

Final Evaluation Report: Executive Summary

WHOLE HOUSING APPROACH PILOT IN CHESHIRE EAST

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Acronyms

BCR	Benefit-Cost Ratio
CBA	Cost-Benefit Analysis
CE	Cheshire East
CEC	Cheshire East Council
DAA	Domestic Abuse Act 2021
DA	Domestic Abuse
DAHA	Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance
IDVA	Independent Domestic Violence Advocate
MARAC	Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (for domestic abuse)
MD	Multiple Disadvantage
MDT	Multiple Disadvantage Team
MyCWA	My Cheshire Without Abuse (refuge provider and third sector partner)
NRPF	No Recourse to Public Funds
PCC	Police and Crime Commissioner
POH	Privately Owned Housing Sector
PRS	Private Rented Sector
RSL	Registered Social Landlord
SEA	Surviving Economic Abuse
STADA	Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse
WHA	Whole Housing Approach

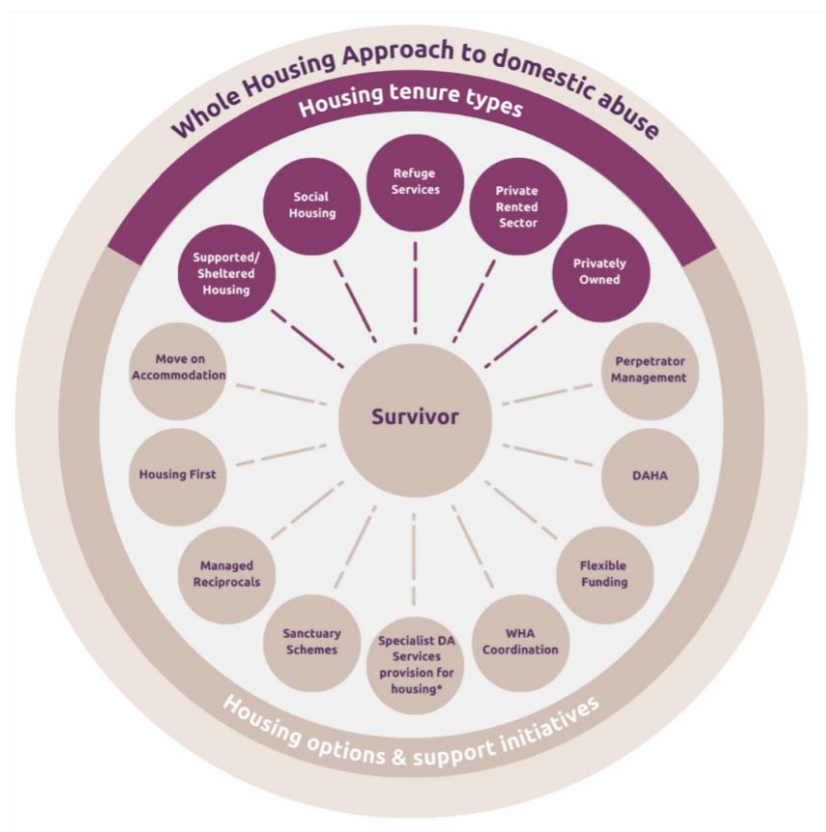
Executive Summary: Has the Whole Housing Approach (WHA) delivered better housing for survivors?

This document is a stand-alone summary of the University of Central Lancashire's WHA Evaluation. The Full Evaluation Report is available via STADA's website.

The Whole Housing Approach pilot in Cheshire East 2022-2024

The Whole Housing Approach (WHA) is a framework for addressing the housing and safety needs of victim-survivors of domestic abuse in a local authority area. The goal is to improve housing options and outcomes for people experiencing domestic abuse so that they can achieve stable housing, live safely, and overcome their experiences of abuse.

The national charity Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse ('STADA') works with local authorities to promote delivery of the WHA model. The 14 components of the WHA bring under one umbrella all main housing tenure types alongside the housing options and support initiatives needed to help people experiencing domestic abuse to maintain or access safe and stable housing (see figure below). *Purple circles* indicate the primary tenure categories, and *beige circles* denote the housing alternatives, initiatives, and domestic abuse support available to victims/survivors across primary tenure categories.



STADA, together with funder The National Lottery, decided to pilot all 14 elements of the WHA in one English local authority. Whilst the WHA had previously been piloted in three English local authority sites, it was felt that those pilots only partially implemented the model (i.e. selected components) whereas this pilot would seek to implement *all* components.

Cheshire East, in partnership with STADA, piloted the model over three years from 2022 to 2024. Cheshire East was chosen as the pilot site following a national selection process.

This evaluation

An independent evaluation was commissioned from the Connect Centre for International Research on Interpersonal Violence and Harm at the University of Central Lancashire (Principal Investigator Dr Lis Bates, with Professor Emerita Nicky Stanley, Dr Kelly Bracewell and Dr Maria Turda), together with partners the University of Glasgow (Professor Annette Hastings) and economic analysis specialists Mutual Ventures (Principal Consultant Agata Miskowiec). This was a highly experienced and qualified research team with expertise across domestic abuse and housing.

The purpose of the independent evaluation was twofold: (A) to assess the pilot's effectiveness and impact, and (B) to provide recommendations for the future rollout of the WHA in other areas. It examined the following questions:

- What difference have the WHA interventions/activities made for domestic abuse survivors? (Answered via outcome evaluation in Chapter C). Have they met the overall aims of getting more survivors into longer-term secure tenancies, sooner, and with a greater range of suitable accommodation options? Key outcome measures are analysed for the pilot site compared with (a) a naturally occurring comparison local authority site and (b) Cheshire East in the year prior to the pilot (January-December 2021).
- In what ways is the WHA model more effective than non-WHA delivery of housing interventions? (Answered in Chapters B & D). These questions are answered via a process evaluation exploring how the observed outcomes were achieved; whether the model was implemented as designed ('fidelity to the model'); and whether the model was accessible and acceptable to its target population (survivors).
- What are the costs and benefits to local authorities and commissioners of implementing a WHA model? (Answered in Chapter E).
- What recommendations can be made to commissioners and policy-makers for implementing a WHA model? (Answered in Chapter F).

The evaluation team adopted a mixed-methods design combining quantitative and qualitative data. Analysis of existing agency and administrative data was combined with new primary data collection from 22 stakeholder interviews and 14 interviews with survivors in Cheshire East. Outcomes data for survivors, perpetrators and children was collected against key pilot metrics, for a baseline year prior to the pilot (2021) and each of the three pilot years (2022-2024), as well as, where available, from a comparator local authority. Chapter A gives further detail on the methods; Appendix 5 contains the Baseline and Evaluation datasets.

Economic analysis specialists Mutual Ventures conducted a cost-benefit analysis. Cost data (actual service spend, including staff time) and benefits data (qualitative benefits data; and, where possible, quantification of benefits to partner agencies) was analysed using established methods (HM Treasury's Green Book; and the Greater Manchester Cost-Benefit Analysis model) to ensure rigour and comparability. In line with this guidance, Mutual Ventures estimated the economic costs and benefits to the public finances and wider society as a result of the WHA interventions by valuing them in monetary terms rather than only focusing on funding and affordability for the public sector. Quality assurance was undertaken to ensure consistency between outputs of the economic modelling and the evaluation work.

Summary of key findings

The Full Evaluation Report, Chapter F, sets out full conclusions and recommendations. Here we summarise the key findings from the evaluation about the impact of the WHA pilot in Cheshire East.

Housing outcomes for survivors, children and perpetrators

- 1) Quantitative outcomes data clearly shows improvements under the pilot compared with baseline year figures for the following measures:
 - More domestic abuse was identified amongst housing clients
 - More survivors and children were supported with housing
 - Fewer survivors were made homeless (successful discharge of Prevention Duty)
 - More survivors and children were supported to safely remain in their own homes
 - More perpetrators were removed from properties, and rehoused
 - Improved partnership working between domestic abuse and housing teams
 - More Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) achieved DAHA accreditation
 - Improved professional knowledge and confidence on domestic abuse
 - More survivors were offered domestic abuse support in temporary accommodation
 - Increased use of flexible funding to support survivors with housing
 - More professionals (across tenure types) were trained about domestic abuse
- 2) However, quantitative outcomes data does not yet evidence success in all the pilot's outcomes. For example, it is not clear whether:
 - More survivors moved into longer-term accommodation, earlier
 - More housing interventions were delivered earlier
 - Fewer survivors lost their tenancy status if they relocated
 - Fewer survivors were in emergency or temporary accommodation for less time
- 3) Taking into account the large improvements in data collection, consistency, granularity and reporting achieved over pilot years 2 and 3, and the expected time-lag between new activities under the pilot and read-across into measurable outcomes data, it is understandable that data may not yet show a clear picture of change across all outcomes. The data should continue to be monitored to assess the picture of success or otherwise on these outcomes for survivors.
- 4) Survivors overall expressed preferences for social housing (with secure tenancies), as more affordable and secure. Meeting this preference continued to be challenging in Cheshire East, despite the pilot, due to ongoing shortages of housing stock.
- 5) Work with perpetrators is showing signs of change, albeit not as much activity was delivered under this component as the pilot team would have liked. Some change is seen in the outcomes data, which show that more perpetrators were removed from properties and re-housed under the pilot compared with the baseline figures. As well, survivor interviews highlighted housing support that had been offered to their partners (albeit some perceived that perpetrator housing was being prioritised over theirs).

Cost-benefit analysis

- 6) The fiscal benefit-cost ratio (BCR) is 10.2, meaning that for every £1 invested in the WHA housing intervention, £10.20 in public sector savings is generated. This reflects exceptional value for money that can be achieved from whole housing interventions (according to HM Treasury Green Book, a BCR greater than 4 is considered very high value for money). Some limitations should be noted:
- (a) these fiscal benefits are best understood as efficiency gains (e.g. reduced demand on stretched services) rather than immediate, cashable savings.
 - (b) the reported fiscal benefit-to-cost ratio represents an average across the programme as a whole. As demonstrated by the case study analysis conducted by STADA, the financial return varies significantly between individual cases, depending on the level of need and the intensity of support required. For those exploring the adoption or scaling of similar interventions, this variability underscores the importance of considering the complexity of beneficiaries' needs when estimating potential fiscal returns.
 - (c) these benefits are dispersed across multiple public agencies, including local authorities, the NHS, the police, and the wider criminal justice system. If we apply a narrower lens that takes into consideration:
 - all costs borne by the local authority (although in Cheshire East, STADA also contributed to some costs), and
 - only those benefits that can be directly accrued to the local authority (in this case – housing benefits only)then the local authority-only BCR falls to 1.2. This means that for every £1 spent by the local authority, only £1.20 is saved in directly attributable housing costs. In practice, the actual benefit to the local authority is likely to be higher, as it also shares in benefits from areas such as domestic abuse prevention, reduced school truancy and so on.
- 7) The social benefit-cost ratio is 39.4, reflecting the extremely high public value generated beyond direct fiscal savings.
- Overall, our cost-benefit analysis concluded that “the WHA housing intervention in Cheshire East represents a highly cost-effective and socially valuable intervention”. While the full benefits are spread across multiple public sector partners, the overall return on investment is compelling. However, the distribution of benefits also highlights the limitations of siloed funding structures. To unlock the full potential of this type of intervention, pooled funding arrangements – allowing for shared investment and shared return across public partners – could be considered.

Improved domestic abuse knowledge and partnership working between domestic abuse and housing teams

The process evaluation found specific successes to be:

- 8) Much improved general awareness of domestic abuse across a wide range of Cheshire East Council (CEC) teams and partners. This extends to teams who did not previously see domestic abuse as their business.
- 9) Better referral pathways from housing teams, wider council teams, Registered Social Landlords, supported and sheltered housing teams and other partner agencies into Cheshire East Council's Domestic Abuse Hub.
- 10) Much improved professional confidence and knowledge within Cheshire East Council and its partners to identify and support domestic abuse survivors.
- 11) Greatly improved partnership working, integration and knowledge exchange between housing and domestic abuse teams at all levels, supported by cross-disciplinary expertise and roles, close co-working and joint training. This meant cases could be progressed more quickly and a greater range of accommodation options considered for survivors.
- 12) Better awareness of and support for survivors with multiple disadvantages and those from minoritised groups.

Paradigm shift from short-term thinking to range of accommodation options within Cheshire East

- 13) There has been a shift from short-term thinking ('refuge only') to considering a wider range of accommodation options for survivors. In Cheshire East, this has mostly focused on improving support for survivors to stay in their own homes, via sanctuary schemes and flexible funding. Survivors appreciate this work, with several referencing the importance of feeling safe and secure at home. Whilst stakeholders hailed the importance of sanctuary schemes, a new provider only became operational towards the pilot end, and so measurable outcomes have yet to be seen. Flexible funding, again hailed by stakeholders and survivors, has been a success, with more funds distributed—but sustaining the success of the flexible funds relies on the Council continuing to provide money for those funds.
- 14) Whilst this shift was evident from the process evaluation and stakeholder interviews, the data on quantitative outcomes does not yet clearly evidence a mindset move from short-term thinking to a wider range of accommodation options within Cheshire East. A similar number of survivors were in refuge at pilot end compared with the initial baseline; there was no increase in numbers under sanctuary schemes, and there was no reduction in the numbers in temporary or emergency accommodation.

Mechanisms underpinning success

15) The process evaluation found that specific mechanisms underpinning pilot successes were:

- Meeting the Part 4 accommodation duty under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- Making domestic abuse a strategic priority in the local authority: 'everyone's business'
- New structures under the pilot especially the WHA Steering Group
- Dedicated new posts in Cheshire East Council under the pilot, especially the WHA Coordinator, Housing and WHA IDVAs and Homechoice domestic abuse caseworker
- Support from STADA's WHA pilot team and their wider housing experts
- Dedicated funding under the pilot, especially flexible funds for home improvements
- Close engagement with By & For partner services
- Delivery of domestic abuse training to a wide range of Council teams and partners
- Data improvements, supported by a new Data Analyst post
- Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) Accreditation for the Council and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs)
- Ensuring survivor voices were sought throughout the pilot

16) The pilot has also brought broader benefits beyond Cheshire East Council teams: especially closer partnerships with By & For services which allowed the needs of minoritised and disabled survivors to be better understood and catered for.

Fidelity to the model

17) Not all 14 components were implemented in Cheshire East as per the WHA Model template, but this did not prevent a Whole Housing Approach being effective. Some components were deemed not relevant to the local context (e.g. Managed Reciprocal); others were implemented in different ways (e.g. Housing First; Move-on). Some elements were not fully implemented due to lack of time (planned perpetrator work); or because it was hard effectively to engage the partners required to drive change (e.g. Private Rented Sector (PRS), Privately Owned Housing sector (POH)).

18) The pilot demonstrated that implementing all WHA components simultaneously and with high fidelity to the 14-component template is not always necessary. Furthermore, high fidelity implementation may not be financially feasible for many local authorities. A more flexible approach is possible, allowing components to be adapted for local context and the most impactful and cost-effective components to be prioritised.

Summary of Recommendations

Learning from the Cheshire East pilot allows us to conclude the following core principles for rolling-out a WHA model in other areas:

- a. High fidelity to the 14-component WHA Model is not crucial to success. A successful WHA can be established without every component needing to be implemented according to a prescriptive blueprint. A flexible model, such as that described by STADA, is achievable - but must not become a pick and mix of convenience or a race to the bottom.
- b. It is vital to consider each component carefully for local context. Whilst the model could be less prescriptive about how each component is implemented, and more flexible to local context, all 14 components are important. All 14 should form a checklist for meaningful engagement for local authorities, who should explain what they are doing to address each component, or give a rationale as to why some will not be implemented or will be implemented differently.
- c. A flexible 'minimum standards' approach (and/or a gold-silver-bronze accreditation model) could support a more flexible implementation of a Whole Housing Approach. For instance, rather than mandating Housing First, that component could focus on improvement of specific core outcomes for survivors with multiple disadvantages and homelessness.
- d. Core criteria, considerations and outcomes could be provided by STADA for each component, offering local authorities more control over the method of implementation, but ensuring that they evidence how they have considered and met core standards.
- e. There are pitfalls with moving away from any prescriptive model and safeguards will be needed. STADA is well placed to oversee a standards/accreditation model (having a successful track record with DAHA) but will need to guard against lowest common denominator implementation e.g. authorities using the WHA terminology but not accurately implementing the activities. Support from the STADA team proved highly important to pilot success in Cheshire East – especially on design, implementation, expert knowledge on key aspects e.g. PRS, multiple disadvantages, data improvement. Consideration is needed to how to 'bottle' and offer the core parts of that STADA support to other local authorities without the intense support and additional funding that a pilot brings. STADA could support local authorities by providing:
 - Best practice WHA resources and updating how-to guides;
 - A peer-support model with other local authorities who are further down the implementation journey;
 - STADA expert support on particular components or issues via a 'helpdesk'.
- f. This evaluation has found that some core roles/posts are crucial to successful implementation of a Whole Housing Approach, namely a WHA Co-ordinator, WHA IDVA, and a DA worker within housing. We recommend retaining these key

posts/roles as non-negotiable elements for local authorities implementing a Whole Housing Approach. The cost-benefit analysis shows that the costs of these posts are recouped in benefits and savings.

- g. Implement key WHA structures including a WHA Steering Group which brings together key statutory and non-statutory partners (including By&For services);
- h. Commit to collecting and reporting consistent, disaggregated, data to evidence core outcomes for survivors. Where necessary, commit to making data improvements and/or integrating data reporting across services.
- i. Ensure ringfenced flexible funding to support survivors to stay safely in their own homes, or to move on to longer-term accommodation.
- j. Ideally, implementing authorities should commit to a minimum three-year WHA. This evaluation shows that fully embedding a WHA takes at least three years, and even then certain activities and data capture are only just underway meaning that quantitative outcomes may take longer to evidence.
- k. Expert input from survivors and By&For services is crucial, and should be built in throughout the design, implementation and evaluation of a WHA.

This evaluation evidences that for every £1 invested in the WHA housing intervention, £10.20 in public sector savings is generated - exceptional value for money. This should reassure local authorities that, even facing tight spending envelopes, some dedicated funding for a WHA is money well spent.