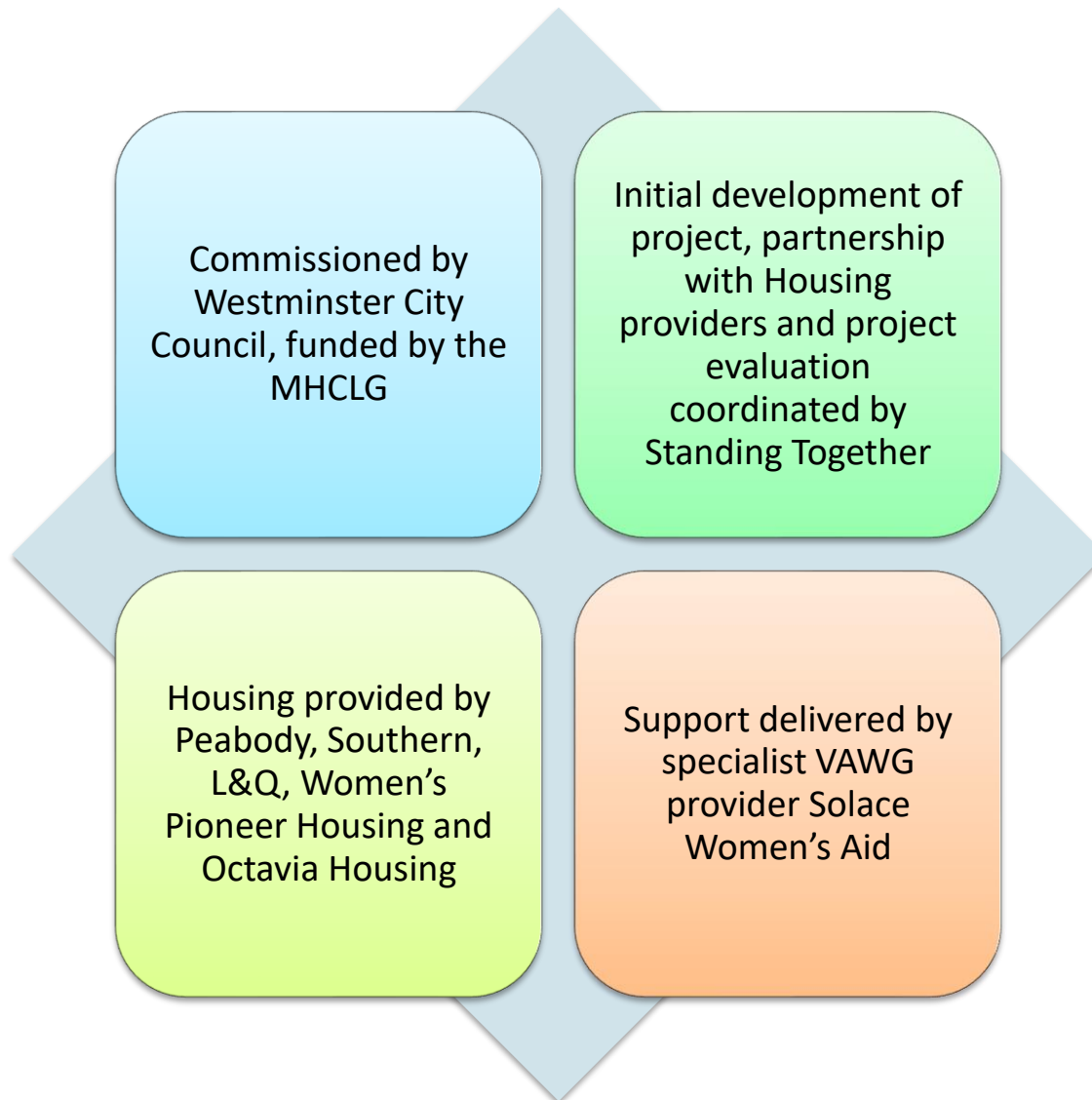Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

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# Why Housing First For Women?

- Experience of domestic violence and abuse is near-universal among women who become homeless [(Women and rough sleeping, University of York centre for social housing policy).](#)

- Women with multiple disadvantage excluded from mainstream services.

- Potentially higher need.

- A robust Housing First response to women must prioritise the management of DA and other forms of VAWG.

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# The Westminster VAWG Housing First Project

Commissioned by Westminster City Council, funded by the MHCLG

Initial development of project, partnership with Housing providers and project evaluation coordinated by Standing Together

Housing provided by Peabody, Southern, L&Q, Women's Pioneer Housing and Octavia Housing

Support delivered by specialist VAWG provider Solace Women's Aid

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# Support Provision

### Traditional support

**20-40** people

Caseload

### Housing First
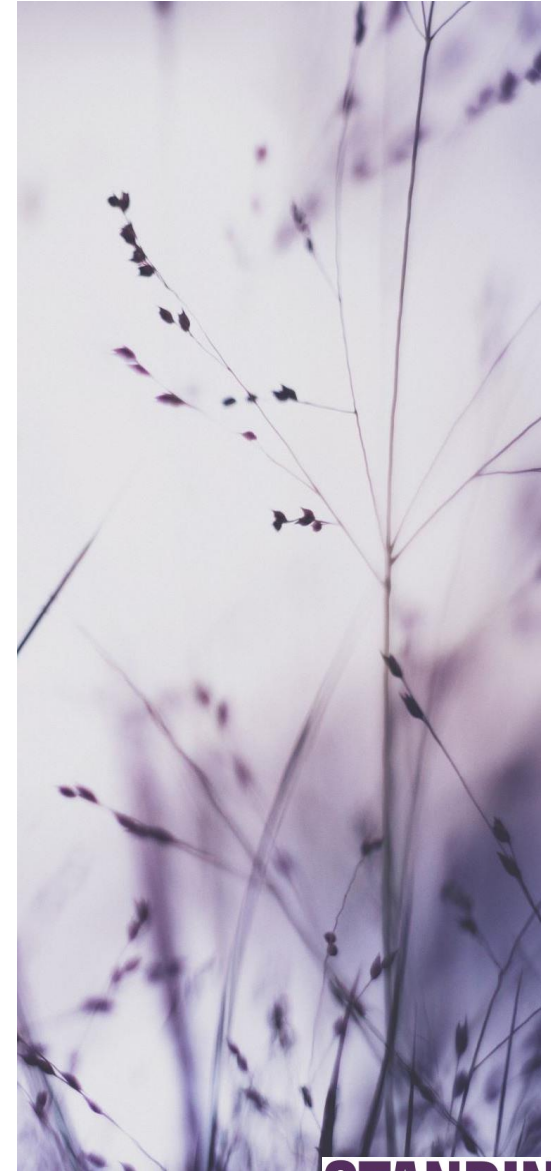
**5-7** people

Caseload

- Commenced service delivery Aug 2019, supporting 11 women – expanded capacity to 20.
- All support workers are women and are trained in VAWG.
- Long-term, holistic one-to-one support with every aspect of life.
- Specialist provision; can provide IDVA support + more, including risk assessments and safety plans.
- Practical support e.g. benefits, rent, bills, GP, etc.
- Partnership working; worker is single point of contact for other agencies & reduces working in silos.
- Tailored to women experiencing multiple disadvantage; reduction in paperwork.

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# Outcomes – Year 1

- **8 out of 9 women** housed have maintained their tenancies. Tenancy sustainment rate is 87.5%.
- **9 women** are consistently engaging with support.
- **8 women** were supported to access drug and alcohol services, 3 women accessed psychological support and all but 2 were registered with GP's and supported to attend health appointments.
- **All the women** were supported around current or historical experiences of VAWG. **7** were supported to make reports to police.
- **2 women** had reconnected with family members including children who were removed from their care.
- **2 women** have been accepted into college. **7 women** supported to pursue their interests e.g., art, writing, knitting

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# Housing First Case study

- **Katie experienced physical and emotional abuse from family members from a young age**
- **Also experienced domestic abuse and grooming**
- **Substance misuse and rough sleeping as a response to the trauma**
- **Housing First supported Katie to access independent accommodation.**
- **Now Katie is completely clean, facilitating recovery groups, accessing psychological support, and recently accepted into college.**
- **Ongoing visits from Housing First worker to support her with DA from current partner.**
- **Katie says 'Make sure that rough sleepers can access accommodation that allows dogs as they are a great support'**

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# Housing First for Women:
# Key Considerations

| Engaging | Managing | Supporting | Housing |
|---|---|---|---|
| Engaging women may take longer and be more difficult.<br><br>Housing First principle: An active engagement approach is used | Managing domestic abuse/VAWG.<br><br>Housing First Principle: Individuals have choice and control | Supporting women as mothers. | Partnerships with housing providers - affordable, secure & suitable properties. |

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# Barriers to scaling up Housing First for women

- Need for longer term funding - engaging women with complex trauma and addressing domestic abuse/VAWG takes <u>time</u>.

- Women are hidden homeless – the danger of focusing Housing First just for the visible rough sleeping cohort (will be mainly men).

- Housing First for women –a gender informed approach needs to be integrated into mixed/generic services.

- Funding for Housing First should take gender into account – a one size fits all approach won't work for women.

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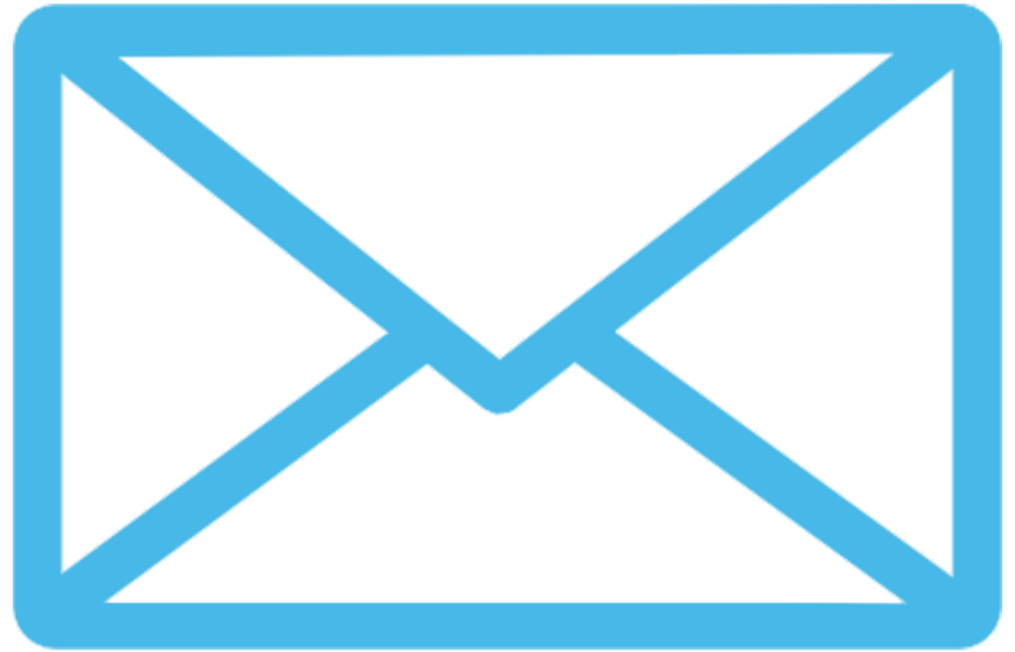against domestic abuse

# Thank You!

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