

**From:** Roger Gough, Leader of the Council

**To:** Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee, 17 January 2024

**Subject:** Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy 2024 – 2029

**Decision Number:** 23/00097

**Key Decision:** *Involves the adoption of major new strategies or frameworks which are not included on the Policy Framework.*

*It has a significant effect on a significant proportion of the community living or working within two or more electoral divisions*

**Classification:** Unrestricted

**Electoral Divisions:** All

**Future pathway:** Cabinet, 25 January 2024 (information paper)

**Summary:**

The Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy is a partnership document overseen by the Kent and Medway Domestic and Sexual Abuse Executive Group. 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 across Kent and Medway.

An eleven-week consultation was completed on the draft strategy, which generated 244 responses. Responses have been analysed and the draft strategy updated accordingly. A consultation report, **Appendix A**, and a 'You Said, We Did' document has been completed (the 'You Said, We Did' is attached to the consultation report). **Appendix B** the Summary Strategy and **Appendix C**, the full Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy are attached to this paper. **Appendix D**, the Equality Impact Assessment is also included within the paperwork.

The Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee is asked either endorse or comment on or make recommendations to the Leader on the proposed decision to adopt the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Partnership Strategy 2024 – 2029 (as set out within the PROD).

## 1. Background

1.1 In April 2021, the Domestic Abuse Act was passed in law. The Domestic Abuse Act created a statutory requirement for tier one local authorities with cooperation from tier two authorities to:

- assess need for accommodation-based support,
- prepare a strategy to provide such support to victims,
- give effect to the strategy,
- monitor the strategy and
- report back annually to central government<sup>1</sup>.

1.2 Kent had an active strategy when the Act was passed, managed and overseen by the Kent and Medway Domestic and Sexual Abuse Executive Group. This Group has representation from Kent County Council, Medway Council, Kent Police, Kent Fire and Rescue Service, the National Probation Service, the NHS, the Department of Work and Pensions, and district, borough, and city councils.

1.3 When the Domestic Abuse Act gained royal assent, tier one duties for both Kent and Medway were integrated into the existing 2020 strategy, recognising that safe accommodation is part of a wider partnership response to domestic abuse.

1.4 The current strategy finishes in 2023 and a 'progress made' report was published on the consultation web page and shows work to meet the strategy commitments. Opportunities for improvement identified within the 'progress made' report have been built in to the 2024 – 2029 strategy supporting continuous improvement. This report is available in **Appendix E**.

## 2. The 2024 – 2029 strategy

2.1 The Summary Strategy and full Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy 2024 – 2029 is attached as **Appendix B** and **Appendix C**.

2.2 This strategy was drafted in partnership with Medway Council, with support from a project group (ICB safeguarding, Police and Crime Commissioners Office, Kent Police and Probation) and in coordination with the partners of the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Executive Group.

2.3 The strategy continues to develop a whole partner response to improving the experiences of those impacted by abuse. Once finalised a delivery plan will be established and monitored to support meeting commitments. Activity indicators are also included as part of the strategy which will form a dashboard to support the work of the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Executive Group moving forward.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-support-within-safe-accommodation/delivery-of-support-to-victims-of-domestic-abuse-in-domestic-abuse-safe-accommodation-services>

2.4 The identification of priorities and themes in the strategy has been sought from a wide range of stakeholders as detailed within the consultation report (**Appendix A**). Lived experience narratives have supported the development of identified themes, including learnings from interviews with adults and with children and young people.

### 3. Consultation process

3.1 The public consultation launched on the 24 July and ran until Monday 9 October 2023. Significant informal consultation happened before and during this period with a number of meetings attended by the strategy team (a full list is available within the consultation report). Reach from meetings attended is approximated at around 900 people (although with some possible duplication).

3.2 The formal consultation generated 244 responses, with 1,035 participants interacting with the page (such as downloading a document), and 2,424 visits to the consultation page (again this would include duplicate visits).

3.3 Of those who responded to the consultation and gave information, 33% disclosed being directly affected by domestic abuse, and a further 13% had a friend or family member impacted by abuse. Only 15% of people who responded to the consultation said they had not been impacted by domestic abuse.

3.4 The consultation responses have supported a number of changes made to the document highlighting key opportunities for improvement. Findings are summarised below.

- On the section focusing on **the Domestic Abuse Act** 73% of respondents strongly or tended to agree that the strategy gives you the information you need about the Act. Respondents highlighted a need to clarify information on children as victims of abuse between their caregivers and including information on adolescent to parent violence. Respondents emphasized that the strategy could strengthen messaging on the impact of domestic abuse on those with protected characteristics including disability, gender (both men and women), sexuality and age.
  - Information on the Domestic Abuse Act definition of children as victims of domestic abuse has been made clearer within the final document, with links to other relevant legislation included. To combat the gendered perception respondents had of the strategy, and to emphasise the cross-cutting nature of abuse, a new infographic section with inclusive imagery has been included.
- **Early Intervention and Prevention** - 86% of respondents strongly or tended to agree with the commitments listed. 'Increasing awareness of Clare's Law'

had the highest number of people strongly agree and therefore was not amended after the consultation. 'Increasing understanding of abuse' had the lowest number of people strongly agree within this section (although all were rated highly).

- Changes made to this section of the strategy include an addition on better understanding the increasing use of technology and abuse, additional commitments on supporting professional awareness of those with no recourse to public funds and commitments on supporting professionals to appropriately respond to disclosure (including understanding signposting and referral options).
- **Immediate need** - 86% of respondents strongly or tended to agree with the commitments listed. 'Supporting children and young people during immediate need' had the highest number of respondents strongly agree, and 'experiences of justice' and 'highlighting civil options' had the lowest number of people strongly agree within this section. The commitments with lower levels of support in these sections were impacted by respondents' negative experiences and underlined the need to improve our partnership response in these areas.
  - In response, wording on civil options has been strengthened with an embedded link which includes further information on civil orders. Additional commitments have been added to 'experiences of justice'.
  - Following feedback, we have also added a section on counter allegations.
  - Additionally, a section has been added to 'being responsive to individual need' which asks those working across services to challenge assumptions or stereotypes of abuse.
  - An addition on homeowners and access to support has also been added following feedback, as well as a section on pets and the importance of safe accommodation options which can accommodate animals.
  - Inclusion of flexibility of services to meet the needs of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities when seeking safety has been highlighted.
- **Recovery** - 84% of respondents strongly or tended to agree with the commitments listed. 'Recognising the mental health impact of abuse' had the highest number of respondents strongly agree and 'prioritising family bonds' had the lowest number of people strongly agree within this section.
  - Concern was expressed around re-traumatisation caused through family courts and management of child contact. The 'prioritising family bonds' section of the strategy was redrafted.
  - Additionally, the subheading 'recognising the mental health impact of abuse' has changed to 'the impact of abuse on mental health' as suggested by a respondent.

- ‘Recognising the experts’ section of the strategy has been redrafted to make it clearer that the experts are those who have been impacted by abuse, and also to acknowledge the key role of the voluntary sector within this space.
- 3.5 Many positive responses on the strategy were received. These are further detailed within the consultation report.

#### 4. Financial implications

- 4.1 The impact of domestic abuse has financial costs to many services within the public sector including Police, Probation, Health and Social Care. The strategy aims to support partnership working to improve collaboration and enhance service design to maximise outcomes from available funds from across the partnership to improve the experiences of those accessing services.
- 4.2 Tier 1 and tier 2 authorities receive funding from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to discharge statutory duties within the Domestic Abuse Act around safe accommodation, strategy development, partnership working and assessing need. The funding received to date by Kent County Council is detailed in the table below. Within KCC this funding is used to support safe accommodation provision including refuge, and security measures which allow people to remain in their own homes, enhance service delivery, therapeutic support for adults and children, and to support staff costs both across commissioning, strategy development and partnership working.

<u>Year</u>	<u>2021/2022</u>	<u>2022/2023</u>	<u>2023/2024</u>	<u>2024/2025</u>
	<u>£3,103,909</u>	<u>£3,112,501</u>	<u>£3,174,764</u>	<u>£3,234,633</u>

- 4.3 Provision of support for people who remain in the community and functions supporting the review and management of domestic homicide reviews is financed through partnership arrangements. In relation to community-based support this includes non-statutory allocations.
- 4.4 The strategy seeks to bring together the aims of each partner organisation and acknowledges that it is ambitious. It also notes that funding routes for both KCC and partners may change within the lifetime of the strategy.
- 4.5 The Kent and Medway Executive Group, of which KCC is a key partner, can review and revise the strategy if needed. This includes through a review period built into the strategy after three years, in 2027, when the Executive will consider whether this strategy is still representative of the challenges faced and ambitions of the members of the Executive Group given resources available.

#### 5. Equality implications:

5.1 Protected characteristics and the intersectionality of these directly impacts risk of domestic abuse and the types of abuse which an individual may experience. The Equality Impact Assessment, available in **Appendix D**, shows a positive impact from the strategy due to commitments which recognise this. The strategy seeks to ensure that services meet needs across protected characteristics.

## 6. Next Steps

6.1 The Strategy was presented at the Kent and Medway Domestic and Sexual Abuse Executive Group on the 13 December 2023 to enable partners to take it through their internal governance processes and gain approval prior to publication.

Following final approval, by all key partners of the Kent and Medway Domestic and Sexual Abuse Executive Group, the strategy will be published on the KCC and partner websites.

6.2 The Kent and Medway Domestic and Sexual Abuse Executive Group will be responsible for creating a delivery plan to support the commitments within the strategy and to monitor outcomes. These will be reported to Kent County Council's Policy and Resource Cabinet Committee on a yearly basis.

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