Report of research carried out by Forum CIO Summer 2025

Contents

1. Executive Summary
2. Background and Context
3. Methodology
4. Findings
5. Themes

Appendix 1 – Informed Consent Statement

Appendix 2 – Purpose Statement and Questions

Appendix 3 – Flyers used in promoting the research

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1. Executive Summary

This report outlines the findings from a series of conversations, a focus group and a survey that took place in Hull in the summer of 2025.

The aim of the research was to listen to the experiences of women and children receiving support from services commissioned by Hull City Council for the victims of domestic abuse. This was a small-scale qualitative research project and the findings must therefore be used with caution. Despite numerous engagement attempts, very minimal feedback was received on two of the commissioned services; lack of information should not be taken as a reflection on the quality of those services.

Women who took part in the focus group and the one-to-one interviews shared their views on two main areas of focus – support and accommodation. This included talking about the nature of good support and where it could be improved, and their experiences of accommodation including feelings of safety, property repairs and standards, and hopes and aspirations for future housing. They also discussed the impact of factors like physical and mental health and the needs of their children.

> *'I was very overwhelmed at first. It's hard to explain. I struggled a lot to settle down. I was worried I wouldn't settle on my own. Having my two ladies coming round… that helps settle me a bit.'*
>
> Anonymous participant

Responses were mixed and were highly dependent on the individual circumstances and support needs of the women that took part. There were examples given of comprehensive and holistic support given that made women feel safe. There were also examples of breakdowns in trusted relationships between women and support workers or organisations – connected to both quality of support and accommodation.

> *'Where I struggle is… it is a charity that runs my house, and they get a lot of money in terms of housing benefit, at least £300 per week, and I look and think 'where does the money go?'*
>
> Anonymous participant

The findings from the research are outlined in the report using the themes identified above. Due to the scale of the research, it is not possible to draw conclusions on which commissioning decisions can be based, but it is hoped that the words of women included in this report can contribute to the overall understanding of the role that services can play in supporting women and children who are victims of domestic abuse in the city.

Forum, the charity which facilitated the conversations, works with individuals who have lived experience of multiple unmet needs, with aim of bringing about system change and improved services for the people who need them. For more information about our work, please visit www.northbankforum.org.uk.

2. Background and Context

Hull City Council commissions a range of services for the victims of domestic abuse, including refuge space and crisis accommodation, support for women who have complex needs, and therapeutic support for children. Services work with the Council's Domestic Abuse Partnership (DAP).

The commissioning team evaluate and monitor the services using different methods. The aim of this research was to complement those methods by speaking to women and children in depth about their experiences to understand what works well and what could be improved. Forum CIO, a local infrastructure charity, were asked to carry out the conversations following a similar exercise at the end of 2024 to gather information on people's experiences of Support Exempt Accommodation in the city.

This research took place alongside other research into 'move on' support in Hull. While this work was separate, some participants had experience of multiple services and shared insights that highlighted areas where systems could change. These insights have been included where they are relevant.

3. Methodology

Recruitment of participants and accessibility

Forum worked with the commissioner to develop flyers that were sent electronically and in printed form to the users and providers of services (Appendix 3). Alongside the research, a survey was developed for those that wanted to share their views without speaking to someone directly. A QR code was added to the flyer for women's services that linked to the survey. The flyers were written in clear language and explained that women could speak as part of a group or in a one-to-one setting.

Information about the purpose of the research was shared, with reassurances around safe spaces and anonymity and informed consent. There was a £15 incentive voucher for each participant.

Questions and informed consent

Questions (Appendix 2) were determined through conversations between the domestic abuse team and Forum, but were designed to be semi-structured and open, with the capacity for facilitators to ask follow-up questions and seek clarification. Not all questions were asked of all participants as they covered a range of services and support that were not applicable in all cases.

Each participant gave their informed consent (Appendix 1) to take part after having the research purpose and anonymity process explained to them verbally.

Interviews and participants

A total of 25 women people took part in the research:

- 8 women joined a focus group at the Women's Aid refuge
- 9 women had one-to-one telephone interviews after seeing one of the engagement flyers

- 4 women had face-to-face interviews at community locations
- 4 women completed some of the survey questions

Women were not asked about their age, ethnicity or other demographics as the small-scale nature of the research meant that no useful assumptions could be made from this data. However, from researcher observation, ages ranged from 20s to early 60s, and approximately 20% of participants were from a migrant background.

Survey responses

There were four survey responses received. None of the respondents answered all of the questions, but the survey was designed to skip ahead based on responses so that only relevant questions were asked. The respondents who did fill the survey out gave detailed narrative information that has been incorporated into the report – where direct quotes are used, it has been made clear that they came from the surveys rather than one-to-one interviews.

Issues and challenges

Four commissioned services were within the scope, but detailed feedback was only obtained on two of the providers – Women's Aid, and Preston Road Women's Centre (also known as WINNER and Purple House, names which are used by clients of the charity). Some feedback was obtained on Humbercare's women's provision but the numbers of participants talking about this service were very low; comments have been included in the report. Despite the engagement efforts of the commissioning team and the people working within the service, the researchers were not able to speak to any of the children who receive therapeutic support from Time to Listen.

An additional challenge of undertaking research into services of this type is that service users are often unaware of the 'type' of service they are receiving and, on occasion, are unsure of the provider name. Forum have now carried out research on several accommodation-related services that are provided through different Housing Related Support contracts, domestic abuse commissioning and through Support Exempt Accommodation (enhanced housing benefit claims); we often find people are only aware that they are in some form of supported housing. While efforts are made to determine this, research questions focused on how women felt and their experiences, rather than the source of the funding.

Structure of report

Direct quotes from transcripts are in italics with quotation marks. Where quotation marks do not appear, the statements are paraphrased or summarised from multiple sources. Anonymity was assured for all participants, and for this reason minor details may have been changed. Full details of the informed consent process are given in the methodology section and appendices.

This report forms part of a series of focus groups and research into housing and support in Hull undertaken in the past 12 months. There are common themes identified across this research which are highlighted in the final section where relevant.

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4. Findings

The findings of the focus groups are presented below, grouped into headings from the question sets and interspersed with direct quotes from participants.

What does good support look like?

> *'Support is essential when you are fleeing. You need that support. I think it can just help you get on your feet, help you cook and clean. Practical things.'*
>
> Anonymous participant

The responses in this section do not reference the participant's service provider, as they cover women's views on the nature of good support, particularly in the context of women who have been in domestic abuse relationships.

Women spoke about the need for responsive, emotional support that was not judgemental. This included support around coming to terms with domestic abuse and its impact. One woman described this as '*Good support is people understanding that sometimes that you do make yourself vulnerable, that you can still fall back into traps… in most of our situations, we still cared for our partners, we still loved them.'*

Regardless of whether they themselves needed support with practical things, women generally recognised the need for help with things like filling in forms, and accessing clothing, food and furniture. Several women spoke about this type of help being useful even to people who were previously able to do these things for themselves, because the trauma of the situation and dealing with the emotional fallout of domestic abuse made it hard to concentrate on the day-to-day.

One woman highlighted that domestic abuse situations can also make women feel as though they need help because their self-esteem has been eroded: '*Where I used to live with my ex, he did a lot of the cooking and house chores, he made me think and feel like I couldn't do it… if I did it, it was wrong. So when I moved here, I was like 'what do I do?'*

Additionally, the following phrases and concepts came up frequently in conversations in the context of good support and good support workers –

- Someone you trust and have the chance to build up a relationship with
- Someone who is proactive and does what they say they will do
- Showing that they care, that 'you're not just a statistic and someone on their books'
- Someone you don't constantly have to chase up
- Workers who do not pressure you, and who go at the pace of the individual

> *'[Good support means] checking in with me, making sure I'm okay, having that consistent support… I can go 4 or 5 days without seeing anyone. So I know that someone is coming round, asking if I'm okay.'*
>
> Anonymous participant

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Quality of support

This section explores feedback on the support provided by Women's Aid and Preston Road Women's Centre. It focuses on comments and experiences of personal support rather than the quality of accommodation.

Support workers - positive

The majority of feedback received about support workers/key workers across the commissioned services was positive. Comments from women getting support from Preston Road Women's Centre included:

'I use that word 'care'... if I ring my worker and I am not in a good mood she likes to know what the problem is, so she can support. So that's what I think of as care. Caring for one another, for your health, your mental health.'

'She is always there for me whenever I call, she's always there for me and listening to me and giving solutions.'

'Having that continuity is important. So it's a big thing for me, trust with professionals is a big thing. I don't trust easily, I keep a lot back. So it's a very big thing that I have the same support worker.'

'I see them every week, they ask me how I am, they are very encouraging. They keep me going! They keep telling me I'm doing well even though I don't think I am!'

> *'One of my friends was in one of their properties and I used to go round to see her. I got to know her support worker because she came round every week. One time she asked how I was, and noticed that I wasn't okay. And I just blurted it out, about the abuse. So she rang the office and said I needed support, and that's how I got into it.'*
>
> Anonymous PRWC participant

Women who were with PRWC also referenced occasions when workers had attended appointments with them or advocated for them when they didn't feel confident. Some mentioned taking part in other activities organised by the charity, including arts and crafts groups and mental health support.

> *'After I came here, I met so many wonderful [workers] – each and every one of them. All the staff are ready to listen to you, if one is not available then someone else will help.'*
>
> Anonymous Women's Aid participant

Women at the Women's Aid refuge spoke about their expectations as well as their experiences. Several shared their pre-conceived ideas of life in a refuge, which were generally not positive and mainly focused on concerns about other residents rather than the accommodation or the support.

However, all participants who were anxious about what a refuge would be like felt that it was very different in reality, and much more supportive and positive. Examples of positive comments from the

women staying at the Women's Aid refuge about the quality of support included:

'They do everything… they don't pressure you to speak. They let you settle in, they'd come gradually. And everything I'd asked for, was done.'

'When I came here [Hull], I didn't know this place, so [support worker] went with me to go for a walk in the park, to get some fresh air, she showed me around, we went to town. She tries to relax me and take my mind off things. All the other staff are really good too, but [my support worker] was amazing.'

'They check on you. You can go two weeks but if they haven't seen me for a bit, they'll come and knock on the door. They're not in your face. They are there if you need them, there's an on call number, but they know if someone needs more support than others.'

> *'They helped me with my benefits as well, and they helped me with clothes. I came here with my son, I had so few clothes for us to wear. They helped me with school clothes for him. I left everything. Now I feel like home.'*
>
> Anonymous Women's Aid participant

In addition, women at the refuge spoke about the optional support groups and activities that took place in the building, including a confidence group to talk about self-care, parenting group, cookery and a group to help women build more positive relationships in the future.

Across the research, where there was a positive relationship with the support worker, this tended to include the following commonalities:

- Consistency – having the same worker, or having advance notice if the worker was away and someone else was standing in
- 'Going the extra mile' – for example, the woman who ended up disclosing her abuse to a PRWC worker who was actually supporting her friend at the time – the worker had taken the time to recognise the signs of domestic abuse
- Able to adapt – support workers who are able to balance the needs of those who require more check-ins and hand-holding, and those who are ready to be more independent
- Inclusive – for example the support available for women at the Women's Aid refuge who were migrants to the UK and who said the workers went out of their way to make them feel included

> *'I didn't know there were any services here… I knew nothing. I didn't expect anything to be honest. I just came here; the support they have, it's amazing. The way they understand me, the way they guided me. I feel so safe here. I was pregnant at that time, and it was all the things I wanted, it was really supportive. I feel really relaxed here.'*
>
> Anonymous Women's Aid participant

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Support workers – negative

None of the women at the Women's Aid refuge expressed any negativity around support workers. Areas for improvement were related only to limitations of the accommodation and these are explored later.

With PRWC, some of the negative feedback about support workers related to a series of issues leading to two cases of a total breakdown of the relationship between worker and client. Others spoke about the experiences in terms of occasional issues, or problems with consistency. The following comments about PRWC represent the experiences of 4 women:

'I had a worker that was meant to come every single week. She didn't. Which I didn't need the support anyway… but that's in their job [description] to do that. When she'd come, she'd stay for two minutes then leave.'

'I'm coming to the end of my journey in supported housing, but in the beginning when police were involved, social workers, I felt it was very disjointed. I had a social worker and my son had a social worker, and even at Purple House I have a DV worker, support worker, somebody managing the house – no one overall person. So you are having to tell your story multiple times.'

Anonymous PRWC participant

'I got moved on a Wednesday and they didn't come round till the following week. I was a bit disappointed as I thought this isn't what was meant to happen, surely. So instead of staying here, the first couple of nights I just stayed at my friends because I was scared to be on my own.'

Anonymous PRWC participant

'I rang to ask if I could see [support worker] at my friend's house because I was looking after her kids, and I could hear [support worker] in the background practically screaming 'no that's inappropriate, if she wants to cancel her appointment that's fine but she will get a warning.'

'On the first occasion I opened my door and thought 'who are you?' but the other one just said she couldn't get anybody else to come with her. They didn't warn me and I felt like I was thrown in at the deep end a bit.'

'There are so many time she hasn't showed up when she was meant to, she hadn't called me when she was meant to.'

'There's nothing that she could… we're never going to get that trust back. It's not just the trust with her, it's with the whole organisation'

'I think because they get that much money from my house alone, and they don't provide any support, why are they still able to claim that?'

'My support worker has limitations, and her time is limited, and I literally only have an hour a week with her. Because of the state of the house… I find it frustrating they

see the anger and me being pissed off… all they see is me kicking off they don't see the person behind it. By the time they come I have reached my limit.'

'I don't get on with her at all, to the point where I've told her she won't get in the house.'

'They are allowed to text five minutes before an appointment and say something has come up, but if I need to cancel I get a telling off.'

The research indicated that some women receiving PRWC support do not feel able to highlight issues with support because they recognise that the majority of support is good, and they feel a need to be 'grateful' for the assistance. For clarity, this was *not* based on any pressure from the service to show gratitude, more a sense that it would feel disrespectful:

'I spoke to a [PRWC] worker and we looked at one place, but I thought I have to discuss with my children… but none of my children want to go to that place, so I am finding it difficult to ring back to let her know because if someone is giving you help... you feel it is rude to say no thank you.'

'It is that unworthiness… when you are in a vulnerable situation… how can I describe it? For example I owned my own house with my husband, I had to leave due to domestic situation, and then I was put in that [poor housing]. But when you feel someone is helping you out you are grateful aren't you, and almost in that unworthiness you feel like you are scrounging in some way.'

Support planning

As part of the overall research, questions about support planning were incorporated to gauge whether plans were done, and to what extent the individual's needs and goals were assessed.

At the Women's Aid refuge, residents spoke about the use of the Outcomes Star to measure their progress:

When you first come in they'll ask how you're feeling. Your mental state. It goes up to about 10 – I was on 1. I was walking round in my pyjamas, I didn't put any make-up on. Then I gradually got back to the person I was before I got with the perpetrator. I saw [support worker] the other day and she had one of the [outcome] stars in her hand, and I said we should do another one of those. It'll probably be all 10s now.'

> *'We still do it [support plan], we did it earlier this year. She calls two or three times in a month, but if I am needing anything, she always tells me if we can't meet face to face, we can talk on the phone, but if it's urgent, I should just ring her immediately.'*
>
> Anonymous PRWC participant

Further feedback from the refuge indicated that women felt support planning was an ongoing process, with needs – including cultural needs – assessed at the start and then continued as and when required. Needs were specifically addressed again in preparation for move on.

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Feedback from PRWC clients about the support planning was minimal. More women spoke about the assistance they had had in preparing to leave the perpetrator, and where this was mentioned, it was done so in a positive way.

For some women, the concept of support planning was unnecessary as they felt they had lived independently before, and did not need additional help once they had left the abusive relationship (other than housing):

'There was a safety plan put in place when I was still with my ex-partner, and I think I've done a safety plan while I've been here but I can't remember.'

'I've had no support plan, no. I've never been asked about personal goals or what I want to achieve. Not sure if I needed that but some women do.'

There was one positive comment about support planning from a woman who was from a migrant background and who explained that she felt she needed more frequent check-ins, which she received.

Others that referred to support planning did so to highlight issues:

'My friend also has a Purple House, she's been in there 6 months and has only just had her support plan done.'

'They said the reason the support plan wasn't put in place was because I was staying with family, but that was months after I'd moved in. I feel like that was an excuse.'

'Support planning feels more like a risk assessment. I think in the beginning when you have escaped that [abuse], you're just grateful that someone is looking out for you. And then as time goes on you maybe start to see the problems in it… the gaps in the support.'

Support to navigate other systems and services

When asked about how support can help to 'join the dots', women gave examples of where this had worked well. One spoke about how her PRWC worker had helped her get her children into a different school, using her contacts to make it easier.

> *'I've had discrimination, yes, at the Job Centre when I had fallen and could not walk. And they were not sympathetic. But my worker, she said if I have to go back, she will come with me.'*
>
> Anonymous PRWC participant

Another, who does not have English as a first language, referred to the help she had received from her PRWC worker with employment. This included helping with the language barrier when she wanted to speak to an employment agency she felt had not treated her well, and accessing the Job Centre for support.

In most cases, the women supported by PRWC could not give examples of where their worker had created links with other services. They felt they had not generally been made aware of other sources of support outside of the services provided directly by the

charity. For some, this was not an issue because they did not feel they needed anything else. Others, however, spoke about being in a new area and feelings of isolation, and said help to know what else was out there was needed – '*when I actually moved in I just got left. So I didn't know where anything was, I didn't know where the nearest doctor's was, I'd never been in East Hull.'*

> *'The therapist really helped me, I was having nightmares, I wasn't able to sleep.'*
>
> Anonymous Women's Aid participant

At the Women's Aid refuge, women spoke about the value of 'hand-holding' support when accessing other services, particularly the justice system, and of the services that are brought into the refuge to give support that workers cannot:

'They've helped me loads with court to be honest. Without that I probably wouldn't even had turned up. She [support worker] did all the coping mechanisms with me.'

'For me, because I am not from here, [it was] help with visa stuff. Because I was very stressed, confused. I had visa but it was about to expire but they helped me with that. I feel more comfortable because they helped with my visa situation [a woman came in to give advice].'

'They had a psychotherapist, they did one-to-one sessions and group sessions, and after that they came once a week.'

All of the women taking part seemed confident that their key worker from the refuge would accompany them to any appointments that they had externally, and a few shared examples of where this had happened, including transport assistance to get there.

Accommodation and moving on

> *'I've learned about all different cultures, how people cook stuff, I've learned loads from being in here. I didn't even know what Eid was.'*
>
> Anonymous participant

While the feedback about support was positive at the Women's Aid refuge, some women did recognise the limitations of facilities in shared accommodation, and in particular the challenges this created for women with children:

'[the only difficulty is] the rooms… with kids. It's a communal kitchen, but trying to get kids ready for bed… they're not in a routine. I take their tablets off them, but if I have the telly on, they can't sleep. One of mine won't let me leave the room without her. When we have our own home it might be a bit better.'

'It's okay having younger children [here], but older ones… mine compared it to a prison! [laughing]. It's not like if you're at home and you can go out with your mates. Obviously they tell their friends everything and it's quite private and confidential here. But they are allowed to come and visit.'

'She [daughter] feels well and truly out of her routine.'

There was a discussion about how the bigger rooms/self-contained flats were allocated, although there was no evidence of resentment about how this was done or why some women had more space. Women felt that mixing up single women and those with children could be unfair, however:

'I think they should put single women on one side and people with kids on the other… if they could. Because you have some women without kids who have to listen to… I mean that poor woman might want a lie-in!'

> *'I have an older child, she's a teenager, she wants her own space, you know?'*
>
> Anonymous Women's Aid participant

Women also spoke about not being able to have their pets at the refuge, although there seemed to be general understanding why this was not possible, and they referenced the support available to get pets fostered or looked after.

Repairs were done in a timely way, and those that had used the on-call number out of hours said calls were answered quickly.

Feedback from women supported by PRWC on accommodation was mixed. It should be noted that the majority of the accommodation provided is non-commissioned, and the feedback below relates to both the crisis accommodation, which is commissioned, and the Support Exempt Accommodation, which is funded through enhanced housing benefit.

Comments were generally split between women who liked their housing and whose main concern was having to move on, and women who lived in older properties and had experienced ongoing issues:

> *'They are good. I was away and when I got back my carbon monoxide alarm was going off and my support worker gave me new batteries, that didn't work, but she said ring the centre. One of the ladies I'd met on one occasion dropped a new one off on her way home which was great.'*
>
> Anonymous PRWC participant

'Yeah it's a nice property. The repairs aren't sorted out quickly though.'

'If I have a problem, I know I can call them. Like I had a leak in the house, and she said call the office but if you don't hear back from them let me know and I'll chase them.'

'The rooms are little and there is mould in some areas of the house. They have been fixing it, but it keeps coming from another direction. They are seeing if there is a better place I can move to because it can't be sorted while we are here.'

'Repairs are done fairly quick, but I've reported my toilet five times, it's getting blocked and they resolve the problem short term. Kitchen door won't close because it's swelled so much. They didn't sort the bins for 4 months. I wouldn't recommend it to anyone. The back garden has rats. It's like a forest. There was a dead rat in the front garden. I've got nice neighbours!'

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'…the condition of the house is my biggest issue and the sheer lack of wanting to fix it. I went on a journey as I struggled to understand who makes the decisions on the conditions of these houses.'

'It's an old house and it gets damp. The door swells up in the winter and it doesn't shut properly. The mould is bad and no one communicates with you about when stuff is getting done. It has made me feel like a second-class citizen.'

'Garden is the only let down. It's a concrete yard full of weeds, will cost me money to make it nice for my children, which I can't really afford and I also won't be here long enough to put money into it.'

'It is simple repair, but despite reporting it numerous times, and my key worker reporting it, no one has even been round to see it. Someone said 'oh I did pass it on to repairs, I'll pass it one again and one of the contractors will ring you.' But no one ever rang. So my key worker [ended up sorting it herself].'

Anonymous PRWC participant

Feelings of safety and permanence

There was one comment, more related to support than accommodation, about not feeling safe with PRWC:

'I don't feel safe here because of all the stuff that's happened, I came here thinking I was going to get that bit more support, but not having the support it's thrown me off and I'm worried for when [the perpetrator] comes out [of prison].'

Other than this example, all the women who were with PRWC said they felt safe in the accommodation.

Several women commented on the accommodation not being permanent which created a sense of unease, which is explored in the Moving On section. This extended to the rules about decoration:

'There is something here I press every day, my 'okay switch', and if I don't press it every day they will come. And if I press it because there is something that needs fixing, they come.'

Anonymous PRWC participant

'I'm not allowed to decorate it without their permission but I know I'm going to get penalised for anything like the marks on the wall.'

'*Repairs are always the problem, and I don't like it that you can't make it like a home, like putting things up on the walls.'*

Women at the Women's Aid refuge said they felt safe in the accommodation:

'I came from London, and I had no one. There was a family who helped me, and they were the ones who rang multiple numbers for me, I was the one who talked. I was afraid at first. But as soon as I came here I felt safe.'

Moving on

All of the women were asked about support to move, including where they envisaged themselves moving on to, and what their priorities were.

At the Women's Aid refuge, women generally felt no pressure to move on, and some had been there for around 2 years. Women were asked if they felt there was a risk of becoming dependent on the refuge – that the support was so positive it increased feelings of concern about moving on. However, responses indicated that this was not the case, mainly because they knew the support could continue:

'If I moved out tomorrow, they do still come and check. It's when you're ready to say 'I don't need the support any more'. It's not like they are saying 'right, you've got a house now, we don't want to know.' And they do have a group, even if you're not in here, they have a group.'

'One of the key workers will still come and see you until you don't need their help anymore.'

Anonymous Women's Aid participant

Both of the women who had come to Hull from another area expressed a desire to stay in the city:

'I love Hull now, I'd love to live here, to stay here.'

None of the women envisaged themselves staying in any form of shared accommodation; they all wanted to live independently. They spoke about being supported to use the Hull City Council housing app, and support workers going with them to view properties. One gave an example of a worker going with a former resident to a prospective property that had mould, and making sure it got sorted before they moved in.

'I asked can this be our forever home? I have moved my kids so many times, and I'm having to move their school this time, we want this to be our home. I was told 'you can stay here for as long as you like, you don't have to move out unless you want to, this is your house. That's what I was told. A few weeks later it got sprung on me that this wasn't my forever house, I needed to get on the housing list, because they wanted me out.'

Anonymous PRWC participant

Comments from the women being supported by PRWC in terms of move on were mixed. Several of the women spoke about being told they would not be able to remain in their houses, and being unhappy about this:

'It's been explained to me now that they are changing the way they do it, as in, now, if you no longer the need the support, you can't live in one of their properties any more, you need to move on. It wasn't like that before apparently, it could just roll. But the Council are now saying it's supported housing, so people should be getting help and support to move on and live independently.'

'They've said I can be here as long as I need to… but they have also said it isn't permanent, which is unsettling.'

'They've basically said they're not kicking me out, but I need to find another property ASAP.'

'Before, if you got one of their properties, it was supported housing. But now, they said the Council send people now to come out and see you and see if you still need the support, and if they say you don't need that support, you have to move. But Purple House would help you move, they're not just going to chuck you out. But when I got told that I was a bit gutted because I quite like where I am.'

Others spoke of the support they felt they would receive from key workers to move on:

'I would need help with furniture, like a sofa, a washing machine. They've said there is help available with that, but we've not gone into detail with that.'

I've been on the Council list since February bidding for properties. I signed up with Umbrella housing before I moved here. I've spoken to one the team and had an assessment. The next step is basically either Council or stay with PRWC if I need the support.'

Women spoke about the impact of knowing they would have to move on:

'I was in crisis accommodation with PRWC and it was… I would describe it as intensive support. But when you get your own place that changes and it's a bit of a shock, like you are on your own again.'

'To be honest when I first moved here I thought 'I don't like it, I hate it, I don't know the area, I don't know anyone' but over the past couple of months I've settled down, I like it, it's near the shops.'

Additional findings

Women spoke about other services within the scope of the research, including the children's therapeutic support from Women's Aid, and therapeutic support from Time to Listen (women and children). The sample sizes were too small to be able to assess and compare the responses, although on both occasions the feedback was positive with no issues to support.

'He doesn't know what it is, he just thinks he goes and plays for an hour and gets out of school! He doesn't like school. It's in the same room where he played when we did the Brave course [DAP] so it's familiar. He just plays board games so the only thing he tells me is if he's won or lost! I don't quiz him on it, I don't ask him, but I do feel it's helping him.' (Speaking about Time to Listen counselling)

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5. Themes

Overall, the focus group and interviews suggested commonalities around the nature of support and what helps women feel safe and be prepared to move on.

The following themes have been highlighted by the research:

Safety

There were very few examples of women saying they did not feel safe in terms of the support they received or the accommodation they were in. Even where there was still a risk from the perpetrator, the use of safety buttons and risk planning across the services led to feelings of safety.

There was evidence that having the services provided by charities that provide other domestic abuse support was helpful. For example, women using Women's Aid and PRWC services referred to doing workshops and sessions on recognising safe relationships and 'red flags', and on developing confidence and assertiveness.

Where women did not feel safe, this was connected to issues with the criminal justice system rather than the service provider.

One potential area for further exploration was the use of a 'warning' system by PRWC for clients that missed appointments. This was only referred to by one client and therefore needs more discussion and exploration. It is highlighted here because the client felt that no one had ever explained what behaviours would or would not necessitate a warning, or what the consequences of receiving one or more warnings would be. In the context of women who have experienced domestic abuse, the use of the word 'warning' could also be problematic.

The importance of consistency

Having the same support worker was referenced frequently across all services. However, the importance of consistency went beyond having a regular support worker. The research also showed that having a sense of stability and control was particularly essential to women who had had very little control over their lives. This included being able to decide who they spoke to and when.

When they felt as though they were getting mixed messages, or having appointments repeatedly cancelled, this was detrimental to mental health and anxiety.

Settling down

Women at the refuge and with PRWC both spoke about finding 'forever homes', particularly in the context of having had to move so many times because of domestic abuse. Concerns about having to move again clearly occupied many of them, and women talked about feeling anxious and unsettled at the idea that they might not be able to settle.

This extended to small things that acted as ongoing reminders that they were in temporary accommodation, such as not being able to put things up on the walls.

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In most cases where women were very worried about where they were going to live, the feelings were exacerbated by having to factor in the needs of their children and particularly having to move schools again.

There were several comments from PRWC clients about needing to demonstrate that they were still in need of support to be able to stay, and a feeling that this prevented them from wanting to move towards complete independence.

Importance of location

When discussing moving on, the area of the city they moved to was of signification importance to most of the women – it was referenced more frequently than other factors like size, type or accessibility.

For some women it had been traumatic moving to another part of Hull after they had to leave their home. For others, it had been important to put distance between themselves and a perpetrator and/or the perpetrator's family.

Where they had not wanted to be in another area, the reasons usually related to being far from friends and family, and not knowing the local facilities. In cases where the perpetrator was in prison, most women wanted to be back in their original area.

Joined-up working

Across the services, there was evidence that workers recognised individual needs in terms of hand-holding women who needed to access other agencies or support.

For the refuge, there was the opportunity to bring external people in to provide holistic care, for example health visitors, counsellors and immigration advisers. This is kept to a minimum to ensure safety and confidentiality.

For PRWC clients, there was evidence that workers accompanied women when they needed it. When asked if they had been signposted to other sources of support, none of the women who took part could immediately give examples of this happening, although some later included examples when they were answering other questions.

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Appendix 1 – Informed Consent Statement

Resident Engagement (Domestic Abuse Services) - focus groups

Focus groups carried out by me, Pippa Robson. I work for Forum CIO, a registered charity that works in Hull. Also present – members of my team. You can contact me on pippa@forumcio.org.uk or 07791 040433.

Consent, anonymity and confidentiality statement

We will be audio recording the session. If you cannot consent to being recorded you cannot take part in the focus group but we can arrange with you to meet separately.

The information you share will **not** be 100% confidential, because we may wish to use some of your direct quotes in the information that goes into our report.

It will however be 100% **anonymised**. This means we will not include your name or other personal information in the report. If you say anything that we think makes you identifiable, for example your age, ethnicity and where you live, then we will amend certain details to ensure no one reading the report can identify you.

By taking part in this focus group you are giving your consent to participate. However, to make sure this is informed consent, please be aware of the following:

- You do not have to say anything you are not comfortable with
- Once the recording of this session is typed up, it will be deleted and no one apart from this small project team will hear it
- We ask that this is a safe space, and request those that are here not to share anything outside of the session – however we cannot guarantee this
- If you say anything in the session and change your mind, you can ask us not to include it in any report and we will honour this but you must tell us at the end of the session
- Due to timescales, you cannot change your mind afterwards or ask us not to include something as it may already be in the report – but you will not be identified or identifiable
- You can ask any questions you want at the start of the session or during the session
- The information you share may be used in the report we will write. This information may be used to shape how Hull City Council buy services from organisations. Information shared may therefore become part of public documents.

Data Protection

We are not recording your full name, address, phone number or any other personal information. During the session you may end up sharing personal information including health information. We will not be recording this specifically in the report and will be anonymising the data.

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Appendix 2 – Purpose Statement and Questions

Resident Engagement for commissioned DA services - focus groups and one-to-one interviews

Purpose Statement (10 minutes)

Hull City Council buys services that support women who are victims of domestic abuse and their children. Currently, these services include refuge accommodation, separate accommodation, therapeutic support and something called 'floating support' which is help from a key worker at a woman's own home or other setting.

The Council needs to review these services from time to time to make sure they are still working well, and that any good things or areas for improvement are known about.

One of the ways they do this is to speak to the people that use the services and ask them honestly about their experiences. The information they get back will be used to make sure the services are the best they can be in the future.

Hull City Council currently commission Hull Womens Aid, Humbercare, Preston Road Women's Centre and Time to Listen to provide a range of support for victims of domestic abuse and we want to seek views on the quality of the support provided. We also want to know what good support looks like.

The interviews and groups are being carried out by staff who work at an independent charity called Forum. This charity does not provide any accommodation services or domestic abuse services.

Question set 1 – thinking about support (20 minutes)

- When you think about support, what do you think it is? Why is it important?
- Can you provide any examples of support you have been offered e.g. help with safety planning to assist you to feel safer, or practical things like clothing/furniture, grant applications etc.

Question set 2 – quality of support (20 minutes)

- What does good support look like? Can you share any experiences of what has gone well? Links with Support Plan if relevant *(During your support session do you work on goals that you would like to achieve and are these reviewed at weekly sessions? Are risks reviewed and is a safety and support plan put in place with you?)*
- What does bad support look like to you? Can you share any experiences of the worst support you have had?

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- Where support has not been good, what would need to change to get it to an acceptable standard, and to an ideal standard?
- Has the support helped you to feel safer

Question set 3 – different types of support (20 minutes)

- Is there any support you think others have had that you would have wanted, but didn't get?
- How has the support you've received fitted in with other services in Hull? Are there ways it could have been better or more joined up?
- How do you think support can help with practical everyday things, and more complicated things?

Question set 4 – when things go wrong (15 minutes)

- If a provider or support worker was not supporting you, what would you do?
- Have you ever felt mistreated or discriminated against while receiving support?

Questions for children and young people receiving support

- Have you enjoyed going to time to listen with you mum?
- What have you enjoyed the most?
- Have you enjoyed attending the art of crafts group?
- Have you enjoyed attending the 1-1 sessions?
- Of the two which did you enjoy the most?
- Have attending the sessions helped you and your mum? How?
- Have the sessions helped you and your brother / sisters?
- Has the supported helped you to feel happier
- Has the support helped you to feel safer?

Questions for those in supported accommodation:

Question set 1 – thinking about support (20 minutes)

- When you think about support, what do you think it is? Why is it important?
- Can you provide any examples of support you have been offered help with accessing legal support, future housing, or to recover from your experience.

Question set 2 – quality of support (20 minutes)

- What does good support look like? Can you share any experiences of what has gone well? Links with Support Plan if relevant *(During your support session do you work on goals that you would like to achieve and are these reviewed at weekly sessions? Are risks reviewed and is a safety and support plan put in place with you?)*
- What does bad support look like to you? Can you share any experiences of the worst support you have had?
- Where support has not been good, what would need to change to get it to an acceptable standard, and to an ideal standard?
- Has the support helped you to feel safer

Question set 3 – different types of support (20 minutes)

- Is there any support you think others have had that you would have wanted, but didn't get?

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- How has the support you've received fitted in with other services in Hull or your hometown? Are there ways it could have been better or more joined up?
- How do you think support can help with practical everyday things, and more complicated things?

Question set 4 – when things go wrong (15 minutes)

- If a provider or support worker was not supporting you, what would you do?
- Have you ever felt mistreated or discriminated against while receiving support?

Question Set 5 – Your accommodation

- Are you happy with the accommodation offer made to you?
- Would you have preferred to have stayed in a different type of accommodation, e.g., communal refuge, your own space with people visiting you, in your own home with additional support?
- Is the quality of the accommodation good? If not why?
- Is there anything you needed that you couldn't access in the accommodation?
- If residing in a dispersed property, did you get a visit every week from your worker?
- If residing in the refuge have workers always been available for you to speak to?

Thank you - vouchers

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Appendix 3 – Flyers used in promoting the research

We want to hear about children's experiences

Hull City Council funds services to help children and women who are victims of domestic abuse. We want to make sure they are working well, and would like to hear from your child.

The Council is working with local charity Forum to listen to the experiences of women and children who are in supported accommodation or who receive outreach support at home as a result of domestic abuse. Services for children are provided by Time to Listen and Women's Aid.

How do I let you know if my child can take part?
Contact Forum by phoning 01482 499030 or emailing admin@forumcio.org.uk. Please ask to speak to Pippa. You could also speak to your key worker and ask them to make contact.

How will my child be protected?
We will make sure interviews are safe spaces and everyone involved will be DBS checked and supervised. Children will not have to say anything they are not comfortable with. Everything we write will be anonymised - names and identities of children will not be included.

Why should my child take part?
When we hear from people who have used services, we understand what works and what needs improving. You will also receive a £15 shopping voucher.

We want to hear about your experiences!

Hull City Council funds services to help women who are victims of domestic abuse and their children. We want to make sure they are working well, and would like to hear from you.

The Council is working with local charity Forum to listen to the experiences of women and children who are in supported accommodation or who receive outreach support as a result of domestic abuse. The providers of these services are Hull Women's Aid, Humbercare, Preston Road Women's Centre (Winner) and Time to Listen.

How do I take part?

Focus group – join a small group of women discussing their experiences

One-to-one interview – a conversation at a time and place to suit you

Survey – if you don't want to speak in person, you can complete the survey by scanning the code at the bottom of the leaflet.

To join a focus group or arrange a conversation, contact Forum by phoning 01482 499030 or emailing admin@forumcio.org.uk. Please ask to speak to Pippa. You could also speak to your key worker and ask them to make contact.

How will I be protected?

We will make sure interviews and groups are safe spaces. You do not have to say anything you are not comfortable with. Everything we write will be anonymised - your name and information will not be connected to it.

Why should I take part?

Women who join a focus group or have a one-to-one conversation will receive a £15 shopping voucher.

Your views will help to improve services for everyone