

Managed Housing Reciprocals

Author: **Clementine Traynard**, Safer London

Safer London is a London charity working to prevent and address gang violence, vulnerability and sexual exploitation. In 2017, they launched the first large scale managed reciprocal scheme in the country including for those at risk of domestic abuse.

Purpose of this toolkit

This toolkit is a reference guide for local authorities, housing providers and specialist domestic abuse services who are interested in setting up a managed housing reciprocal scheme to support social tenants who need to relocate due to domestic abuse. It includes key considerations and practical resources for planning and implementation, as well as guidance on how to monitor the quality and effectiveness of a managed housing reciprocal scheme.

Definition

A managed housing reciprocal scheme enables individuals and families who are at risk of domestic abuse or violence and who have a social tenancy, to move to a safe area whilst retaining their tenancy. It is a formal collaboration between social housing providers that is coordinated by an independent agency.

The coordinating agency manages the referral process and keeps track of moves, ensuring that the system is fair for all housing providers involved and that victim/survivors can move as quickly as possible.

What problem do managed reciprocals seek to address?

In areas where demand for social housing outstrips supply, victim/survivors who have a social tenancy risk losing it in their efforts to remain safe. The loss of a social tenancy can be a form of re-victimisation for victim/survivors. Not only are victim/survivors asked to leave their home to escape violence and abuse perpetrated by someone else, but by doing so are penalised through the loss of their social tenancy.

It is the responsibility of institutions to implement measures to prevent re-victimisation. Ideally, victim/survivors should not have to give up their homes and rights to keep safe from abuse. However, measures to prevent perpetrators from accessing the home (Sanctuary Schemes) and/or to remove perpetrators from the home (court order or custody) are not always adequate or appropriate. Sometimes, victim/survivors do not want to pursue criminal or court proceedings and, instead of adding security measures to their homes, would prefer to leave. In these cases, a reciprocal move offers an option for victim/survivors to access affordable and stable housing and rebuild their lives.

Housing associations with larger property portfolios may be able to move tenants away from the perpetrator and into a safe area. However, councils and housing associations that only have properties in one local authority cannot always ensure that victim/survivors can move out of their danger areas. Managed reciprocals enable councils and housing providers to make better use of their housing stock and protect their tenants who are at risk of domestic abuse and violence.

Background

The Pan-London Housing Reciprocal was the first large scale managed reciprocal scheme. It was implemented in Greater London in 2017. Based on the East London Housing Reciprocal model, the scheme merged multiple London sub-regional reciprocal schemes into one to maximize the options available to housing providers and victims/survivors. The charity Safer London was introduced as an independent coordinator to keep track of referrals and moves. The scheme was developed based on research by Solace Women's Aid which found that over 60% of women who entered refuges in London with a social tenancy lost the tenancy during their stay.ⁱ

In 2016, Safer London conducted a Needs Assessment of domestic abuse services in London, which found that local authorities and housing associations were struggling to arrange cross-borough moves for their tenants.ⁱⁱ Barriers included staff not having the right contacts in other boroughs, and housing providers being reluctant to engage in moves as there was no guarantee that properties would be reciprocated. The Pan-London Housing Reciprocal facilitates cross-borough moves by ensuring that housing providers have a clear referral pathway, the right contacts, and that properties they put in are reciprocated.

In 2019, Cambridgeshire was the second area to set up a managed reciprocal scheme and did so through the Whole Housing project.

How do managed reciprocals improve quality of life?

Managed reciprocals provide victim/survivors with the ability to live free from violence and abuse. With the majority (87%, or 137 offences) of all domestic homicide cases in 2014/15 having occurred in a house or dwelling, the home is a key component when considering the most effective responses to domestic abuse.ⁱⁱⁱ

Institutions can often exacerbate harm to victim/survivors by expecting them to provide evidence of violence, as well as not offering guaranteed access to protection and long-term, secure and stable housing.^{iv} These issues result in practical barriers for victim/survivors leaving an abusive partner, at a point when risk of homicide is highest.^v Managed reciprocals provide social tenants with greater protection by preventing the loss of a social tenancy.

In comparison to men, women often have lower incomes, which means they are more reliant on social housing to provide stable accommodation for their families when they leave perpetrators.^{vi} The long-term stability and affordability that social housing provides is crucial for victim/survivors and their children to rebuild their lives after abuse.

“This scheme has allowed my children and I to live a new life. I believe this scheme will also be very helpful for others who need to move from where they are, whatever their situation may be.”

Victim/survivor (London Housing Reciprocal)

“The housing reciprocal allowed my client to continue with her daily routines in a safe space with the potential of [the perpetrator] turning up at her property or running into her in the local area much reduced. This gave her a reinforced sense of safety and reduced her anxieties around unexpected encounters.”

Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (London Housing Reciprocal)

Principles

- **Safety:** Managed reciprocals enable victim/survivors to consider where they feel safe to live and to move to a secure home. Reciprocals are designed to be able to be accessed quickly to address the urgency that victim/survivors often need to relocate to safety.
- **Mutual benefit:** Managed reciprocals are based on reciprocity: a risk area for a victim/survivor can be a place of safety for another victim/survivor. Reciprocals allow housing providers to make best use of their stock and prevent voids.
- **Partnership working:** Managed reciprocals recognise that housing providers and domestic abuse services must work together to address and prevent domestic abuse.
- **Fair and transparent:** Having an independent coordinator ensures a neutral monitoring system. Housing partners can trust that properties they put in to rehouse other housing provider’s tenants will be reciprocated.

- **Cost-effective:** Managed reciprocals only need a small investment in the form of a local coordinator. They reduce the use of temporary accommodation, including the cost to local authorities and the emotional cost to victim/survivors. For example, Westminster Council spent £48 million on temporary accommodation in 2017/18.^{vii}
- **Evidence-generating:** Once set up, managed reciprocals provide unique insight into cross-boundary moves for victim/survivors living in social housing. These insights can inform regional and national domestic abuse strategies and needs assessments.

Components

- **Clear agreement:** Councils and housing associations taking part sign an agreement setting out the roles and responsibilities of partners, including nominating a lead for each organisation. Each scheme can be tailored - such as making participation voluntary or mandatory, or setting conditions on tenancy and property types. An example of Memorandum of Understanding agreement is included in the Resources section.
- **Local Coordinator:** There needs to be an independent coordinator in place to administer the referral process and keep track of properties owed. The local coordinator needs to have good knowledge and understanding of domestic abuse and be able to offer a sensitive approach when liaising with applicants. There is a template job description in the Resources section.
- **Multi-agency and cross-sector collaboration:** Managed reciprocals work best when victim/survivors are supported through the relocation process by a specialist domestic abuse worker. There need to be strong links between the housing partners and local domestic abuse agencies. Housing providers and specialist domestic abuse agencies should meet regularly, for instance through a steering group.
- **Communication:** Effective communication is a central component of managed reciprocals. The local coordinator has a central role in ensuring that communication between partners is effective and as quick as possible, with capacity to respond and follow up daily if needed. Each partner should have two named contacts to ensure a timely response.
- **Embedding pathway into internal protocols:** The reciprocal scheme should embed into housing allocation and management transfer protocols. Staff need to be made aware of the scheme at their induction and through policies, procedures and training.

Planning and preparation

Considering the local housing context

Before setting up a managed reciprocal, an assessment should be carried out to determine if there is a need for a reciprocal scheme. Providers of temporary or emergency accommodation, such as refuges and hostels, should compare the housing status of victim/survivors before and after they access emergency accommodation, to find out whether they are losing their social tenancy in the process. Domestic abuse services should be consulted to find out whether the fear of losing a social tenancy acts as a barrier to leaving for people they support. Local authorities and housing associations should also be consulted to assess whether a reciprocal scheme can help improve their response to tenants experiencing domestic abuse.

Where demand for social housing is significantly higher than supply, local authorities operate waiting lists and priority banding systems. However even high priority applicants are likely to wait years to be housed, particularly for family-size properties. In this context, it is extremely difficult for landlords to justify offering one of their properties to someone who is coming from another area, as this means not accommodating an applicant on their own register who has priority for social housing. Managed reciprocals provide a guarantee that the system is fair and mutually beneficial, with each property offered by a housing partner being reciprocated with the same size property for one of their tenants accessing the scheme.

In areas of low housing demand, social housing supply is sufficient to address demand. Social landlords can make their properties available to new tenants coming from outside their local area and support existing tenants when needed. Therefore, the need for a coordinator might not be necessary. However, there should still be capacity within housing teams to record and monitor moves for social tenants relocating due to domestic abuse in order to understand patterns and trends. Principles of managed reciprocals can be applied to improve existing choice-based lettings schemes and other mechanisms that enable tenants to relocate.

Reciprocal moves should only be utilised when other housing pathways, such as internal management transfers, are not suitable or cannot be accessed. Therefore, referrals should only reflect a small proportion of social tenants who need to move urgently due to domestic abuse.

Stakeholder Engagement

When setting up a managed reciprocal scheme it is important to engage the key housing providers in the region, including local authorities and housing associations, and to identify the organisation that will coordinate the scheme.

To do this, identify the regional forums where social housing providers meet, in particular the ones operating at a strategic level. For example, in London Safer London presented at the Directors of Housing forum. In regions where there is a common housing register, attend lettings meetings or steering groups. If there is no formal forum taking place, set up a meeting with the managers or heads of lettings for the local authorities and largest housing associations in the region.

Resources & securing funding

In London staffing levels have varied as the reciprocal scheme has developed and become busier. Typically staffing has revolved around one manager and one full-time equivalent coordinator for the everyday coordination of referrals and moves. Additional capacity in the team enables various development initiatives, such as reaching out to specific groups that experience additional barriers to accessing safe housing, for instance care leavers or women with an offending history. The scheme is funded by the London Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC), with match-funding from trusts and foundations.

In Cambridgeshire, the Domestic Abuse Service Administrator provides the equivalent of one day a week for reciprocal coordination, with support from the local Whole Housing Project Manager.

If no funding is available from a specific project or regional government, alternative funding models can be explored. For example, individual housing partners could make a financial contribution to fund the local coordinator or donate a role as a resource in kind. In areas where there is a smaller geographical spread, the role could also support the coordination of other domestic abuse initiatives such as the local Sanctuary Scheme. The initial needs assessment should determine if additional funding should be earmarked to cover moving costs or other support needs such as Sanctuary Schemes.

Each housing provider commits one to two Reciprocal Named Leads who lead on approving referrals for their tenants and responding to property requests sent by the local coordinator. In London, the Reciprocal Named Leads commit approximately two hours a week to reviewing referrals and one day per quarter to attend meetings that relate to reciprocal coordination. However, time spent on reviewing referrals can vary significantly depending on engagement and activity and will likely be more when a tenant is in the process of moving. In the existing schemes it is most often the Housing Managers who lead on approving referrals for internal tenants, and Lettings Managers who lead on receiving property requests and offering properties.

The table on the next page summarises key statistics for the London and Cambridgeshire's managed reciprocal schemes:

Area	Reciprocal local coordinator capacity	Number of social housing properties	Households on housing register (2018)	Average waiting time for households on the housing register
Greater London	One full-time equivalent coordinator and one full-time equivalent manager. Additional capacity to develop the scheme.	763,100	232,409	Information not available for all boroughs. Example of Westminster: Studio: 2.5 years 1 bed: 1 year 2 bed: 10 years 3 bed: 16 years 4 bed +: 34 years
Cambridgeshire & Peterborough	One day a week equivalent coordinator and manager support	53,000	15,268	Information not available

Various data sources^{viii}.

Implementation and ongoing operation

Setting up a scheme

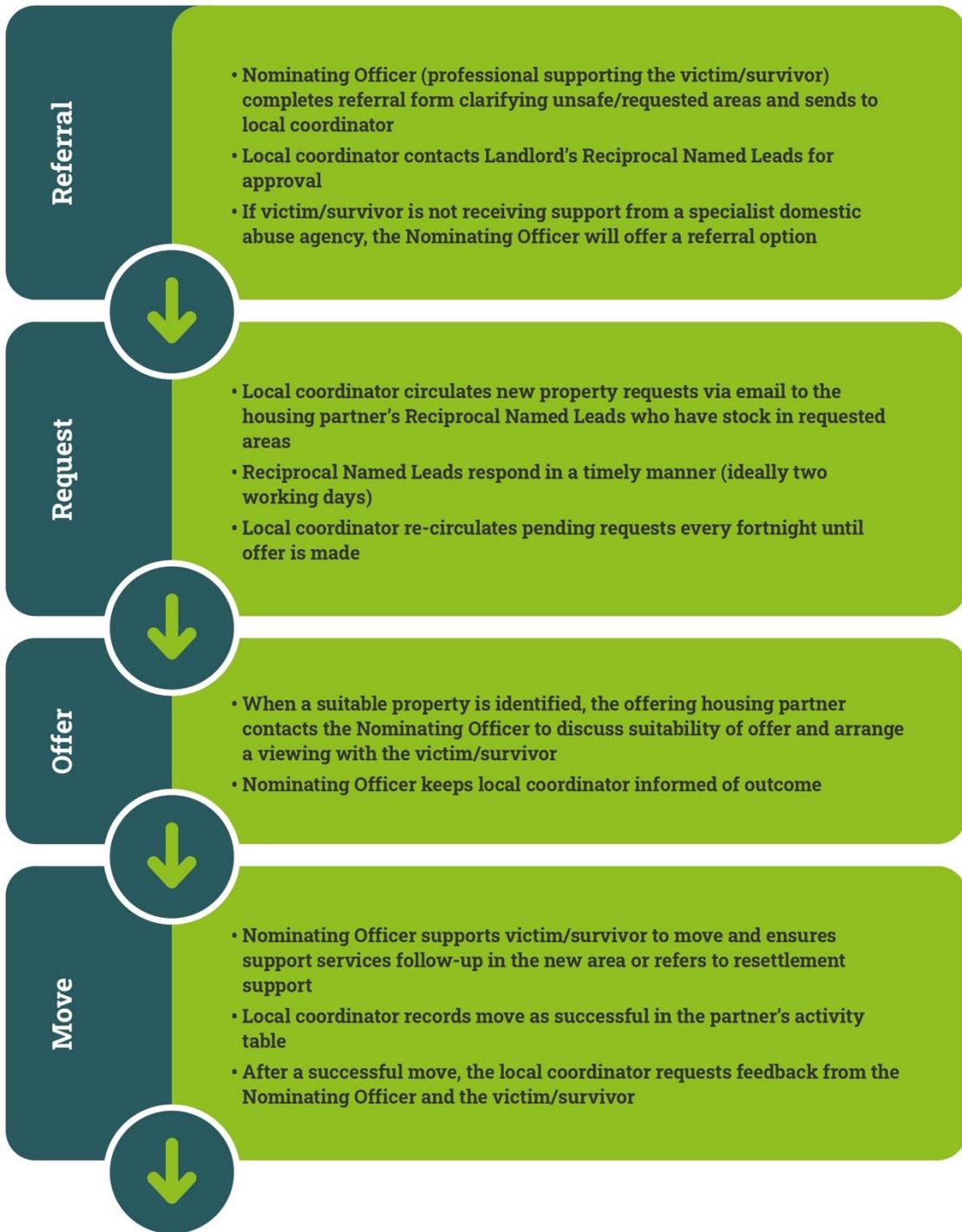
Partners need to agree on the geographical range of the scheme, taking into consideration the needs of victim/survivors. Many victim/survivors need to remain in the same region, as they rely on family and support networks and need to maintain links to work or health care. At the same time they need to move far enough away from the perpetrator to prevent any encounters that could put them at risk.

Partners should discuss other considerations, such as making participation voluntary or mandatory, and agreeing on the types of tenancy and properties provided. These considerations should be included in a clear agreement document signed by all participating housing partners and the coordinating agency. The document must clearly define the roles and responsibilities of all involved. A template of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreement can be found in the Resources section.

The local coordinator should organise regular multi-agency meetings that can be formalised into a steering group. These meetings will bring together the housing partners and domestic abuse agencies to ensure that the needs of the victim/survivors are being met.

Managed reciprocals rely on partnership working which requires both operational and strategic input from partners. This means there needs to be active engagement from housing partners including properties provided and mechanisms to feedback on the on-going running of the scheme.

Process flowchart



Involving specialist domestic abuse services

If the victim/survivor is not receiving support from a specialist domestic abuse agency, the local coordinator should encourage the referring agency to make this referral. The referring agency needs to ensure that the victim/survivor is supported through the process, including moving costs, accessing benefits where relevant, and accessing resettlement support in the new area.

After a move, victim/survivors can feel isolated and as a result can become vulnerable to further abuse. Flexible funding, mobile advocacy, and Sanctuary Schemes can be useful while waiting for a move or resettlement support in the new area. Please refer to the toolkits on flexible funding, mobile advocacy and Sanctuary Schemes for more details.

In Cambridgeshire, the partners decided that all reciprocal referrals should be made via the domestic abuse services. This ensured that all victim/survivors receive support by a specialist domestic abuse support worker throughout the process.

Referral form

The referral form should not include the victim/survivor's name or address for confidentiality and safety reasons. Instead, the contact details of the Nominating Officer (professional who is leading on the referral) should be included so that landlords can make contact when they have a property available. A template referral form is included in the Resources section.

Monitoring and cap on number of properties owed

The local coordinator keeps track of property offers made, monitors the overall number of moves in and out of each partner's properties and shares a partner activity table regularly with all landlords. This table shows who owes properties and ensures the system is fair and transparent. An example can be found in the Resources section of this toolkit.

In order to make sure that properties are reciprocated, the local coordinator implements a cap on properties owed. For instance, a partner cannot make a new referral for one of their tenants if they already owe two properties to the scheme.

Awareness raising and training

It is essential to promote the scheme across all sectors that support victim/survivors of domestic abuse. This includes specialist organisations supporting local minority groups, such as culturally specific, BME and LGBTQ+ organisations. This allows tenants who often face barriers when accessing generic services to access support.

Local authorities and housing providers taking part need to raise awareness about the scheme with their staff through policies, procedures and training. They also need to make their tenants aware of it if they approach them for support.

Schemes of this nature require regular training to ensure that all those involved understand the expectations and their remit, and equip them to effectively advise and support victim/survivors through the process. To raise awareness about the scheme and explain how it works, the local coordinator in London offers regular training to all types of statutory and voluntary organisations that may come into contact with the scheme. This should be built into the local coordinator's role.

Evaluation

Key outputs and outcomes:

- **Number of housing partners signed up to the scheme:** Including both local authorities and housing associations.
- **Number of referrals and property requests circulated:** This will indicate the level of demand for cross-boundary moves.
- **Number of offers made:** This will indicate the level of response and engagement from housing providers. Property offers might be refused for a variety of reasons, so it will not necessarily correspond to the number of successful moves.
- **Types of properties and tenancies offered:** A property log can give insight into how housing partners are participating
- **Number of successful moves:** The Local Coordinator should record both the number of households and the total number of people (adults and children) who moved through the scheme.
- **Number of multi-agency meetings and training provided:** The Local Coordinator should keep track of meetings organised to discuss the scheme and training sessions provided.
- **Feedback:** The Local Coordinator requests feedback from both the Nominating Officer and the victim/survivor (via new landlord where needed) within one month of the move.
- **Sustainability:** The Local Coordinator contacts the receiving landlord six months after a move to monitor whether the move effectively addressed the risk in the long term.

Discussion and considerations

Rehousing Perpetrators

An area of discussion has been whether reciprocal arrangements can be used to rehouse perpetrators of abuse. The Cambridgeshire reciprocal provides the option of relocating the perpetrator if it is deemed safe to do so. This allows the victim/survivor to remain in their home and it is often quicker to identify a property for a single person than a family-size property.

Rehousing perpetrators may prove controversial. To explore this and other ways to engage with perpetrators please refer to the Perpetrator Management toolkit.

Choice and responsibilities

As housing professionals must work with limited housing options while managing the safety of their tenants, accessing a move through the managed reciprocal scheme should be voluntary and the choice of the victim/survivors. If the instance that the victim/survivor doesn't want to move, other options should be explored including the Sanctuary Scheme, flexible funding and actions taken against the perpetrator. This will help to ensure that the needs of the victim/survivor are met, and that they maintain control over their situation. The housing provider should explore all possible avenues of support which may include remaining in the home.

Responsibilities and consequences should first and foremost be shifted to perpetrators and, where possible, institutions should intervene through removing perpetrators and holding them to account.

Domestic abuse can be complex and relocations may not always remove risk, therefore it is important to monitor the sustainability of moves as well as addressing any other needs a victim/survivor might present.

Resource 1: Case study – Sarah’s story*

“The Pan-London Housing Reciprocal has provided us the opportunity to rebuild our lives. I and my family feel very safe in our new home and my ex-partner doesn’t know where we live.

I had to flee my property due to domestic violence and my local authority wasn’t doing very much to help me. When I approached the borough I fled to, I had an assessment with a caseworker and was told that the council was going to put me into temporary accommodation that evening and that they would liaise with my housing officer and make an application for the Pan London Reciprocal. I wasn’t familiar with the Pan London scheme but my caseworker advised me that it was an initiative set up to ensure that people fleeing DV could retain their tenancy and not become homeless. An application was made by my housing officer and all I had to do was notify them of the boroughs that were safe for me to move to. I was advised that it could take a few months to find me suitable permanent accommodation but during this period, I would continue to live in temporary accommodation and the dual housing benefit would cover the rent for the property that I fled from.

After a few months, the same borough I approached accepted my Pan London application and agreed to permanently house me. It was a relief as my children and I were settled in the area and I finally felt safe again. I feel like my children and I have a future now.” – Victim/survivor

“Our client’s housing journey would have been significantly different without the reciprocal service. As the family was from outside the borough, they would have needed to present as homeless, therefore going down the homelessness route. This often involves emergency accommodation and temporary accommodation, and duty may be discharged into the private rented sector. The reciprocal service allowed the client to maintain her secure tenancy status. I truly believe the reciprocal is a valuable tool in supporting survivors of domestic abuse. It gives tenants the opportunity of keeping their secure tenancy status, preventing further victimisation and reducing stress relating to moving homes.” – Support worker

*Name has been changed

Resources

1. Case study: Sarah's story
2. Template Memorandum of Understanding agreement
3. Template Property Request Form
4. Example Job Description Reciprocal Coordinator
5. Template database log including monitoring/activity tables
6. Links to existing managed reciprocal websites
 - [London](#)
 - [Cambridgeshire](#)

References

ⁱ Solace Women's Aid (2016) *The Price of Safety*. Retrieved from https://www.solacewomensaid.org/sites/default/files/2018-05/Solace%20Women%27s%20Aid%20housing%20report_The%20price%20of%20safety_Mar16.pdf.

ⁱⁱ Safer London (2016) *Pan-London Domestic Violence Needs Assessment*. Retrieved from <https://saferlondon.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/PLDV-Needs-Assessment-Final-low-res.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Home Office (2016) *Key Findings from Analysis of Domestic Homicide Reviews*. Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/575232/HO-Domestic-Homicide-Review-Analysis-161206.pdf

^{iv} Crisis (2019) 'A Safe Home': *Breaking the link between homelessness and domestic abuse*. Retrieved from https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/240459/cri0198_domesticabusebill_appg_report_2019_aw_web.pdf

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Women's Budget Group (2019) *A home of her own: Housing and women*. Retrieved from <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/WBG19-Housing-Report-full-digital.pdf>

^{vii} London Assembly (2019) *Living in Limbo: London's temporary accommodation crisis*. Retrieved from https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/temporary_accommodation_report_-_living_in_limbo_-_final.pdf

^{viii} Cambridgeshire Insight (2020). Retrieved from <https://cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/housing/>

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