

Home is where the hurt is

Strength Of A Woman

Women tell shocking stories of the harsh reality of surviving as a woman in the city. Hear the experiences of gender columnist Emmie Harrison-West, Ukranian Refuge Elena Sophya Hryshchenko, the woman of Baytree and many others as they discuss everything from rogue landlords and council gatekeeping to being so fearful the only remaining option was to escape



IMAGE: POPPY WOODS

Dear Readers,

This month's issue was initially going to be an introduction to our project, however, after several conversations and news stories I realised that the theme must be changed to housing. While most of us are in the 'privileged' position of having secure housing (a position that should not be a privilege but a human right) many people will not have a secure home this Christmas, or one at all.

A disproportionate amount of these individuals are vulnerable woman, fleeing abuse at home or on the street. When journalist Emmie Harrison-West came to me with a proposal covering the exodus of woman from London to places where they feel safer to exist and don't have to live in fear, I knew that the main issue of this month's Strength of a Woman was going to be housing.

I was inundated by responses from woman, many of whom wish to remain anonymous, all experiencing the drastic effects of housing because of their gender. While a lot of this felt so inescapably bleak and hopeless I wanted to curl up in a ball, what struck me next was the strength, of the women who fight on every day. Of the woman whose stories I have read and those who I haven't but surround me every day, persisting, surviving and continuing to fight even when it feels like everything is against us.

I spent time at Baytree, where Women are being empowered by one another and made not only safe but confident, Elena Sophya Hryshchenko a refugee who writes so beautifully and finds power in her own voice. We are all here and we will not stop, because we have no choice.

Poppy x

"I often wonder if the gender pay gap is hindering me from being able to afford my first home - I hate having to depend on my husband and his pay cheque"

Anonymous, Brixton

I was recently told a story by a close family friend who had just escaped a domestic abuse situation. The culmination of months of implicit and explicit abuse had resulted in her ex smashing through the front window of the house they used to share and brutally attacking her; the failings of Lambeth police in this case were of their typical variety (uphold the patriarchy through weaponised incompetence of the highest degree by ignoring all signs that don't point in this direction – but this is a topic for another, or rather many other, articles).

What stood out to me in this story was another type of male reaction from a smaller character in the story. If knowledge is power and wilful ignorance far on the other side of the spectrum, then this took it a step further; a term has not yet been coined for the symptoms of a toxic and patriarchal society, it is only just being approached in a way that incites research or diagnosis (again, I could go into depth here on the parallels between scientific research in its gender bias and will – just not now).

At the behest of the police, the woman – still dissociated from reality by the physical trauma and with blood dripping down the side of her face – called her landlord over to come and inspect the damage. In addition to the broken window, she took him and the officers around the flat to show other damages that had occurred over previous months including knuckle indentations on the fridge and fractured door frames where locks on bedroom and bathroom doors had been broken down and mended repeatedly. This was all taken down as evidence.

About a month later, the woman received an email from the landlord detailing every instance of damage to the property with textual and photographic evidence and a list of invoices for its return to rights for the next tenants. This was not beyond the landlord's legal jurisdiction – she told

me she knew in signing the contract she was jointly responsible for any damage incurred and did not dispute the deductions, which totalled her entire deposit.

However, I was taken aback by the landlord's insensitivity in the matter and wilful refusal to step out of the boundaries of his own self-interest. It was not the deductions, but rather the manner in which he expressed the charges and her responsibility for acts of vandalism that he, despite her and the police testimonies, refused to have any sensitivity to.

To send a young woman in recovery from a violent crime a litany of detailed evidence of abuse, which had been at a point of overwhelming her own physical and emotional limits, seemed unfathomable. To not see that these easily fixable cosmetic damages were just the tip of a far deeper reaching iceberg of physical and psychological damages that would be long-lasting to her seemed inhumane.

Fortunately, the young woman was able to continue working, stay with friends and family and, by working overtime, quickly save up to recover the funds needed to put down a new deposit and secure a flat of her own.

This story got me to thinking that if this is what happens legally in situations where respected private landlords are acting completely in their rights and to those who have the fortune to be quite privileged members of Brixton's community, what is it like when vulnerable young woman in our borough without the privileges afforded to my friend are let out to the shark tank of landlords and the gatekeeping of local council housing departments.

A report published by the Public Interest Law Centre (the PILC) this September by Isabella Mulholland entitled "Abused Twice: The 'gatekeeping' of housing support for domestic abuse survivors in every London Borough" examines the role of local councils in the systemic perpetuation of gender-related abuse across the city, with explicit

reference to its prevalence in Lambeth.

The report found that despite the Domestic Abuse Act of 2021 'containing laudable housing provisions' and extending the definition of 'priority need' to include Domestic Abuse survivors, the council's 'value judgements' and 'unlawfully high evidence thresholds' have blocked the Act's ability to enforce any real changes.

One survivor in Lambeth had her homeless application by the Council refused this year because they told her she was not actually 'homeless' as they did not deem her to be experiencing domestic abuse under their limited and self-constructed perceptions of her situation.

Another research participant in this report tells of how earlier this year Lambeth council failed to provide the emergency accommodation she needed, as they did not have a harassment order in place and they did not understand domestic abuse outside of its physical manifestations. Even after her solicitor contacted the Housing Authority to try and push for her to receive emergency accommodation, they retracted their previous decision and provided her with another housing officer who couldn't provide her with 'Emergency Accommodation' until after the weekend. The urgency of this situation could have been dire if she had not made her own provisions and stayed with a friend. Her neighbour later informed her that her ex-partner had visited her former residence while she was away and was still in communication with the landlord to gain access to the property. In her interview for the study she said "Even though it was so obvious I was in danger, Lambeth had still not moved me to a safe property and had actually left me to stay in a dangerous one. If I hadn't been able to stay at my friend's house I would have been subject to more abuse that weekend. Lambeth did nothing to protect me from that."

What perpetuates this further is

the inability of our local police force to charge or enforce any legislation even when all the evidence is clear and available. The same friend who motivated me to write this piece spent five hours in Brixton Police Station, months after the incident, after finally having been asked to give a statement, only to be told later that evening by way of a single-line email that the perpetrator had been released with a caution. This put her in an incredibly vulnerable and unsafe position where she felt gaslit by the people tasked with her protection and unsafe to live in her own borough. If this is how little action they take to explicitly evidenced physical abuse, I dread to think what it must be like for those whose abuse has occurred in much more inconspicuous manners.

The 2021 Act clearly states that domestic abuse is defined as such: occurring between any two individuals aged over 16 who are 'personally connected' and consists of any instances of; physical or emotional abuse, violent or threatening behaviour, controlling or coercive behaviour, economic abuse, psychological, emotional or other abuse. All of which were present in the case and all of which were apparently deemed 'cautionable'.

The legislation also explicitly states that 'an important factor in ensuring that an appropriate response to domestic abuse is understanding what domestic abuse is, the context in which it takes place and what the impacts are on victims; as well as how the impacts may be different on different groups of people.' As one woman states: '[Lambeth Council] said 'there has never been any physical violence within the relationship' ... I felt that they were not taking the abuse I had suffered seriously, and the fact that it could start again at any moment. My ex-partner was stalking me and I lived in constant fear that he would show up and continue to abuse me

We are defining

Any perceptual shift starts with education and awareness and despite a microcosm of contemporary society being incredibly knowledgeable on the terminology of gender bias, this is an echo chamber which bounces back deeper insight internally. Therefore, every feature will include terminology and definitions provided by our contributors so that everyone can recognise, diagnose and articulate behaviours and call them out. Please add your own by joining our mailing list and submitting through our online submission forms (QR on page opposite)

Weaponised Incompetence

Weaponised incompetence is when someone expresses, through words, actions or both, that they are not very good at something or do not know how to do something in order not to have to carry out or properly learn how to carry out tasks they do not like. For example, a male partner saying he can't clean the house because he knows you like it a particular way and he wouldn't be able to do it how you would want, or not knowing how a food shop should be done, how to change a nappy so it doesn't fall off or making an unenthusiastic attempt at a task or doing something so badly that it has to be done again or so that he is not asked the next time.

This is also present in the workplace and almost always results in female colleagues doing the lion's share of tasks, particularly those that are more tedious. A few years ago the only male colleague in a nursery I worked in for a year, advised me - as though sharing a life-hack - that if you don't like a job you can just do it badly or slowly so that you are not asked to do it again and instead tasked with things you prefer.

Mansplaining:

This is when a man takes it upon themselves to explain something in a patronising or condescending manner which declares them as an authority on the topic. Yes, women can be patronising and condescending too. However, years of societal imbalance and inherited subservience means that they can never mansplain, as this is based upon a conviction that comes with the privilege and unquestioned authority of the patriarchy.

Studies have shown how women in the workplace experience much higher degrees of imposter syndrome and feel their opinions and decisions need to be backed up and informed by research or other factors. They also undervalue their own abilities and performance. This trend is seen in reverse in men, who have been conditioned to the opposite, to see themselves as very capable, overestimate their abilities and performance and under explain or research their decisions as they often take being in a position of authority as a given - the Pygmalion effect in reverse.

By Poppy Woods

In 2015, the Office for National Statistics found that more than three times the amount of people who own homes in Lambeth rent, and of this, almost 100,000 of these people rent from private landlords. More recent statistics published by 'Renter's Rights London' found that the average home in Lambeth costs 14.95 times the average annual salary. They also found that there are currently 18,792 households on the waiting list for a council house, one of the highest numbers of any London Borough. With the average price for a one bedroom flat in the Borough found to be over £1,300, a few hundred pounds over the average for inner South East and West London, and an energy crisis that has seen bills skyrocket, as well as housing and economic crises - the statistics have undoubtedly worsened. Whereas it used to be a struggle to climb onto the property ladder, what we are now seeing is an even bigger struggle just to get a roof over the heads of our population.

So what are 'rogue landlords?' Chief Whip for the Conservative party in the House of Lords, and previously Parliamentary Under-Secretary of state for Department for Communities and Local Government and minister for Women and Equalities of the United Kingdom, Baroness Williams of Trafford, defines it as 'to describe a landlord who knowingly flouts their obligations by renting out unsafe and substandard accommodation to tenants, many of whom may be vulnerable.'

Despite grand statements of the funding being dedicated and changes to policy being made - including last year's HMO policy, the Lambeth Liberal Democrats state that: '47,000 households in Lambeth live in private rental accommodation, yet the condition of too many of these properties are below standard. One reason for this is that our local council has comprehensively failed to protect its residents from rogue landlords.' While Sadiq Khan, calling for greater fines for rogue landlords, stated that: 'Every single Londoner deserves a secure, safe and comfortable home. Nearly a fifth of London's private rented accommodation doesn't meet basic standards... Poor housing conditions and exploitive rents have an awful impact on both the physical and mental health of tenants and these actions need to have consequences.'

But where are the changes being made?

Over the last few years only two cases of rogue landlords in Lambeth being convicted can be easily found. The first was last winter, when residents of Dorchester court were finally listened to after years of negligence and dilapidation of their living conditions, and their landlord 'Manaque Ltd' were served with an improvement notice after

decades of campaigning by residents. The second was a conviction of a landlord whose illegal bedsit had been inspected between 2019 and 2020 and was then finally brought to justice, fined and put into the rogue landlords register.

Of this most recent success, Councillor Maria Kay, Cabinet Member

for Better Homes and Reducing Homelessness, said 'Unscrupulous landlords who put profit ahead of their tenants' safety and wellbeing will not be tolerated in our borough.'

But with such a huge discrepancy between those being convicted and brought to justice and the reality of a housing crisis and rising figures of demand and inadequate private accommodation in our Borough, what is the impact of this trend on those most vulnerable? The lack of support, current economic and political climate and increasing rental shortages in Lambeth and all across London leaves many of the most vulnerable of our community, including those escaping domestic violence or war torn home countries in incredibly unsafe situations - desperate to escape homelessness and in the hands of private landlords who at best require huge rental fees and deposits and at worst provide 'safety' that leaves survivors feeling incredibly vulnerable and unsafe. A recent report by Woman's hour found that many survivors of Domestic Abuse had been rehoused by rogue Landlords in 'safe hostels' which they were expected to share with men and were often 'drug houses'. Woman's Hour interviewed one Refuge CEO who said she is turning down, on average, one rogue landlord a week; many of whom are trying to court survivors of domestic abuse as tenants and instead of using increased housing benefits to support these women are pocketing the additional money. Their reporter, Carolyn Atkinson, said on the program that:

'as today's report lays bare, an increasing number of unscrupulous landlords are using women sort of as pawns to game the system. They're raking in millions of pounds, but they're providing little or no support because the rules are so weak.'

A report by the Human Rights Watch published earlier this year entitled: 'I want us to live like Humans Again' interviewed one woman who was placed by Lambeth Council in temporary accommodation when she fell pregnant for 6 months in a studio flat where she shared a single double bed with her four sons aged 4, 7 and 9, and they ate their meals on the floor. She stated 'The council just put me there and left me. When Covid started I saw hell. All we could do was stay at home all day with absolutely no space... [the council] gave me a key and that was the last day that I ever heard from them.'

Despite the government's recent dedication (November 2022) of £20 million to toughen inspections of failing landlords and improve support for residents in supported housing, almost no actualisation of this fund has been made public. Lambeth MP Helen Hayes has been campaigning for 'Georgia's law', named after a mother placed in temporary housing after threats by gang members towards her and her teenage son who was made homeless when her housing association didn't have any suitable accommodation. This Law, which Hayes took to the House of Commons over the summer, hopes to see social housing tenants' rights protected if they have to move for their own protection; this would ensure that members of our community receiving housing

benefits through private landlords at least are protected from the shark tank of money-grabbing rogue private landlords. The legislation, however, is far from being passed.

Hayes says, 'Tackling serious violence requires multiple solutions. Ensuring that social landlords have a duty to act to limit harm caused by a risk of violence is an important reform in keeping our communities safe, and I hope the government will support Georgia's law.'

So what are the council doing to prevent these sorts of situations from happening? Despite Lambeth council telling the private renters group of plans to launch a specialist advice service to support private renters, this still has not happened. They employ just one housing advisor, who is able to investigate unlawful eviction and complaints of harassment, however many have reported that the general 'Housing Advice Service' they recommend calling for support does not make accessing advice or support easy and the Shelter Helpline is a much more reliable source of support to private tenants. They also do not have a Private Rented Sector forum where private renters can discuss ways to improve the situation, despite holding a quarterly consultation for private landlords. The Renters' Rights group for London says that despite the highly publicised rogue landlord prosecution in Lambeth, they expect the total figure for prosecutions of rogue landlords in the area over the last 5 years to be very small, as it is an extremely costly and time-consuming process which many councils avoid.

Councillor Mqahamed Hashi, Lambeth Cabinet member for Safer Communities, in celebration of the Borough being awarded a White Ribbon Accreditation this month, which recognises organisations who are taking a strategic approach towards ending Male violence against women through awareness, education and advocacy said 'It is completely unacceptable for women to feel unsafe in their own homes or on the streets of our borough, and we have worked hard over many years to tackle the scourge of violence against women and girls.' Hot off the heels of several VAWG initiatives in the borough over the last few years, our reluctance to celebrate the council's sentiment as the situation for women gets increasingly unsafe and figures continue to rise should not come as any surprise.

Resources are available: Shelter provides support to those at risk of homelessness or questioning their safety or the standard of their housing, and the government have created a 'rogue landlord checker' which can be accessed here: [www.london.gov.uk/rogue-landlord-checker]

"Six years ago I was renting a flat in a block of flats. I was a 20 year old woman, still felt like a girl really. I got involved with a neighbour. I became stuck in an abusive relationship, that resulted in me having to move out to get away. I feel this is one of many stories of how young women get into vulnerable situations because they are not strong enough to say no. Don't have the voice to believe in their convictions. I hope that if women share their experiences. So that more healing can happen and help women realise their true potential."

Anonymous, Brixton



Uncatchable, unstable, crazy, sometimes cruel and unfair

Elena Sophya Hryshchenko

If you think I'm talking about my personal qualities, I'm not. That is my first impression of renting in London. I have never rented a place here, moreover, I have never lived in London before. I came here at the end of June on a 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme because of the war in my Homeland and I lived at my sponsor's place for some time. But that time has come to an end.

For a person who has never rented a flat or a room in London, the whole procedure is even more complex and stressful. First, you start checking out the sites, then after you see the prices for flats and almost have a heart attack, you run to 'Spareroom'.

Sadly, this last one wasn't really helpful to me - 99% of my messages were read and left without response. What's funny is that when I posted an advert to say that I'm looking for a flat, I got a huge number of proposals to move in with male friends. And of course, those room ads with titles like 'Looking for a single, lonely woman, possibly with a child' from live-in landlords. Such a cliché.

Next, I tried to find a flat to rent with my friend. which moves us on to my favourite - agencies, who are constantly contradicting themselves. They'll say: 'We will accept you only if you're working full time' and then book viewings right in the middle of the working day.

But all of that is fine - what tipped me over the edge was that one of the agents said: 'If you are renting a flat with your friend, you cannot replace both tenants in the contract if you want to leave. Only one of you can leave the property and replace herself with another tenant, the other must stay.' Which made me wonder ... Am I signing a sentence or what?

I did find a room. And that's with the help of my friends, not an agency or site. Other friends have been searching for a flat for months, making offers and still - nothing. The saddest part is that everybody knows that what's going on with the rent market is impossible, but nobody does anything to change it. How come?

I've left London for good as the city isn't safe enough for women

Emmie Harrison-West

Two months ago, I left London. For good.

But it wasn't the pollution, astronomical rent, or £7 pints that triggered my move out of the Big Smoke. It wasn't even the fact that I'd never be able to afford to buy my first home, or even the self-importance of its residents – but the fact that I'm a woman.

London is no place for women – and scores of us are leaving as we've had enough.

In my five years of living in the capital, I lost count of how many times I was sexually assaulted. Harrassed, and told that I was going to be raped, stabbed, shot, or murdered. Both during the day and night; with heels and no tights on, or clad in jeans and a jumper with my hair scraped up (like it matters), I've been harrassed. On the tube, the bus, and my own street. Touched, catcalled, followed, belittled, patronised – been called a b*tch, sl*t, sl*g, and c*nt by men whose eyes roved over my body at all times of day.

I've never experienced raw, all-encompassing fear like it.

I feel like the city existed to make me feel lesser, as if I was a second class citizen simply for being born a woman. For something beyond my control.

The people who are supposed to lead and protect its residents – its police officers, politicians, and mayors – clearly don't prioritise women's safety, and it reeks. Reeks of sexism and misogyny, privilege and inequality. It was exhausting simply existing as my sex in this so-called United Kingdom's capital city.

In London, recorded domestic abuse offences have increased by 26 per cent in five years. In 2021, the number of London's reported sexual assaults reached a 10-year high, with one rape reported every hour. Just one in 20 resulted in a charge – with figures only rising.

And last March, I'm sure I don't need to remind you that one woman was kidnapped and murdered by a serving officer for the Metropolitan Police, who's nickname was 'The Rapist'. Sarah Everard was just 33, four years older than me. She was walking home from her friend's home in Brixton, which was less than an hour from my flat. She walked via a well-lit route, and had called her boyfriend en route. She did everything 'right', but the city and the people assigned to supposedly protect her, failed her.

While Sarah's death sparked a national conversation on the safety of women in London, with vigils lighting up across the country, we had to lose a young woman for people to listen to our fatigued cries.

Since her death, for the remainder of 2021, it was estimated that a woman was allegedly killed as a result of male violence every two weeks in London. This year, it's no different. So far in 2022, a suspected 93 women in the UK have been killed at the hands of men – 19 of them lived in the capital.

It's hard not to grieve for women that looked, dressed and lived like you. Ones that you may have once



walked past on the street, or went to the same shops, bars and restaurants as before their lives were brutally ended too. It's too close for comfort, and it's heartbreaking.

Last June, when Sadiq Khan – the Mayor of London – announced his Violence Against Women & Girls strategy, a third of the city's homicide victims were women at the time. All suspects were men. Numbers have only continued to rise, and I lie awake in dread, waiting for this year's figures and shocking headlines to plague my waking moments.

Khan's strategy is reportedly worth £17.7m – but do you see any scrap of evidence of it in London life? All I saw were patronising TfL posters telling people that 'staring is wrong'. A poster isn't going to help me when a man sits next to me on an empty tube carriage – neither is the claim that the tube's CCTV footage is reportedly kept for just 72 hours. It's not enough, especially given that a study by London TravelWatch revealed that almost half of women (48 per cent) living in the city have refused to travel at certain times over concerns for their safety.

It's because of London that I'm afraid of being a woman. Afraid to walk alone, at any time of the day. Afraid to hop in a taxi myself, or travel after hours on any mode of transport. I don't run or cycle alone, at any time of day – things that I once loved.

I walk down the middle of my street, in the road and away from cars, for fear of being kidnapped. I lock myself into my own home, and hold keys between my fingers when walking to the shop – even during the day. I jump at every noise, and daren't walk along canal paths, or near bushes.

London did nothing to protect me, and continues to fail its women – and the relief I've felt at leaving it behind is incomprehensible.

While the problem is clearly a lack of education in men – fueled by a systematically sexist society that prescribes worth based on sex, and refuses to teach its children the importance of gender and consent – the city is a hotbed for crimes against women. It perpetuates inequality by refusing to hold men to account, or investing in women's safety and wellbeing.

This series of columns for Strength of a Woman will show just that: the strength of women. The strength and muscle memory we've had to adopt (without help) out of the sheer fear that comes with simply existing as a woman.

We're sick of being strong, we just want to live – without having to think about having to survive every single day.

Samuel Johnson famously once wrote: 'When a man is tired



A quilt made by the Women and staff of Baytree

A Word from Baytree

The Baytree Centre is a social inclusion charity for women and girls based in the heart of Brixton, South London. An integral part of the community since 1991, we provide holistic support through personal development activities and training.

The Baytree Centre works with women living in poverty and social isolation to build their skills, amplify their voices and enable them to overcome social and economic barriers. Through our social mobility programme, we support vulnerably housed women through one-to-one coaching with embedded information, advice and guidance. This approach enables the women to address their immediate needs, as well as ensuring that they build the broader skills necessary to address other challenges in the future.

A new aspect of our social mobility programme is supporting 100 vulnerably housed women per year over 2 years. The support includes: Housing advice and advocacy; social mobility 1-2-1 mentoring covering 5 areas: Family stability (including housing) finance, education, career and well being. The monthly mentoring meetings will be complemented with a programme of workshops around those 5 areas. We work exclusively with women living in poverty. Migrant and refugee women many of whom are also suffering from trauma due to

domestic and sexual abuse as well as tragic journeys on their way to the UK. Many of the women we work with are illiterate in their own language, or simply do not speak English we also offer them ESOL and integration activities which support their confidence and ability to break the cycle of poverty.

The Baytree Centre has been supporting women living in poverty in Brixton for the past 27 years. Through personal experience of supporting women in a holistic way, contact monitoring and evaluation, calendared focus groups and by annual surveys and questionnaires we have a very good idea of the needs of the women who come to us. A great majority of them are vulnerably housed where they have a huge risk of becoming homeless. Poverty is complex and so we work differently to address the needs of these women. Language barriers can inhibit social support networks, work prospects and result in isolation, impacting negatively on well-being and finance. This can affect children, slowing their development and education. Many of these women have suffered from domestic abuse and violence and are experiencing toxic stress. Most of them have experienced trauma, enormous loss of confidence. The needs of the women we were working with were so complex that led us to do research and see who else was trying to offer

a holistic and supportive person centre approach, and we found Mobility Mentoring based on science (cf. empathways.org).

Success story

CR lives with her husband and her three young daughters. She and her husband work in the cleaning sector.

Testimonial

"Four years ago, we had to move out of our home because of a leak. The landlord never let us move back in. Other landlords wouldn't accept us, because we didn't have a deposit or a guarantor.

The Council found a private house for us to rent. It was very expensive (nearly £2000 per month) and far from the children's school but we had no alternative. When we moved in, there was damp and black mould everywhere and the outside drains were blocked so it stank. My three daughters started having nosebleeds, problems breathing at night and fainting. The GP said it was because of the damp and bad ventilation.

My coach at BAYTREE helped me to understand my rights and contact Environmental Health. We worked hard on this for 8 months and now the windows have been replaced and the drains have been cleared. Now we are doing a housing assessment with the Council to find a longer-term solution. For now, it is not as bad as it was. BAYTREE helped me to be more confident in standing up for my rights."

Home is where the hurt is

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and my children. I felt so unsafe and alone.'

Even when those whose abuse finally passes the council's seemingly random and uninformed measures, the accommodation offered is completely inappropriate. Another Woman, tells of how Lambeth council offered her temporary accommodation in Kent, which would take her away from her family and support networks to be all alone in an unfamiliar place. After she managed to convey this with the help of a family member to her advocate, she was offered temporary accommodation two boroughs away, which, in her own words '...would have taken my son who is GCSE age 2 hours to get to school. I couldn't accept that. So instead we are now staying in a refuge, where me and my four children, including two teenage sons, share one room.'

Homeless Charity 'Star Support' explain in the same report how one self-referred homeless woman had spent several nights in a local park after being turned away by Lambeth council as she had been suffering domestic abuse from her family who had made plans for her to be trafficked to East Africa for 'conversion therapy'. Despite the clear danger of her situation, she had been told by her housing officer to return home as the 'actions taken by her parent to send her to East Africa for 'conversion therapy' was clearly a sign of a supportive home.' They directly told her that she should return to her parents and that her parents were just trying to support her. They advocated for a change in housing officer, but – although recognising that the advice to return was dangerous – the council maintained that the housing officer's advice was appropriate as she believed that Harriet's parents

Thank you so much to everyone who has contributed to our new feature, whether by submitting or just joining our momentum.

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