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To: Policy & Resources Committee, 6th May 2026

Subject: Kent & Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy 2024-2029
 Year Two Update 2025-2026

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway: ICS DivMT, 14th April 2026
 ASCH DMT, 14th April 2026

Future Pathway: None

Summary: This paper gives a summary of progress against the Kent and Medway Partnership Domestic Abuse Strategy 2024-2029 in its second year of delivery, focussing on Kent County Council and Partnership projects. This covers a broad range of areas across the domestic abuse agenda including:

Early Intervention & Prevention:

- Domestic Abuse Awareness Campaigns
- Kent & Medway Domestic Abuse Services Website
- KCC as a White Ribbon Organisation
- Professional Training
- Domestic Abuse Champions

Immediate Needs:

- MARAC Hub change programme
- Reaching out to schools
- Operation Encompass
- Responding to CAPVA
- Temporary Accommodation Research Project

Recovery:

- Differentiating Parental Conflict from Abuse
- The impact of abuse on mental health
- Suicide & Domestic Abuse
- Recognising the experts

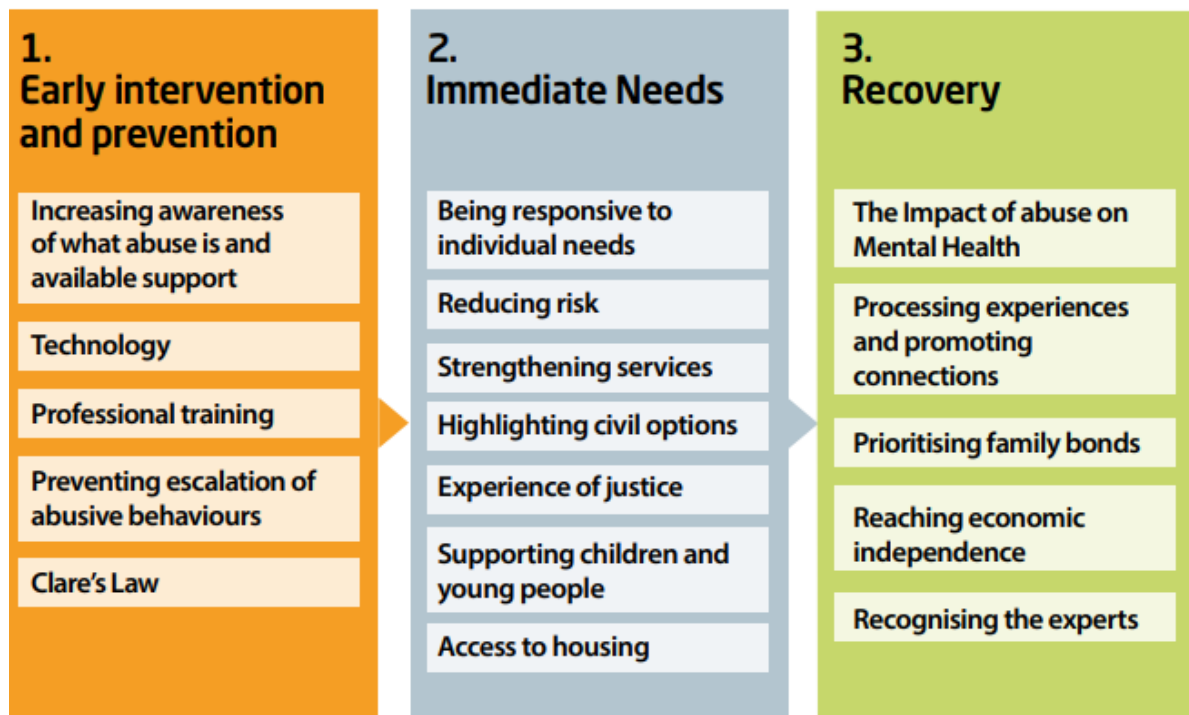
Policy & Resources Cabinet Committee are asked to:

1. **Note** progress made against the Kent & Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy and make recommendations on future delivery plan direction.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy is a partnership document overseen by the Kent and Medway Domestic and Sexual Abuse Executive Group.
- 1.2 The strategy embodies the approach of its 20 partners to *'reduce the prevalence of domestic abuse, and ensure that where domestic abuse takes place, all those affected get the right support, quickly'*. It was launched in 2024, following endorsement at Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee where an annual report was requested.
- 1.3 The strategy includes both statutory requirements for tier one local authorities to support people accessing safe accommodation services, and commitments across the partnership to support people impacted by domestic abuse in Kent and Medway. The strategy continues to develop a coordinated community response to improving the experiences of those impacted by abuse across each stage of their experience, making commitments against early intervention and prevention, immediate need, and recovery.

Figure 1 - Strategy Pillars & Commitments



- 1.4 A review of the Strategy will take place in 2027/8 to assess whether it continues to meet the needs of the partnership and should remain in place for its full 5-year span, or whether an update or new strategy is necessary.
- 1.5 The Summary Strategy and full Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy 2024 – 2029 are attached as **Appendix A** and **Appendix B**.

2. Delivering against our Strategy

- 2.1 To support the strategy the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Executive Group (Executive Group) oversee a delivery plan managed by the Domestic Abuse Projects & Partnerships Team and discharged via the governance structure.
- 2.2 The delivery plan is drafted annually in partnership with Medway Council and in coordination with each of the partners of the Executive Group. This process focusses on creating a user friendly and responsive plan, allocating actions to subgroups within the governance structure. An update against each pillar or strategy is provided to the Executive Group on a rotating quarterly basis.

Kent & Medway Domestic Abuse Partnership

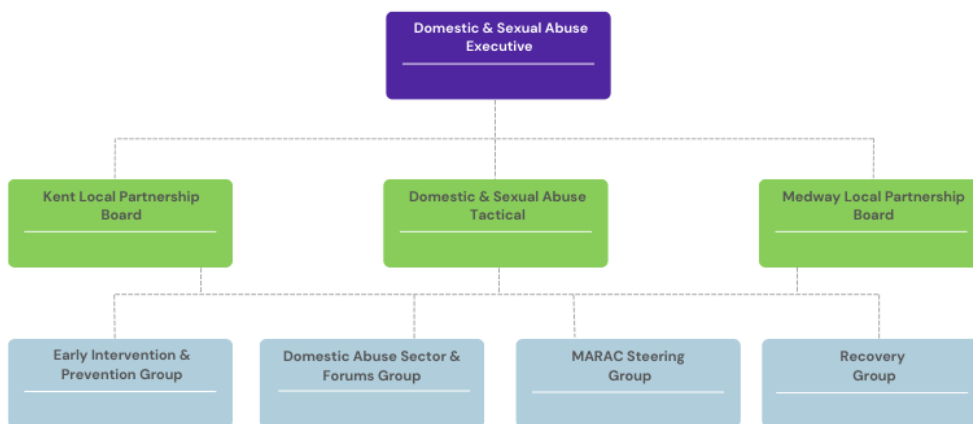


Figure 2 - Domestic Abuse Partnership Governance Structure

3. Early Intervention & Prevention

- 3.1 The first section is about our collective ambition to challenge negative societal attitudes and stigma linked to discussing abuse, increasing awareness, reducing the escalation of abusive behaviours, and encouraging conversation and education. There are 25 'Early Intervention and Prevention' commitments in the Strategy, the following are key projects delivered in 2025/6 within this area of work.

3.2 Increasing Awareness

3.3 The Know, See, Speak Out Campaign

3.3.1 The [Know, See, Speak Out](#) multiagency campaign aims to raise awareness of domestic abuse across Kent and Medway, engaging hundreds of individuals, businesses and organisations, helping them to:

- **Know** more about domestic abuse by undertaking training
- **See** what action they can take such as sharing our [campaign resources](#)
- **Speak Out** by signposting people to services

3.3.2 Social media assets were shared by numerous organisations, ensuring that as a partnership we are facilitating clear consistent messaging expanding understanding of domestic abuse and the routes to support.

3.3.3 This year the Domestic Abuse Projects & Partnerships team delivered a high impact regional media moment on the risks of 'love bombing', driven by powerful survivor testimony and expert partnership voices. Coverage on BBC Radio Kent and BBC Southeast expanded our reach, strengthening public understanding of coercive control and encouraging earlier recognition and help-seeking.

3.4 The 16 Days of Activism

3.4.1 The 16 Days of Activism takes place from 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and White Ribbon Day, and runs to 10 December, International Human Rights Day.

3.4.2 This year we delivered a multichannel [awareness campaign](#) across Kent & Medway, including 5,500+ posters distributed to schools, health settings, public spaces, transport hubs and partner organisations. Education settings were a major focus: 155 secondary schools and PRUs received 1,570 posters, ensuring young people, staff and safeguarding leads had visible access to information about domestic abuse support. Strong strategic partnerships with Southeastern, Southern Water, NHS Kent & Medway, Kent FA and others further increased visibility through poster placement, vinyl stickers, targeted sector based activity.

3.4.3 The campaign was amplified through extensive social media delivery, supported by a structured content calendar, survivor led stories and readymade campaign assets. This resulted in 3.3 million organic reach, 16,563 interactions, and 826 mentions across social platforms. Press engagement included Heart FM coverage, White Ribbon Day features and a community safety podcast. Partner engagement remained high, with campaign updates shared through newsletter networks across local authority, health, youth, education and community sectors

3.4.4 To further increase knowledge and confidence around domestic abuse, we delivered the '6 Steps to Ending Abuse' professional webinar series. Sessions were delivered by agencies across the partnership and covered key topics including safe enquiry, risk assessment, perpetrator work, young people's experiences, and service pathways. Across the series, there were 1,100

registrations and 600 attendees. Participant feedback highlighted high quality presentations, impactful survivor testimony, practical demonstrations, and effective use of real-life case studies - reinforcing the value of the sessions in strengthening professional understanding and practice.

3.5 Kent & Medway Domestic Abuse Services Website

3.5.1 During the year, we developed a new Kent & Medway Domestic Abuse Services website to meet a clear need: a well-functioning, easy-to-use and accessible platform that supports those affected by domestic abuse and those seeking to support them. The site was coproduced with survivor voice ambassadors, children and young people, and partners, whose feedback shaped its tone, navigation, content layout and safety features such as the quick exit button.

3.5.2 The website launched in the summer 2025, accompanied by targeted communications to partners, including an autumn mailout directing all secondary schools to new children and young people's webpages and resources, and a website focused newsletter. The result is a well received, user tested central hub for domestic abuse information, support, training and resources - praised for its clear layout, supportive tone, ease of use, survivor centred language, strong accessibility features and ease of navigation by survivors and professional partners, as well as its clarity, accessibility and shareability by children and young people. To date, around 5,000 users have accessed the website, with the most viewed pages being the home page, the get support near you section, and the campaigns page.

3.6 Domestic Abuse Partnership Newsletter

3.6.1 A regular '[Domestic Abuse Support in Kent and Medway Newsletter](#)' continues to provide consistent messaging, updates and resources to support our shared work to prevent domestic abuse and improve outcomes for survivors. This year, distribution increased to 1,700 recipients, and several special 'spotlight' editions were published, focusing on topics such as Carers and Domestic Abuse, the MARAC Hub Change Programme, the launch of the new domestic abuse website, and the importance of structured risk assessments.

3.7 White Ribbon Accreditation

3.7.1 KCC are proud to be a [White Ribbon accredited organisation](#). White Ribbon encourages people, especially men and boys, to take action and change behaviour individually or collectively to end male violence against women and girls. Their mission is for all men to fulfil the White Ribbon Promise to never commit, excuse or remain silent about male violence against women.

3.7.2 The White Ribbon Working Group led by the Domestic Abuse Projects & Partnerships team have been encouraging individuals and organisations to make consistent choices and actions to support this year's white ribbon theme of "We Speak Up" - encouraging men to challenge sexism, misogyny and harmful behaviours in everyday situations. This aims to drive a cultural shift in our

attitude towards preventing abuse. Members of the working group have attended meetings across the organisation some of which include, a GET DLT Staff Engagement Session, Refer Kent Networking Forum & ASCH Community Team. This has had a positive response, with more people signing up to become White Ribbon Ambassadors and Champions.

3.7.3 On the 25th of November, White Ribbon Day, 95 people joined “This White Ribbon Day We Speak Up - Silence isn’t safe”, a webinar encouraging men and boys to think about how they can help end violence towards women. A stall was also erected in Sessions House to engage staff in conversations about the White Ribbon mission.

3.8 Professional Training

3.9 Adult Social Care Domestic Abuse Training

3.9.1 In 2026, work was undertaken to redesign domestic abuse training for Adult Social Care staff to ensure the content was up to date and focussed on the intersection between domestic abuse and individuals with care and support needs. The new Adults Domestic Abuse training course was created in partnership with the Learning & Development Team and Adults Social Care. This collaborative approach produced a robust programme that strengthens practitioner knowledge and confidence when supporting adults experiencing domestic abuse. The new training offer is a valuable addition to the wider domestic abuse training pathway and reflects our shared commitment to improving outcomes and promoting consistent, informed practice across the workforce.

3.10 DASH Training for Children’s Social Care

3.10.1 Following an internal audit carried out to assess our multiagency response to children as victims in their own right a need was identified for greater awareness of Domestic Abuse Stalking and Harassment (DASH) risk assessment practice across children’s social care. To address this the DASH will be included as part of a new Domestic Abuse Assessment Tool and a comprehensive full day DASH training has been procured for 1,200 people to include social workers, early help, the Front Door, Child Protection Conference Chairs, Family Hubs and Youth Justice teams. By offering specialist training across the workforce, but delivered primarily within district teams, we are enabling shared learning and consistent understanding. This will ensure a more systematic approach to risk, prompting safer action planning and decision making with families, ultimately offering greater protection for children experiencing domestic abuse within their households.

3.11 Kent Community Domestic Abuse Champions

3.11.1 To support the learning available to staff across the partnership and to external organisations the Domestic Abuse Projects and Partnerships Team

have produced a free Kent Community Domestic Abuse Champions programme. This programme provides 2.5 hours of high quality domestic abuse training to anyone who lives or works in Kent. This enables us to build a community of people who know how to ask about abuse, and know how to help.

3.11.2 The Kent Domestic Abuse Champions Scheme has proved popular, with monthly sessions often fully booked. To date there are just over 300 Champions in Kent, 98% of whom say they were very satisfied or satisfied with the training. We have also been able to provide bespoke sessions for organisations, and been lucky to engage NHS Primary Care staff, Kent Football Association, and Voluntary Community Sector Organisations in developing networks of Champions within their organisations.

3.11.3 The Champions are supported by regular Communities of Practice, bringing together training updates, opportunities to network with fellow Champions, and the chance to hear from domestic abuse Survivor Ambassadors who generously share their experiences to enhance understanding of abuse and generate deeper, more informed practice across the workforce.

3.11.4 There are DA Champions who, since completing the training are now part of the Survivor Voice Ambassadors Programme.

3.11.5 The programme has been successful in attracting grant funding from the Police and Crime Commissioner's Crime Reduction Grant – this has provided a Champions Pack for each trainee so that they can identify themselves to their networks as a safe person to talk to.

3.12 End Domestic Abuse Webinar Series

3.12.1 The "[End Domestic Abuse](#)" [learning webinar series](#) provides a comprehensive, year-round programme of free professional development for practitioners. To date, the series has delivered sessions on key topics including victim blaming and permissive language, recognising stalking and its link with domestic abuse, domestic abuse in later life, supporting survivors with complex and co-occurring needs, understanding and preventing domestic and sexual abuse of men, suicide prevention and economic abuse. Together, these webinars have attracted 1,350 registrations and nearly 700 attendees, demonstrating strong and consistent engagement across the workforce.

3. 13 Preventing Escalation of Abusive Behaviours

3.13.1 To equip professionals across multiple agencies in Kent and Medway with the skills and confidence to recognise and respond more effectively to people using abusive behaviour webinars have been provided on a number of topics – these included:

- Working with Perpetrators – Starting Change: delivered by CDAP
- Working with Perpetrators – What Works: delivered by Interventions Alliance

- Holding Perpetrators to Account: delivered by Kent & Medway's Domestic Abuse Partnership Teams
- Victim or Perpetrator – What to do if you're not sure?: delivered by the Men's IDVA Service and Kent Domestic Abuse Partnership Team

3.13.2 The webinars engaged people in learning that turns the focus onto a perpetrators responsibility for the abuse and the ways professionals can hold them to account, marking a crucial shift away from victim centric working.

3.13.3 A [new page](#) has also been added to the Kent & Medway Domestic Abuse Services website to engage those using abusive behaviour. The content looks at where someone concerned about their behaviour can access help, gives advice and resources to stop the abuse, and learn how to make positive changes.

4. Immediate Need

4.1 By immediate needs we mean the services, interventions and support that people need whilst domestic abuse is occurring and in the immediate aftermath.

4.2 These services and responses may help with managing risk and increasing safety, but people may also need support with practical issues such as access to housing accessing civil orders. Within this section we also look at housing and safe accommodation services with commitments to support improved responses.

4.3 There are 64 'Immediate Needs' commitments in the Strategy, the following are key projects within this area of work undertaken in 2025/6.

4.4 Being Responsive to Individual Needs

4.4.1 Projects under being responsive to individual needs look to address barriers to access so that anyone experiencing abuse feels they are able to access support that aligns with their experiences. Projects have included working to raise awareness of options to support those with No Recourse to Public Funds by inviting Project 17 to the Local Partnership Board to explore the issue and increase confidence in creating safe avenues to support.

4.4.2 We have also sought to strengthen links with community groups, faith groups and leaders to expand on opportunities for partnership. To do this a letter was sent to faith based organisations and groups across Kent and Medway to raise awareness of how faith can be used as a tactic of abuse, how faith groups can ensure they are safe places for anyone experiencing abuse and to invite them to join the 16 Days of Action Campaign.

4.4.3 Pets also form a vital lifeline for many people experiencing abuse, to raise awareness of that refuges in Kent can accept pets social media posts were created. Specialist training has also been offered. Kent Public Health and the Centre for Animal Inclusive Practice delivered two training days on recognising

and responding to the abuse of animals as a tactic of coercive control and pets as a protective factor.

4.5 Reducing Risk

4.6 Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference Hub

4.6.1 A Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) is a safeguarding forum to discuss how to help people experiencing domestic abuse who are at high risk of murder or serious harm. The process enables agency-specific research to be shared, and actions allocated to increase the safety of adult and child victims of abuse to create a joint safety plan. A new MARAC Hub Process, with increased staffing and an online Case Management System which allows quick information sharing and action planning, went live in April 2025 following extensive multiagency engagement.

4.6.2 An initial evaluation of the implementation and early adoption of the new MARAC Hub model highlighted good practice, the success of the online referral form and ability to share research before meetings to increase responsiveness. The report did however highlight issues in consistent understanding of processes and aims, with issues stemming from limited licence availability and poor uptake of action planning and professionals meetings before the MARAC meeting. This has been addressed through a comprehensive action plan, the success of which will be monitored by the MARAC Steering Group and a secondary review to be undertaken in October 2026.

4.6.3 The Domestic Abuse Research Programme, within KCC's Kent Analytics Team won the Local Area Research and Intelligence Association (LARIA) Research Impact Award in March 2026 for 'Best Use of Local Area Research', recognising their three-month evaluation of the new MARAC Hub Model.

4.7 Learning from Domestic Homicide Reviews

4.7.1 The Strategy identifies working with the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and Safeguarding Boards to ensure that learnings from Domestic Homicide Reviews, Safeguarding Adult Reviews and Children's Safeguarding Practice reviews are supported. Alongside working with these boards to offer domestic abuse expertise to the review process and take forward actions to embed learning from reviews the CSP held five Domestic Homicide Review learning events in 2025-6 with over 750 attendees.

4.7.2 Events focused on counter-allegations, reflecting challenges seen in several DHRs where victim-perpetrator identities were unclear or misidentified; caring dynamics and dementia, including specialist input from Aberystwyth University, the impact on mothers separated from their children, a factor identified in multiple DA-linked suicides, and featured guest speakers Liz Hanlon and Dr Rachael Grey, examined coercive control alongside co-occurring conditions, with contributions from LookAhead and Kent Police as well as identifying the difference between carer breakdown and domestic abuse. The webinars bring

together experts, give families a space to speak about their loved ones, and highlight how the partnership can learn from cases where a life has been lost.

4.8 Strengthening Services

- 4.8.1 Providing support and advice to victims of domestic abuse is a priority for KCC and other organisations across the county. Through the Kent and Medway multi-agency governance groups, we are collaborating with partners to recommission the Kent Integrated Domestic Abuse Service. Market engagement with stakeholders, Survivor Voice Ambassadors and domestic abuse services has taken place to ensure the Service Specification reflects the needs of families experiencing domestic abuse.
- 4.8.2 The new Kent Integrated Family Domestic Abuse Service has been successful in attracting broad partnership engagement and funding to ensure that an equitable, high quality service with a single point of access will be available across Kent. Work will be ongoing in 2026/7 to commission the new service.
- 4.8.3 There were also a number of community and safe accommodation services commissioned to work alongside the Kent Integrated Domestic Abuse Service (KIDAS) umbrella in 2025/6 that are detailed below.

4.9 Cyber Sanctuary – responding to technology facilitated abuse

- 4.9.1 In 2025/26 we strengthened domestic abuse services by developing and launching the Cyber Sanctuary, which began accepting referrals in February 2026. This innovative offer responds to a gap in provision and enhances Kent's safe accommodation support by addressing cyberstalking, online harassment, and technology-facilitated coercive control; forms of abuse that are becoming increasingly common.
- 4.9.2 The service builds on the SAFER Scheme, where improved security and support allows victims to stay safely in their own homes and 97% of referrals disclosed both domestic abuse and stalking. Insights from Survivor Voice Ambassadors and Domestic Homicide Reviews highlighted the serious risks linked to online surveillance and reinforced the need for specialist cyber-focused support.
- 4.9.3 The Cyber Sanctuary provides face to face cyber risk assessments, practical help with devices, accounts, privacy settings, and home technology, as well as guidance on evidence collection and crime reporting. Professional training will also improve awareness and early identification of technology facilitated abuse.

4.10 Domestic Abuse Navigator's for Integrated Children's Services

- 4.10.1 The Domestic Abuse Navigator programme delivers bookable consultation sessions, providing practitioners with accessible, timely support on individual cases. These consultations assist staff in identifying and accessing the most appropriate specialist services available across Kent, ensuring that victims receive the right intervention at the right time.

4.10.2 In addition to case-specific advice, the Domestic Abuse Navigator offers expert guidance on key areas of practice, including:

- **Legal frameworks**, helping practitioners understand available protective measures and statutory responsibilities.
- **Risk management**, supporting staff to assess, interpret, and respond to both immediate and cumulative risks within a case.
- **Navigating support pathways**, ensuring practitioners are confident in referring into local, specialist, and multi-agency services.

4.10.3 Consultation sessions are staffed by an appropriately trained, experienced, and professionally supervised domestic abuse specialist, ensuring high-quality, evidence-informed support. The Navigator will also promote consistent best practice, strengthen professional confidence, and enhance partnership working across Integrated Children's Services.

4.11 Highlighting Civil Options

4.11.1 In 2025/26 we strengthened the availability of clear, accessible information for survivors by publishing updated content on the [Kent & Medway Domestic Abuse Services Website](#). The new sections provide comprehensive guidance on legal and protective orders, including how these measures can safeguard victims and what actions to take if a breach occurs. This update aims to raise awareness of the civil options available to people experiencing domestic abuse and to support a consistent, victim centred approach when responding to breaches. By improving access to reliable information, the website now better empowers survivors to understand their rights, seek protection, and feel confident in navigating the legal processes designed to keep them safe.

4.12 Experiences of Justice

4.12.1 As part of our Year Two commitments to improving Experiences of Justice, we have continued to promote training, policies, and practice guidance that strengthen practitioners' ability to identify coercive behaviour, understand typologies of abuse, and respond safely to counter-allegations. This included delivering a dedicated session on counter-allegations at a Domestic Homicide Review Learning Event and providing training to Family Hub teams, where research on the prevalence of counter allegations was presented alongside practical ways to identify and respond. We further advanced this agenda through the End Domestic Abuse Learning Webinars, *Victim or Perpetrator – How to Tell the Difference*, which addressed the negative experiences of victims who are wrongly identified as perpetrators or where language mutualises responsibility.

4.12.2 Alongside workforce development, we strengthened public-facing resources by enhancing the "[Am I Being Abused?](#)" page on the Kent & Medway Domestic

Abuse Services website to help individuals recognise signs of coercive control. Collectively, these measures aim to upskill professionals to correctly identify abuse, avoid undermining victims' experiences, and ensure survivors achieve fairer and more supportive outcomes across the justice system.

4.13 Supporting Children & Young People

4.13.1 Children and young people are victims of domestic abuse in their own right and what they have seen, heard, felt and lived with can have long-lasting impacts on their mental health and the way they experience life. In 2025/6 a number of projects initiatives have been added enhanced our offer for children and young people.

4.14 Reaching Out to Schools

4.14.1 Schools play a vital role as trusted, everyday points of contact for families, often being the agency with the deepest insight into a child's lived experience. As part of the commitment to strengthening support for children experiencing domestic abuse, we delivered a countywide project to equip all secondary schools and PRUs in Kent with high-quality information and resources.

4.14.2 At the start of the autumn term, each setting received a pack of domestic abuse awareness posters accompanied by a safeguarding-focused letter highlighting the increased risks some pupils may face during school holidays and outlining the support available through the Kent & Medway Domestic Abuse Services Partnership. The materials provide clear signposting for young people, parents, and staff, and promote access to training, policy support, and specialist services.

4.14.3 By ensuring schools have the tools, information, and pathways they need, this project strengthens their ability to recognise abuse, respond safely, and support the ongoing safety and wellbeing of the young people and families they serve.

4.15 Kent Youth County Council – Staying Safe Working Group DA Leaflet

4.15.1 We worked with the Kent Youth County Council Staying Safe working group and KCC's i-Thrive and Participation Team, to coproduce a domestic abuse flyer, which will help young people recognise different types and signs of abuse, understand how to support a friend safely and confidentially, and access key helplines and further support through the Kent & Medway Domestic Abuse website.

4.16 Healing Together – Kent Family Hubs take the Lead

4.16.1 This year the Healing Together Programme was expanded. Healing Together is a trauma-informed, evidence-based intervention that helps children and young people affected by domestic abuse by using simple, body-based tools to support safety and emotional regulation. Funding from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner enabled 42 frontline practitioners across Kent and Medway to be

trained. To build long-term capacity, practitioners across education, health, and social care were offered the training to deliver the programme.

- 4.16.2 A key development has been the formal adoption of Healing Together as part of the Kent Family Hubs core offer, making Kent one of the first local authorities to embed the programme system-wide. As a result, trauma-informed approaches are becoming more integrated into everyday practice, strengthening early intervention and improving support for children impacted by domestic abuse.

4.17 New Guidance on Operation Encompass

- 4.17.1 Operation Encompass is a police-to-school safeguarding system that alerts a child's school when the child has been involved in or exposed to a domestic abuse incident. While previous Kent guidance mainly focused on how schools receive these notifications, it left a significant gap around what schools should do next.

- 4.17.2 To address this, a comprehensive new guidance document has been jointly developed by the Domestic Abuse Projects and Partnerships Team and Kent Police, in consultation with the Kent Multiagency Safeguarding Children's Partnership (KMSCP) Education Safeguarding Group

- 4.17.3 This updated guidance focuses on supporting schools to take safe, informed and practical action once a notification is received. The document offers step-by-step instructions, practical safeguarding approaches, and trauma-informed responses. It also includes frequently asked questions about how children experience domestic abuse, guidance on whether and when to speak with parents, and advice on how to support the child sensitively within the school environment. In addition, the guidance covers practical matters such as accessing additional training, ensuring appropriate information-sharing and record-keeping, and embedding Operation Encompass into existing safeguarding processes.

4.18 Responding to Child or Adolescent to Parent Abuse

- 4.18.1 To reflect the recommendations made in a recent Domestic Homicide Review, a new multi-agency Child or Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse (CAPVA) guide has been developed to address a gap in local guidance and practice.

- 4.18.2 The guide focuses on ensuring the safety and wellbeing of the whole family, parents, siblings, and the child using harmful behaviours, recognising CAPVA as a complex form of hidden harm that requires robust but trauma-informed responses. It emphasises that all members of the family may be at risk, outlines the importance of sensitive disclosure-enabled practice, and provides clear pathways for safeguarding, assessment, and multi-agency support. The guidance highlights the need to balance effective risk management with a compassionate, developmentally informed understanding of the child's behaviour, ensuring that interventions safeguard victims while also supporting the young person to reduce harm and access appropriate help.

4.18.3 This was launched at an Integrated Children's Services Communities of Practice, was publicised via the Kent & Medway Domestic Abuse Newsletter and is publicly accessible via the [Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Services](#) website.

4.19 Access to Housing

4.20 Understanding the Use of Temporary Accommodation

4.20.1 Following the 2023 Needs Assessment recommendation to understand the drivers behind victims/survivors entering temporary accommodation rather than specialist safe accommodation, the Kent Domestic Abuse Research Programme conducted qualitative engagement with 36 professionals across Kent & Medway through interviews, focus groups and surveys.

4.20.2 The insight work explored:

- Why victim/survivors may choose temporary accommodation over refuge or other safe accommodation
- Barriers, challenges, and successes in housing victim/survivors
- Potential system improvements to better support safe and appropriate housing outcomes

4.20.3 The research found that victims and survivors enter temporary accommodation rather than refuge due to a desire to maintain routine, concerns about shared living, stigma around refuge and fears about how refuge might affect future housing options. Alongside these personal considerations, system-level issues also play a significant role, including limited availability of refuge spaces, complex referral and assessment processes, and inconsistent communication across agencies. These factors can make temporary accommodation the more immediate option at the point of crisis, meaning that victims are not then able to access the expert support available in safe accommodation for both them and their children.

4.20.4 To address the report's findings a workshop brought together experts in housing and domestic abuse from across the county to develop an action plan. This plan now sits with the Local Partnership Board. Early successes include providing licences for Routes to Support, the national database for live refuge vacancies, to every district in Kent supporting another referral processes and the development of a guide for victims and survivors on their housing options.

4.21 Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) Accreditation

4.22 DAHA accreditation is the UK benchmark for how housing providers should respond to domestic abuse. By becoming DAHA accredited, housing providers implement and embed an effective domestic abuse response that keeps survivors safe and holds perpetrators to account. KCC made a grant available to all District, Borough, and City councils in Kent to maintain DAHA membership for the third year to support a strong and consistent housing response.

- 4.23 There are eight priority areas including policies and procedures, publicity and awareness raising, safety-led case management, survivor-led support, staff development and perpetrator accountability. Working collectively the domestic abuse coordinators and DAHA leads for each council are sharing resources to maximise our impact, tackle challenges together and deliver solutions. This work has resulted in increased training across housing teams, the development of champion schemes, introduction of trauma informed support pathways and increasing awareness through clear information on local authority websites.
- 4.24 This year the first member of the group underwent accreditation, with Swale Borough Council achieving a Gold Award. Several other districts are now nearing the accreditation stage, showcasing the work that has been undertaken to improve systems and prioritise the needs of those experiencing abuse.

5. Recovery

- 5.1 Domestic abuse and the associated trauma can have a significant impact on the people affected. There can be damaging long and short-term physical, mental, emotional, and psychological health impacts on adults and children. These repercussions remain long after the immediate safety needs have been met.
- 5.2 The Partnership want Kent & Medway to be a place where people have the opportunity to thrive, to recover from the harm, heal and build resilience.
- 5.3 There are 22 'Recovery' commitments in the strategy, the following are key projects within this area of work.

5.4 Prioritising family bonds

- 5.4.1 A multiagency project was initiated to develop the Parental Conflict and Domestic Abuse Tool, designed to help practitioners distinguish between coercive control, where power is held and abused by one person, and parental conflict, where power is broadly equal but communication is poor and unhealthy conflict is poorly resolved.
- 5.4.2 This was initiated after feedback from providers highlighted that the language used in some referrals described abusive behaviours as parental conflict, leading to domestic abuse cases being inappropriately directed to parental conflict interventions.
- 5.4.3 The tool supports safe, evidence-based decision-making by prompting practitioners to consider the motive and impact behind behaviours, enabling clearer professional challenge and ensuring individuals are directed to the correct pathway.

5.5 The impact of abuse on mental health

5.5.1 Between 60 and 70% of women seeking mental health support have experienced domestic abuse.¹ This means that promoting better understanding of domestic abuse and trauma-informed practice within mental healthcare settings is essential.

5.2 Introducing Mental Health Navigators

5.2.1 In 2024/25 45% of those accessing refuge services in Kent (240 adults) were noted as having an additional mental health need. A gap was identified, where survivors with complex mental health needs were unable to take up refuge accommodation due to the difficulty in accessing appropriate support. Where they were able to take up placements, the lack of access to specialist mental health support can lead to disengagement from broader support services. Survivors may struggle to engage with move-on planning and other transitional support, which can delay their progression out of refuge accommodation.

5.2.2. An additional project has been designed to address this gap, employing two Recovery and Pathways Workers in conjunction with Live Well Kent and Medway to deliver a targeted, evidence-based, trauma-informed offer that strengthens the emotional wellbeing and recovery of survivors. This role will deliver therapeutic mental health interventions to those in safe accommodation, working with the domestic abuse support providers to develop support plans, offer advocacy and support the development of integrated care pathways. Recruitment is currently underway with the project aiming to embed in 2026/27.

5.3 Enhanced Therapeutic Support

5.3.1 Enhanced Therapeutic Support (ETS) provides an annual pot of funding to each of the existing KIDAS providers, enabling them to purchase additional trauma-informed support. This includes access to enhanced counselling designed to reduce barriers for survivors with additional mental health needs who may otherwise struggle to access refuge. The funding also allows providers to offer a wide range of therapeutic interventions, such as yoga, art therapy and other wellbeing-focused activities, ensuring support can meet broader recovery needs.

5.3.2 Demand for this support has increased. In Kent, the definition of safe accommodation has expanded beyond traditional refuge settings to also include survivors who have had the Safe Accommodation For Eligible Residents (SAFER) scheme applied to their property. This shift has broadened the range of survivors eligible for support and increased the volume of those accessing safe accommodation pathways.

¹ [The Road to Recovery: Meeting the Mental Health Needs of Domestic Abuse Survivors. An Inquiry into Domestic Abuse and Mental Health by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Domestic Violence and Abuse](#)

5.3.3 To reflect the growth in demand, the scope and the ETS funding available to domestic abuse providers has been increased, ensuring providers are equipped to meet the evolving needs of survivors across the county.

5.4 Suicide and Domestic Abuse

5.4.1 Kent continues to lead the national conversation highlighting the link between domestic abuse and suicide. Research led by the Suicide Prevention team in Public Health has identified that 33% (280 out of 847) suspected suicides in Kent and Medway between Jan 2018 and Sept 2024 have been impacted by domestic abuse. This includes victims, perpetrators and a group of individuals who were known to Kent Police as both victims and perpetrators.

5.4.2 Kent Public Health has now funded a project to further understand and support victims of domestic abuse bereaved by a perpetrator's suicide. The threat of suicide is often used as part of the tactic of abuse, to control a victim's response and ability to leave. However, when someone who has used coercive and controlling abuse does take their own life the dynamic left behind is complex, and specialist support for the victim of abuse hasn't previously been available.

5.4.3 A partnership led by The Dot's, with Rising Sun and PARO has engaged lived experience leads and two therapists, to support people bereaved through domestic abuse-related suicide through weekly online groups and one-one support. This work has identified key themes including blame directed at survivors, complex grief for a partner who was also a perpetrator, children's confusion, significant gaps in services, and a lack of language or public narratives to describe this experience. Early learning points to the need for public resources that name this form of bereavement, training for DA and mental health professionals on coercive control-suicide dynamics and tools for survivors who need continued gentle, flexible support formats.

5.5 Recognising the experts

5.6 Survivor Voice Ambassadors

5.6.1 The experts in domestic abuse are those people who are living or have lived through abusive experiences. The Partnership are continuing to be led by the voices of those who have experienced abuse.

5.6.2 By sharing their experiences with the Domestic Abuse Research Programme in Kent and Medway, giving their ideas and their time 16 Survivor Voice Ambassadors are influencing and co-designing services, policies, projects, training and more.

5.6.3 Their voices are included to bring alive press articles, social media posts and training materials; ensuring their experiences are front and centre in our work, guiding partners, and practitioners to remain focussed on the importance of responding to their needs. Survivor Voice Ambassadors also helped to develop the new Kent & Medway Partnership Domestic Abuse Services Website, are key

in the Domestic Abuse Champion's Communities of Practice and input into the domestic abuse service recommissioning.

5.6.4 The Domestic Abuse Research Programme, within KCC's Kent Analytics team won the Local Area Research and Intelligence Association (LARIA) Research Impact Award in March 2026 for 'Most Engaging Communication of the Local Area Research or Analysis', in recognition for their work on the Survivor Voice Ambassadors Programme: Embedding lived experience in Domestic Abuse policy, training and public communication.

5.7 Post Separation Abuse

5.7.1 A campaign was developed through the Recovery Group to raise awareness of post-separation abuse, challenging the victim-blaming narrative of "*why doesn't she just leave?*" and highlighting the dangers associated with leaving an abusive relationship. Kent Survivor Voice Ambassadors generously shared their experiences, which informed the creation of a series of social media assets. The campaign drew attention to the reality that economic abuse often continues long after separation, and that post-separation abuse commonly includes stalking, harassment, manipulation of children, and online tracking. It also emphasised that the point of leaving is frequently the period of **highest risk of harm**.

6. Measuring Success - Activity Indicators

6.1 To achieve the ambitions set out in the strategy, progress against the delivery plan and a suite of activity indicators are being monitored through the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Executive Group. Quantitative measurements in this complex area must always be applied with caution but paired with qualitative learning can help us identify progress.

6.2 Kent Analytics have developed a Microsoft Power BI dashboard which contains the activity indicators data provided by data source owners across the Partnership. This report is interactive and updated dynamically every quarter. Access to the dashboard is restricted to key nominated partners across the Partnership and a Memorandum of Understanding around the use of the dashboard is in place with them.

6.3 An update on the activity indicators is provided at each Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Executive Group.

7. Conclusion

7.1 This is a five-year strategy which embodies our approach to tackling domestic abuse and our work to 'reduce the prevalence of domestic abuse, and ensure that where domestic abuse takes place, all those affected get the right support, quickly.' In year two of delivery a comprehensive delivery plan has been advanced alongside

a Domestic Abuse Activity Indicator Dashboard to help the Kent & Medway Executive Group to monitor activity.

7.2 Under **Early Intervention & Prevention** work has been undertaken to increase awareness of domestic abuse and the services available through the multiagency Know, See, Speak Out campaign and 16 Days of Action workstream. This has fostered new strategic partnerships, delivered the '6 Steps to Ending Abuse' webinar series during the 16 Days of Action and a monthly End Domestic Abuse Learning Webinar. Over 5,000 posters were distributed to schools, health settings transport hubs and public spaces and the Partnership newsletter is delivered to over 1,700 recipients. The Kent & Medway Domestic Abuse Services Website, coproduced with Survivor Voice Ambassadors and Children and Young People who had experienced abuse, launched in August 2025 and has been praised for its clear layout, supportive tone, ease of use, survivor centred language. The White Ribbon working group have been working to involve men in taking a stand against abuse to drive a cultural shift in attitudes towards domestic abuse.

7.3 To support professionals across our services to be domestic abuse informed, take opportunities to identify risk and use trauma informed approaches providing a variety of training opportunities has remained a key theme. The Adult Social Care Domestic Abuse Delta training package was rewritten to focus on the intersection of care and support needs and domestic abuse whilst a series of webinars were produced to reflect learning identified through Domestic Homicide Reviews.

7.4 Domestic Abuse Stalking and Harassment (DASH) risk assessment has been procured for 1200 staff across Children's Services ensuring that a firm understanding of the risks posed by a perpetrator informs our safeguarding response. The Kent Domestic Abuse Champions Programme completed its first year, training 283 individuals from diverse backgrounds, professions, and vocations across the county. These Champions serve as trusted points of contact within their networks, helping to bridge the gap between danger and essential support.

7.5 To hold perpetrators of abuse to account multiple training sessions have been offered throughout the year on topics related to supporting and disrupting behaviour to promote safety for victims of abuse. The new Domestic Abuse Services Website content also addresses perpetrators directly promoting referrals to behaviour change services and resources to stop the abuse.

7.6 For **Immediate Need** there has been work undertaken to ensure services were responsible to individual need. Projects focused on being responsive to individual needs aim to remove barriers to support by increasing awareness of available options, strengthening partnerships with community and faith groups, and ensuring that support feels safe and relevant to all who may need it. This has included work on No Recourse to Public Funds, outreach to faith communities, promotion of pet-friendly refuge spaces, and specialist training on the role of animals in coercive control.

7.7 To reduce risk a comprehensive action plan was created following the initial MARAC Hub Change Programme review, this resulted in increasing licences by a

third, creating district time slots and making amendments to the Case Management System. Strengthening services has included innovative projects such as the Cyber Sanctuary which recognises the growing threat of technology facilitated abuse by providing face to face cyber risk assessments and the Domestic Abuse Navigators programme which helps professionals across Integrated Children's Services to access expert case advice.

7.8 To support Children & Young People affected by abuse all secondary schools have received domestic abuse awareness posters was shared with schools, along with a safeguarding-focused letter outlining heightened holiday risks and the support available through the Kent & Medway Domestic Abuse Services Partnership. Guides on Operation Encompass and Child or Adolescent to Parent Violence have been created to support consistent, safe and empathetic responses to children who have experienced an incident of domestic abuse and/or are exhibiting harmful behaviours at home. Kent Family Hubs have also integrated the Healing Together programme into their core offer, ensuring that more children who have experienced abuse can access the body-based tools that support emotional regulation.

7.9 Promoting access to housing the Kent Domestic Abuse Research Programme explored why victims and survivors often enter temporary accommodation prompting the development of an action plan now held by the Local Partnership Board while the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance accreditation working group have brought together all our District, Borough and City councils to work towards the accreditation.

7.10 To meet commitments under **Recovery** a tool to differentiate Parental Conflict and Domestic Abuse has been under development to promote safe, evidence-based decision-making. A project to introduce Mental Health Navigators to deliver therapeutic interventions and help survivors in safe accommodation to navigate pathways to find the most appropriate support. Enhanced Therapeutic Support has been expanded to ensure those residing in homes where SAFER has been implemented are able to access the services provided. Kent Public Health has also funded a project to further understand and support victims of domestic abuse bereaved by a perpetrator's suicide.

7.11 To recognise the experts, survivors' voices continue to lead the Partnership's work, with 16 Survivor Voice Ambassadors sharing their experiences to shape services, policies, projects, and training. Their input informs communications, training materials, the Kent & Medway Domestic Abuse Services website, the Champions' Communities of Practice, and the wider recommissioning of domestic abuse services, ensuring that lived experience remains central to all partnership activity.

7.12 There has been significant activity from across the partnership against each of the strategy pillars. Whilst this report has focussed on multiagency and KCC led projects significant progress has also been made by agencies across the Partnership.

8. Policy & Resources Committee are asked to:

1. **Note** progress made against the Kent & Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy and make recommendations on future delivery plan direction.

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11. Appendices:

Appendix A: The Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Summary Strategy

[Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy](#)

Appendix B: Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy 2024 – 2029

[Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy 2020-2023: Summary](#)