

A large, mature tree with dense green foliage stands on the left side of a vast, sunlit grassy field. The sun is high in the sky, creating a bright lens flare effect. The background is filled with more trees and a clear blue sky with scattered white clouds. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

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

Accessing support

This is a strategy document about how we want to develop and improve our services over the next 5 years.

In Kent and Medway you can access domestic abuse services by contacting Victim Support for assessment and referral to your local service by calling **0808 168 9111** or using the **Live Chat** facility.

Alternatively, you can contact the freephone 24 hour National Domestic Violence Helpline run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge on 0808 2000 247 or the Men's' Advice Line on 0808 801 0327. If you are concerned about your use of abusive behaviour the Respect helpline is available on 0808 8024040.

If you are in immediate danger please do not be afraid to call 999, otherwise you can contact Kent Police on the non-emergency telephone number 101 or visit your local police station to speak with an officer in confidence.

If you can't speak out loud, you can press 55 so that the operator knows you need help. You can also video call 999 to communicate in BSL for free by visiting the 999 BSL website or downloading the app.

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An executive summary of this strategy has been produced. The executive summary is available in Easy Read and in British Sign Language.

In partnership with and supported by



Foreword

Signed



Roger Gough
Leader, Kent County Council



Vince Maple
Leader, Medway Council



Simon Wilson
Assistant Chief Constable (Crime), Kent Police

Domestic abuse is prolific and wide reaching. In 2022 2.4 million adults experienced abuse¹. The impact of abuse can result in a range of negative and harmful effects on health, wellbeing and outcomes in life. Domestic abuse impacts upon future generations and their ability, capacity and attitude towards relationships, parenting, self-esteem and mental health. Abuse does not sit in isolation but may be linked to other life experiences which may include financial and economic exclusion, mental health support needs, substance dependencies or homelessness.

The Kent and Medway Domestic and Sexual Abuse Executive Group are proud to be prioritising and continuing to build on the achievements of our domestic and sexual abuse multiagency partnership. This strategy, our second Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy (2024- 2029) has been developed using narratives of lived experience.

These narratives are powerful and illustrate the often-complex journey a person moves through that may include identifying abuse, immediate need and recovery. This journey can look different for everyone and is not linear.

Domestic abuse can be hidden, leaving lasting physical, mental, social, and economic damage. Within this strategy we aim to challenge negative societal attitudes and stigma linked to discussing abuse, encouraging conversation and education. We need to ensure the immediate needs of people are met, by establishing support services to help intervene when a person is ready to disclose abuse, support

children impacted by abuse and aid the development of programmes which challenge perpetration and abusive behaviours. We must also work to ensure that services can be shaped and developed to respond to a longer-term journey of recovery, recognising that this recovery involves broader structures which aid the re-establishment of stability. Many different services, both statutory and voluntary work to support families and individuals affected by domestic abuse across Kent and Medway. These services often work together to make sure that provision is coordinated, identifying potential areas for improvement in the services that are being delivered. This strategy seeks to support this coordination working to ensure that people feel safe, secure and supported during their journey.

We would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to those who have provided examples of lived experiences of abuse and engaged with our research programmes both in Medway and in Kent, thank you to the children and young people who have given their ideas for development of services and thank you to the professionals who have given their time to feed into the development of this strategy. Without your valuable insight this strategy could not be formed.

¹. Office of National Statistics, Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview: November 2023
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwalesoverview/november2022>

Introduction

This is a document produced by the Kent and Medway Domestic and Sexual Abuse Executive Group which includes partners across Kent County Council, Medway Council, Kent Fire and Rescue Services, Kent Police, the National Probation Service, the NHS, the Department of Work and Pensions, the Police and Crime Commissioner and all Kent District, Borough and City Councils (referred to in this document as the Partnership).

This strategy works to achieve the joint collective aim to: ‘reduce the prevalence of domestic abuse, and ensure that where domestic abuse takes place, all those affected get the right support, quickly’.

This strategy identifies joint commitments across the Partnership for those impacted by domestic abuse, and is inclusive of those who are or have been abused, those who perpetrate through abuse, and children who witness abuse, using the voice of people who have experienced abuse to identify areas of priority across the Partnership’s collective service provision.

This strategy also supports Kent County Council and Medway Council’s statutory duty to fulfil their responsibility to have a strategy which details aims and priorities for adults and children who have experienced domestic abuse in safe accommodation services.



Governance

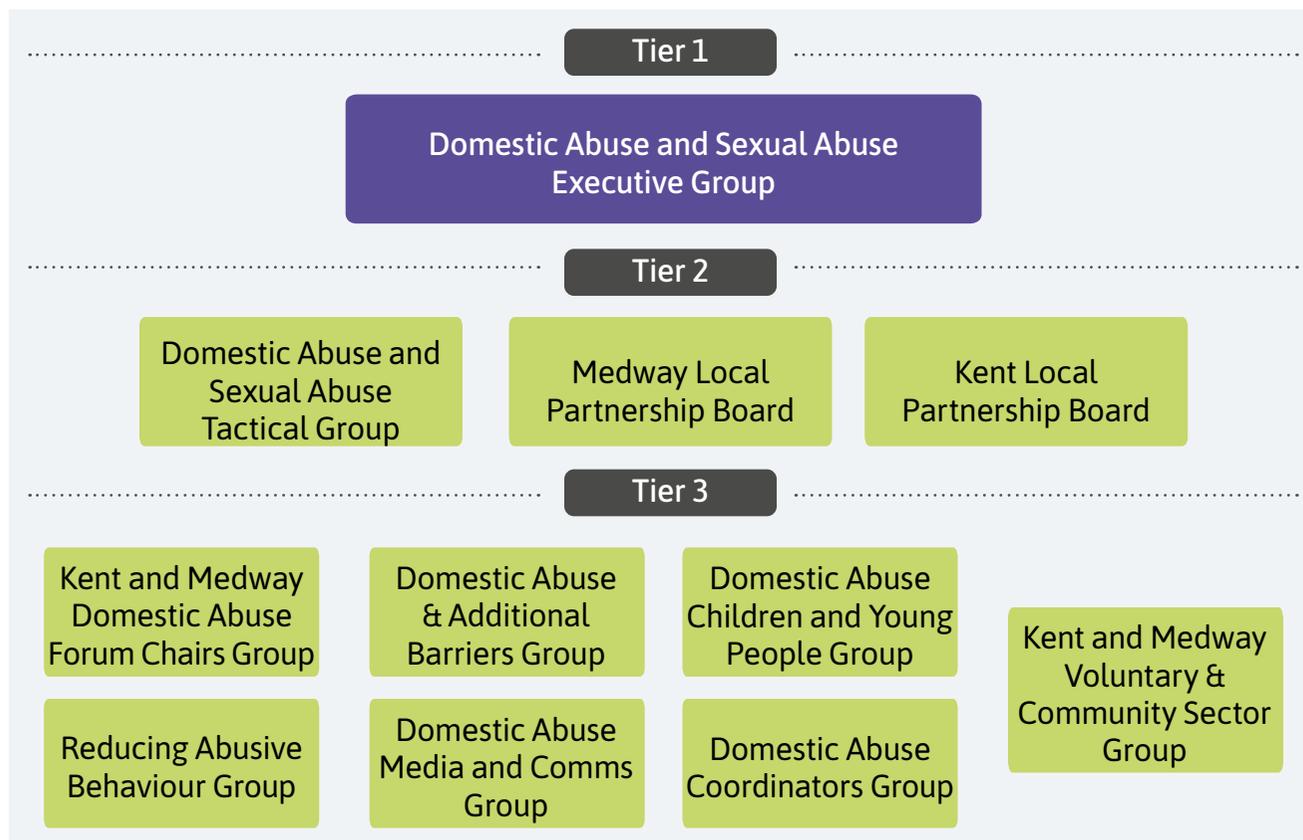
The Kent and Medway Domestic and Sexual Abuse Executive Group, and the associated governance structure supporting this work, brings together experts in the field of domestic abuse, who work in partnership to strengthen responses across Kent and Medway.

The Executive Group is supported by a number of meetings including the statutory Local Partnership Boards within Kent and Medway which ensure delivery of legal duties linked to the 2021 Domestic

Abuse Act. This strategy includes areas which relate to these legal duties which are highlighted using this logo:



The Partnership will work collaboratively to meet the commitments within the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy which sets out the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse Executive Group's joint vision, priorities, and commitments.



The Domestic Abuse Act 2021

The Domestic Abuse Act received Royal Assent at the end of April 2021. The Act works to increase awareness of domestic abuse, to improve the effectiveness of the criminal justice system and to strengthen support for people who have experienced abuse.²

The Act also creates a statutory definition of domestic abuse for the first time. Behaviour is classed as domestic abuse when:

‘two people are personally connected to each other, over the age of 16 and where the behaviour between each other is abusive.’³

This definition may relate to both a single incident or a course or pattern of behaviours. It includes those who are in, or have been in intimate relationships or behaviour between family members regardless of gender or sexuality.

Domestic abuse impacts children. Children who see, hear or experience the effects of domestic abuse and are related to either of the parties are considered victims of domestic abuse independently of the adult who experiences the abuse.

Children suffer both direct and indirect harm from domestic abuse and while the strategy uses the definition from the Domestic Abuse Act, definitions in other legislation related to child abuse and neglect may also be relevant.

Adolescent to parent violence is classified as domestic abuse when both parties are over the age of 16. While it is recognised that adolescent to parent violence can

equally involve children under 16, interventions may be different from responses to adults perpetrating abusive behaviours.

Additionally, ‘honour-based’ abuse is an umbrella term which may involve physical abuse including forced physical traumas such as breast flattening or female genital mutilation, psychological pressure or forced marriage. This is often perpetrated by a person’s family and members of a community with the aim of protecting or defending honour. This is a violation of human rights and a form of domestic abuse.⁴ Harmful behaviours due to ‘honour-based’ abuse can present in different ways and are sometimes used as leverage and cover for domestic abuse.



2. Domestic Abuse Act 2021
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/contents/enacted>

3. Reference as above

4. The Crown Prosecution Service, November 2023

[So-Called Honour-Based Abuse | The Crown Prosecution Service \(cps.gov.uk\)](https://www.cps.gov.uk/so-called-honour-based-abuse)

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 continued

Statement on sexual abuse

While this strategy seeks to coordinate aims and delivery on domestic abuse it will incorporate sexual abuse when this aligns with the domestic abuse definition. The Kent and Medway Domestic and Sexual Abuse Partnership recognise that sexual abuse and violence happens outside of this definition.

The Partnership seeks to support coordinated working on sexual abuse which is not included within this strategy. The Kent and Medway Domestic and Sexual Abuse Executive Group will create a working group made up of key partners to establish the actions required across the Partnership to strengthen and embed responses to sexual abuse and violence across Kent & Medway. This working group will collaborate with existing partnership activities and statutory responsibilities, such as the safeguarding boards and responses to the Serious Violence Duty, to ensure approaches are aligned.

SAFE ACCOMMODATION



Kent County Council and Medway Council have a responsibility by law to assess the need for, and provide support for those in safe accommodation for all those impacted by abuse and their children, both for those who live within area, and those who come from outside the area.

The definition of safe accommodation includes:

1. refuge;
2. specialist accommodation (including dedicated specialist support for people with protected characteristics such as a disability);
3. dispersed accommodation which includes self-contained accommodation;
4. move on, or second stage accommodation, a place to move to when intensive support is no longer needed but a level of support is still beneficial;
5. sanctuary schemes where physical security measures have been put in place into a person's home.

No recourse to public funds

"While I appreciate the help I received, I also feel I was grossly misguided. And I think my situation is very niche and they weren't quite sure how to guide me... In cases like mine, where there's the element of, you know the immigration aspect and financial abuse to the extent I've experienced..."

People experiencing abuse who may have limited access to public funding due to their immigration status may be highly vulnerable, their status may be an additional way for a person using abusive behaviour to control them.

Dependent on a person's situation there may be opportunities to support them under various legislation which might include the Care Act (2014), the Childrens Act (Section 17, 1989) and the Human Rights Act (1998). This strategy includes a commitment to increase professional awareness, which is further detailed in the 'Immediate Need' section of this strategy.

Domestic Abuse facts and figures



Statistics on domestic abuse are helpful in identifying trends, but any use of statistics needs to be carefully considered because domestic abuse is often hidden and under reported.

Nationally



An estimated 2.4 million adults aged 16 and over have experienced domestic abuse within the last year. This is a prevalence rate of around 5 in 100 adult.⁵



Women are around twice as likely to experience abuse than men, equating to an estimated 1.7 million women and 699,000 men.⁶



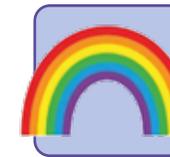
Between April 2018 and March 2021 269 women and 104 men were victims of a domestic homicide.⁷



Over 10% of adults with a disability experienced domestic abuse in the last year, compared to 4% of adults without a disability.⁸



People from minoritized ethnicities are less likely to disclose abuse and may suffer 1.5 times longer before seeking help.⁹



Bisexual adults were more likely to have experienced domestic abuse in the last year (15.2%) than gay or lesbian (8.4%), or heterosexual adults (5.2%).¹⁰



Research has suggested that up to 80% of trans people have experienced emotionally, sexually, or physically abusive behaviour from a partner or ex-partner.¹¹

5. "Office of national Statistics, Domestic Abuse prevalence and trends, England and Wales: November 2023"
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwalesoverview/november2023>

6. Reference as above

7. Reference as above

8. Reference as above

9. "Nomis, Official census and labour market statistics, November 2023"
<https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/datasets/apsnew>

10. "HM Government, Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan, November 2023"
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/624422988fa8f527785ed11c/E02735263_Tackling_Domestic_Abuse_CP_639_Elay_002_.pdf

11. "LGBT Youth Scotland, Transgender People's Experiences of Domestic Abuse, November 2023"
<https://www.scottishtrans.org/our-work/census2022/>

Domestic Abuse facts and figures continued



There were 2,887 offences related to honour-based abuse were recorded in England and Wales in the year ending March 2021.¹²



In 2022 the Forced Marriage Unit dealt with a total of 302 cases.¹³



One in four (23%) victims of recorded domestic homicides are over the age of 60. They were almost equally likely to be killed by a partner or spouse (46%) as they were by their (adult) children or grandchildren (44%).¹⁴



32% of homeless women said domestic abuse contributed to their homelessness.¹⁵

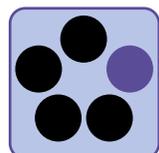


Nearly 4 times as many women in the lowest income bracket had experienced domestic abuse in the last 12 months (17.0%), compared with those in the highest household income bracket (4.3%).¹⁶

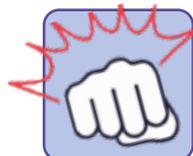


Around 1 in 5 children have been exposed to domestic abuse in their household.¹⁷

Kent & Medway



1 in 5 recorded crimes (22%) in Kent and Medway are related to domestic abuse.¹⁸



Over 63,000 adults in Kent & Medway were projected to have experienced domestic abuse in 2021-22.¹⁹



Over 24,000 children in Kent & Medway live in a household where an adult was experiencing domestic abuse.²⁰



Over 22,000 domestic abuse referrals were made through the Kent domestic abuse helplines in 2022.²¹



Over 4000 people accessed community services such as MARAC, community and specialist IDVAs or outreach support in Kent & Medway in 2022-23.²²

Both Kent and Medway produce strategic needs assessments for domestic abuse which use data from services to identify trends in service provision and highlight any gaps in support and provision, or areas which we need to strengthen.

12. "Home Office, Statistics on so called 'honour-based' abuse offences, England and Wales, 2021 to 2022, November 2023"

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statistics-on-so-called-honour-based-abuse-offences-england-and-wales-2021-to-2022/statistics-on-so-called-honour-based-abuse-offences-england-and-wales-2021-to-2022>

13. "Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Forced Marriage Unit statistics 2022, November 2023" [Forced Marriage Unit statistics 2022](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/forced-marriage-unit-statistics-2022)

14. "Age UK, Parliamentary Briefing, No Age Limit: Domestic Abuse, November 2023" <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/parliamentary-briefing---domestic-abuse---jan-2020.pdf>

15. "Safelives, Homelessness and domestic abuse, November 2023" <https://safelives.org.uk/spotlight-5-homelessness-and-domestic-abuse>

16. "Office of National Statistics, November 2023" (Office for National Statistics) (2017) Domestic abuse in England and Wales: year ending March 2017. London: ONS.

17. "NSPCC, Child abuse and neglect in the UK today, November 2023" [Child abuse and neglect in the UK today | NSPCC Learning](https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-we-do/learning-and-research/child-abuse-and-neglect-in-the-uk-today/)

18. Domestic Abuse Statistics Data Tool, Home Office, November 2022

19. From Kent & Medway's service reports 2022-23: Internal data

20. "Children's Commissioner, Children in families at risk, 2018" <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/vulnerable-children/children-in-families-at-risk-local-area-maps/>

21. From Kent & Medway's service reports 2022-23: Internal data

22. Reference as above

Domestic Abuse facts and figures continued

SAFE ACCOMMODATION



Data from our refuges and other safe accommodation

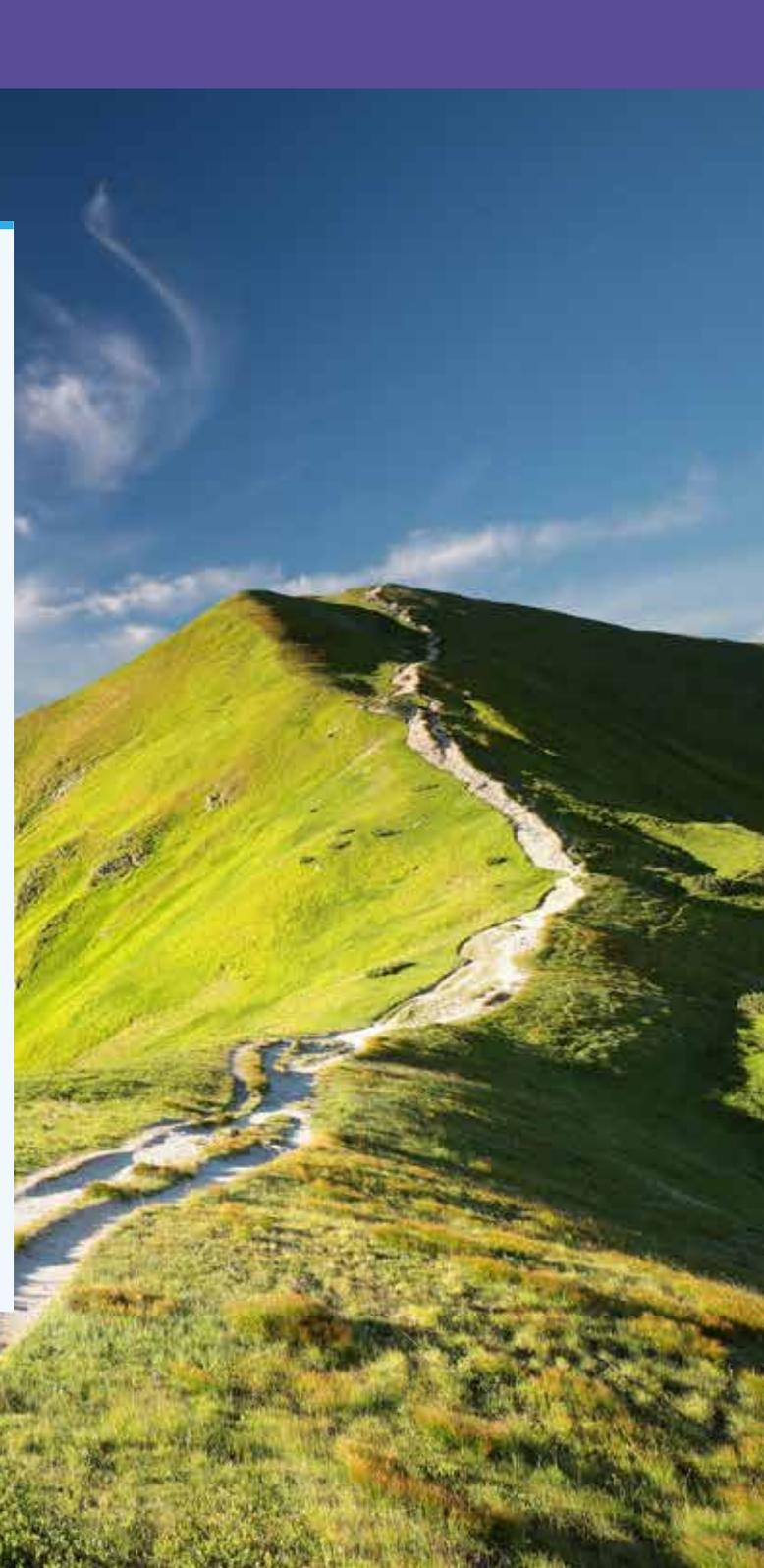
(2022/2023 commissioned services data)

Kent

- 208 people accessed Kent County Council commissioned refuge.
- 51.9% of people in Kent refuges had accompanying children.
- 6.3% of people in refuge identified as lesbian, gay, or pansexual.
- Of those in refuge, 8.2% had a physical or sensory disability and 1.9% had a learning disability.
- 42.3% of those in refuge identified as needing mental health support (as a secondary need).
- 63.9% of individuals in refuge identified as “White – British” and 31.7% identified as other ethnic minority groups.
- 52.4% of people in refuge came from outside Kent.

Medway

- 59 people accessed safe accommodation services in Medway.
- 47 children were supported whilst in safe accommodation.
- 15 adults and children accessed counselling and play therapy in refuge.
- 21% of people accessing refuge accommodation in Medway identified as black or from a minority ethnic group.
- 13% of people were between 16 – 25 years old.
- 51 % of people reported as having a mental health need.
- 16% of people had a disability in refuge.
- Over a year 113 people have benefited from Sanctuary Scheme adaptations to enable them to remain safely in their homes.



Domestic Abuse facts and figures continued

Gaps identified from the 2021 needs assessment which focused on safe accommodation are highlighted within the table below, as is information on how we will, or have met these gaps.

SAFE ACCOMMODATION



Identified gaps in provision

Kent

Gap identified

Support services for children and young people in safe accommodation.

How we will meet or have met the gap

Within Kent the safe accommodation support service for children is commissioned. This service supports access to group, one-to-one and peer support, and has extended the length of provision available for therapeutic support for children and young people.

Access to services for people with multiple barriers such as dependency and mental health support requirements.

Training is being developed for those working with people with mental health support needs on domestic abuse, and for those working in domestic abuse on mental health. Additional training has also been rolled out on intersectionality between dependencies (including alcohol and drug dependencies) and domestic abuse.

Specialist Independent Domestic Violence Advisors have been commissioned. These roles provide a dedicated, intensive, specialist resource delivering a joined-up, multi-agency support package, liaising with key organisations such as mental health services, substance misuse treatment services and criminal justice agencies to deliver consistency and positive outcomes for vulnerable clients.

Enhanced therapeutic support is also available which provides enhanced and responsive therapeutic support and additional provision for those with co-occurring conditions (16 years+) to improve access to refuges.

Further work is ongoing to develop projects in this area.

Domestic Abuse facts and figures continued

SAFE ACCOMMODATION



Kent

Access to secure secondary accommodation options when moving out of refuge or other safe accommodation.

Tenancy Support Officers have been introduced to increase support and advocacy for those moving from safe accommodation.

Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance Accreditation will support strong and consistent housing responses across area, and is being sought by all tier 2 authorities, supported by Kent County Council (KCC).

Provision in Sanctuary schemes vary across the county, meaning some people may get more robust support in one scheme compared to another.

Kent County Council will commission a Sanctuary service which will extend the availability of services within Kent .

Safe Access for Eligible Residents (SAFER) is a scheme which has been developed by Kent County Council with engagement from all partner agencies and people with lived experience of domestic abuse.

The scheme will extend the availability of Sanctuary services within Kent and access to support for those residing in properties where Sanctuary has been applied.

Access to refuge accommodation for men

A pilot which will support men in safe accommodation has been commissioned.



Domestic Abuse facts and figures continued

SAFE ACCOMMODATION



Medway

Gap identified

How we will meet or have met the gap

Access to services for people with multiple barriers such as dependency and mental health support requirements.

Medway Council will continue to commission an Access Independent Domestic Violence Adviser to offer specialist support for those with barriers to access such as complex mental health needs or substance and/or alcohol dependency. This is also an outreach post to work with those who are rough sleeping with the aim of supporting people into safe accommodation.

Access to secure secondary accommodation options when moving out of refuge or other safe accommodation.

Medway Council have introduced a specialist Domestic Abuse Housing Options Officer, who are also a trained Independent Domestic Violence Advisor to support access to secondary accommodation.

Support in temporary accommodation.

The dispersed accommodation contract was reviewed early in 2023 to include households placed in temporary accommodation due to domestic abuse, providing they are placed in suitable 'safe and relevant' accommodation as outlined in Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. An additional Independent Domestic Violence Advisor has been brought in to support people facing multiple barriers to access, who have needed Sanctuary measures installed in their property

Mental Health support within safe accommodation.

The mental health needs of children and adults are supported through an in-house counselling service, for people in both refuge and dispersed safe accommodation.

Access to refuge accommodation for men and other people impacted by abuse who cannot access refuge e.g. larger families, those with pets or other needs.

Medway Council has commissioned a dispersed accommodation scheme for those people where refuge is not suitable/accessible or those who want to remain in Medway and close to their school, work or support networks. This scheme started in December 2021.

Funding

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 has created specific funding to support those impacted by domestic abuse who access safe accommodation. The funding allocated to date is detailed in Appendix A. At the time this strategy was published the funding allocation was not known past 2024/2025. Funding available will continue to be used to meet gaps identified through the needs assessments which are refreshed or renewed yearly.

Whilst statutory funding is specific to the support of those who reside in safe accommodation, we know that most people experiencing domestic abuse will choose to access support in the community, wanting to increase their safety whilst maintaining their networks and homes.

Within this strategy we have used the information available including published research, quantitative information and talking to people about their experiences, to identify where the Partnership can make a difference, but we do recognise that this strategy is aspirational and that not all elements are funded through statutory monies.

Funding for some areas of this strategy is dependent on continued local and national funding and options for collaborative bids. The Partnership will seek opportunities to access monies to support commitments and work with local providers to strengthen local bids from Kent and Medway.



Kent and Medway strategic priorities

This section of the strategy outlines commitments from the Kent and Medway Domestic and Sexual Abuse Executive Group (the Partnership).

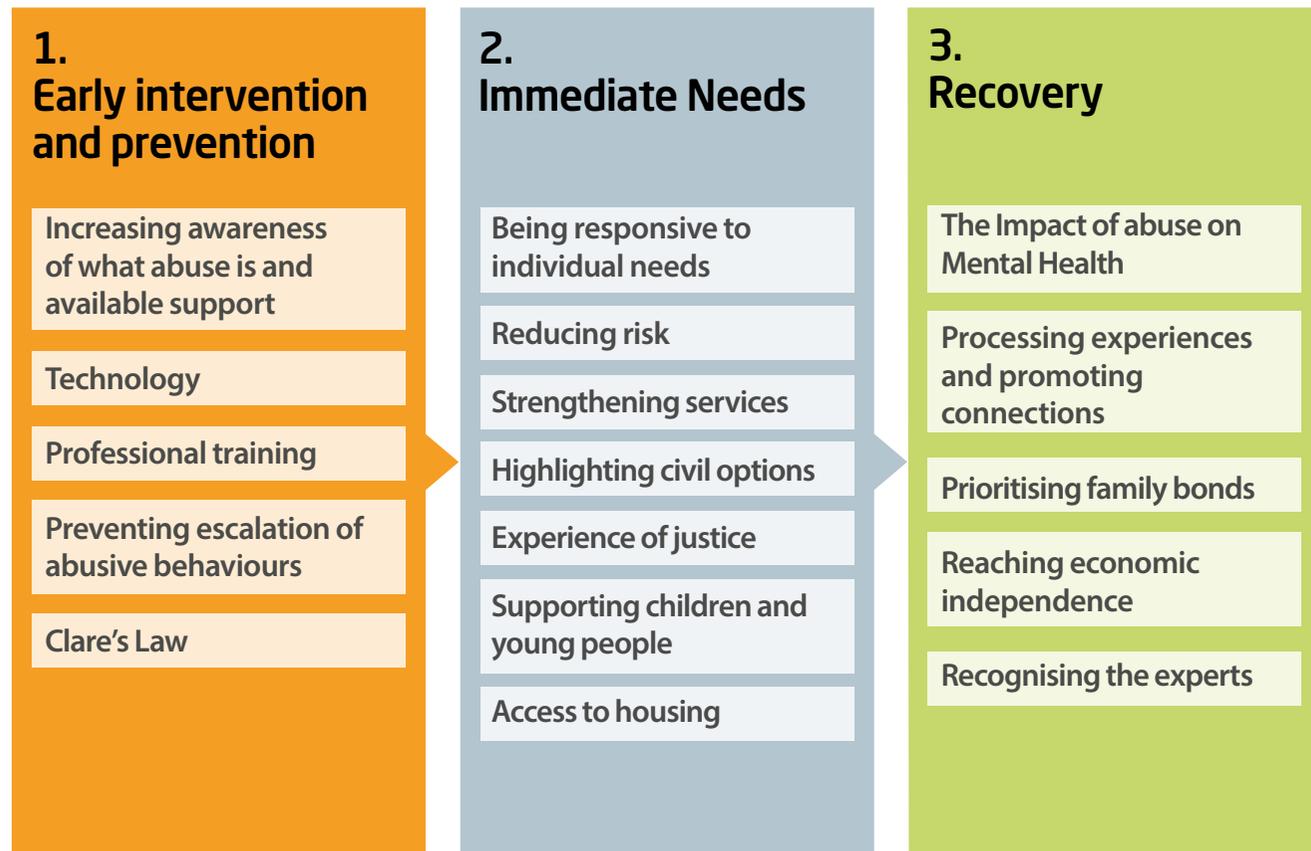
It starts with a focus on early intervention and prevention which aims to challenge negative societal attitudes and stigma linked to discussing abuse, increasing awareness, reducing the escalation of abusive behaviours and encouraging conversation and education.

The strategy then moves to focus on support when

a person is in crisis or in immediate need exploring the provision and support that adults, children and families need at this time.

Lastly the strategy explores recovery, and how services can be shaped and developed to respond to a longer-term journey and progression to healing, recognising that this involves broader structures which aid the re-establishment of stability.

The headings under each priority have been informed by research and from interviews on experience.



1. Early intervention and prevention

"For me it's like everyone just needs educating. What is domestic abuse? So, at school you go all the way through every organisation. You know, every judge, solicitor, whoever is involved in anything to do with domestic abuse should be trained. . . People would think differently. I think, you know, courts would be different, the legal system will be different and other people's perceptions. Even if it's taught at school, young girls, boys, how they grow up and their perception of what abuse is [is] really important."

"I feel like something needs to be taught in schools. That's just my opinion. Because what I kind of uncovered with my counselling is that me personally, a lot of my issues stem from childhood trauma, and then you end up finding yourself in a relationship at a young age with a trauma bond. . . If I had been taught better about relationships and what gaslighting is and what manipulating someone looks like I would [have been] a lot more educated like now."

"Communication with different generations is key – different forms for different ages e.g. TV (awareness) for older people, social media and TikTok for younger generations - targeted messages for different generations"

"More awareness needed for everyone -e.g., the lady at the GP that takes your blood and notices a bruise on your arm"

What do we mean by early intervention and prevention?

This theme aims to increase the focus on early intervention and prevention, to stop domestic abuse occurring, to help people identify domestic abuse as early as possible and get support in place to stop the impacts from escalating.

Early intervention can take different forms. We know that anyone can be impacted by abuse at any age, and identifying opportunities to reduce the long-term impacts needs to happen across life stages.

Early intervention means increasing awareness and providing education, so that people are aware of what domestic abuse is, while giving people the skills they need to identify healthy relationships.

If a person has identified that they are experiencing abuse, they need to know what support is available, so they can get the right support at the right time to prevent further escalation.

Education also helps people to identify when their behaviours may be abusive. Earlier identification of harmful behaviours can support access to interventions which can prevent escalation of this behaviour.

Clare's Law can also support opportunities to identify risk earlier and is included within this section.

Early intervention and prevention *continued*

Increase awareness of what abuse is and available support

"I think even that domestic abuse helpline needs to be even more sign posted because I didn't even know about it. And they helped me to where I am now".

"Having and knowing where to go when you are in that real lonely state is one of the most important things, if you have got nobody else".

"[people experiencing abuse] have just got to feel that they can go somewhere. Because when you do reach out, you've reached that point where you really need help and you don't want people just to leave you hanging."

Knowing where and how to access support is crucial, when a person is ready to reach out for help, they must know where to turn. Effective communications can support increased awareness and can also be used to promote understanding of domestic abuse and that it can affect anyone irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity, disability or orientation.

Understanding what a healthy relationship is and what it looks like can support identification of relationships which are abusive.

To increase awareness of service provision and of what domestic abuse is, the Partnership will:

- work collaboratively to promote consistent messaging on access, ensuring that messaging and imagery is inclusive and diverse;
- use available communication channels to increase awareness of what abuse is and that it can impact anyone, ensuring communication is accessible;
- work to 'reach out' to groups currently not accessing services; this includes making communications accessible and translating information where appropriate;
- include communications on 'honour based' abuse including forced marriage, and work with communities to better understand how best to increase awareness of support;
- increase awareness of the different types of abuse including coercive behavior, economic abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, harassment and stalking and online or digital abuse;
- continue to improve information, promotion and uptake of available resources for more consistent domestic abuse curriculum content as part of healthy relationship and sex education, helping to identify abuse in early intimate relationships.

Technology

The use of technology to perpetrate domestic abuse has risen with the increase in use of smart phones, tablets and internet connected home devices. Those using abusive behaviours use these tools to further harm people who are experiencing the abuse by monitoring, stalking, harassment and impersonation.

More understanding of rapidly changing technologies and how this is used to perpetrate domestic abuse is needed to prevent escalation and reduce the risk.

The Partnership will:

- increase the awareness of technologies used to perpetrate abuse so it can be more easily recognised and prevented.

Early intervention and prevention *continued*

Professional training

“Domestic abuse training needs to be there for every professional and it should be a statutory thing that every professional needs to have, like health and safety. Because if people knew how to recognise the signs of it, I think people could help others to pick it up and to recognise it themselves, or at least be able to offer them a service that’s available in your area if you want to access it.”

Across the Partnership we have the opportunity to promote stronger understandings of abuse throughout our staff groups.

Staff should feel confident and empowered to respond to disclosures within complex contexts that they may find themselves within. People who disclose should feel safe and listened to. It is important that staff are trained as part of their induction and that training is reviewed and updated regularly.

We need to ensure that professionals working across our services have the training to develop the skills they need to identify and respond to domestic abuse as early as possible.

To support our staff to identify domestic abuse, and have trauma informed, healing centred, strong responses the Partnership will:

- support professionals across our services to be domestic abuse informed, taking opportunities to identify risk and using trauma informed approaches in response;
- continue to develop our understanding of trauma and ensure our staff have access to training and development opportunities to explore and develop in this area;
- train professionals to help people feel safe when disclosing abuse;
- ensure training is available for staff on areas such as options for support and the additional barriers experienced for those with no recourse to public funds, who are LGBT+ or are experiencing ‘honour based’ abuse, forced marriage, financial and economic, sexual or coercive abuse;
- equip staff to be able to explore and challenge behaviour which may be linked to interpretations of aspects of culture which put people at risk of harm, abuse or death.

The principles of trauma informed practice are safety, trust, choice, collaboration, empowerment and cultural consideration, empathically exploring the question of ‘what’s happened to you’. A ‘healing centered’ approach progresses this compassionate enquiry, and helps identify the strengths of those exposed to trauma, empowering them to heal and re-establish their own well-being, as opposed to being defined by being the victim survivor of traumatic events.

As employers we have a duty to our employees. This includes where they are impacted by abuse.

The Partnership Will:

- support policies and procedures that allow people to access specialist support and to make adaptations that enable them to stay safe at work;
- support behavior change and create accountability for those using abusive behaviour by taking a robust approach to any allegations of abusive behaviour made against our staff. We will instigate a formal management investigation in line with our policies and procedures and will support the complainant to understand available options for support.

Early intervention and prevention *continued*

Preventing escalation of abusive behaviours

People who perpetrate through abusive behaviours cause significant harm to others. To stop abuse from occurring, recurring, or escalating we need to address those causing it. People perpetrating abusive behaviours may themselves have experienced or witnessed abuse and they can be at increased risk of suicide.²³ We need interventions in place to support the person while challenging and disrupting this behaviour.

Education is important in helping people to define abuse and to challenge behaviours and attitudes linked to this. We are working closely with the Violence Reduction Unit and Prevent team who support narrative on positive, strength-based identities where abusive and dangerous behaviours are challenged.

To reduce the escalation of abusive behaviours the Partnership will:

- support awareness of adverse childhood experiences (ACE) and trauma informed practice;
- work across communities to promote positive behaviours and challenge harmful gendered stereotyping;
- support work on bystander and upstander interventions;
- work with the Prevent team to better understand links between extremism, incels and domestic abuse;

- work to increase the recognition of, and response to, those perpetrating abusive behaviours across Partnership services in order to support the person, promote accountability and disrupt abusive behaviour.

Clare's Law

"You know, there's Clare's Law, but Clare's law is not well known. If you haven't been through domestic abuse, you don't know what Clare's law is..."

If effectively used Clare's Law can help to identify risk of abuse.

To increase the take up and use of Clare's Law to prevent harm the Partnership will:

- review processes around Clare's Law to try to make this as accessible as possible and increase use;
- increase awareness of the scheme through local social marketing so that people can make informed decisions about their safety.

Clare's Law also known as the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) gives people the 'right to ask' if their current or ex-partner has any previous history of violence or abuse. It is called Clare's Law after Clare Wood who was killed in 2009 by an ex-partner who unknown to her had been violent to previous partners.

Under the 'right to ask' the person impacted by abuse, family members and close friends can ask for this information which is released to the person at risk. The request is considered by a panel of Police, Probation, and other services. Information is only then passed on to the person at risk if it is deemed lawful, proportionate and necessary.

Under Clare's Law people also have the 'right to know' where services proactively release information if they believe someone is at risk.

²³. "National Suicide Prevention Alliance, Highlighting the link between domestic abuse and suicide, November 2023"
<https://nspa.org.uk/resource/link-domestic-abuse-and-suicide/>

2. Immediate Needs

What do we mean by immediate needs?

"I was in such a bad place and didn't know where to go, who to talk to. It was hard to talk because of the kids around. It was hard to actually pick up the phone and physically try and call someone and talk to them. You know, some sort of service. So in the end, one evening I was just at a point where I really just wanted to end my life again and I found the Victim Support online and it had the online chat, so I started talking to somebody from there. That helped."

"It is the real loneliness. That is what for me probably was the hardest part in the beginning. ...I do believe for me the loneliness every time he would go was what made me take him back. I had nobody. I mean, normally you would have friends you can pick up the phone and call. I didn't have that. I had no friends anymore, not one."

"The IDVA service was amazing – I was so lonely; I didn't know how to do anything- didn't know how to use the TV because I wasn't allowed to before. If someone was able to check in with a phone call more frequently it would have been very helpful, every day or every few days after referral."

By immediate needs we mean the services, interventions and support that people need whilst

domestic abuse is occurring and in the immediate aftermath. These services may help with managing risk and increasing safety, but people may also need support with practical issues such as access to housing and school places.

All experiences of abuse are individual, and our services need to be flexible and responsive to meet these needs. Feedback from workshops and the voluntary sector highlighted the importance of high quality, joined up support, non-judgemental responses where people feel heard, and services which are both open to all and tailored to individual need.

Within this section we also look at housing and safe accommodation services with commitments to support improved responses.

Being responsive to individual need

"I had police officers turn up to ask me how I was. One of them sat down with me, gave me probably about sort of eight or nine different brochures. And it was like, you know, phone these people talk to these people. And but you don't wanna be here when she comes back. ...I think they handed me some [pamphlets] and they were just like, you know, these people won't be able to help you because these only deal with women. But if you give them a phone call and say, you know can you give me numbers? They would probably have other numbers you can call for help."

Immediate Needs continued

“If you’ve got money, whether it’s joint money or not, there’s not much help for you. People perceive that you can go and get a good solicitor, or you can leave him. Pack your bags and just leave and get in the car and go. And also, if you’ve got a home, you’re not getting housing, they aren’t gonna give you a home because you’ve got a home. ... I think there’s a lot of women probably like me who can never get out.”

“Even in diversity, there’s still diversity that needs to happen, but here no one looks like me, so I think there’s also that loneliness here where I want to go to staff, but you can’t quite understand all the things that I may need because you don’t know what it’s like to be me. Constantly having to explain yourself and who you are is exhausting.”

The Partnership must ensure that services can meet the needs of our diverse population; recognising that people’s journeys, trauma, support needs, and recovery are different. Characteristics such as our ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disabilities, and age can affect the risk of experiencing domestic abuse, the abusive tactics used and sometimes, the support we need.

Information collected nationally, and locally from those with lived experience of domestic abuse, has highlighted a need for specialist services that are tailored to diverse characteristics.

Some individuals and communities may face multiple and intersecting barriers to support. This can in turn result in the over or under representation of people facing these inequalities within our support services.

People facing multiple barriers may have overlapping need, which may be underpinned by a history of abuse. There may be high rates of mental health need, and problematic substance use (which can be a form of coping mechanism), contact with the criminal justice system and issues around housing or homelessness. People who have barriers to access may have experienced multiple episodes of trauma and/or adverse childhood experiences, which increases their likelihood of further trauma such as domestic abuse.

To respond to need we should ensure that services are equipped to support people experiencing multiple barriers effectively.

All people who experience domestic abuse are impacted differently by their unique experiences. These experiences can be shaped by our characteristics, including our gender and gender identity.

The strategy recognises that domestic abuse can manifest differently across relationships but that our biases can shape how we perceive a situation. Professionals must always challenge bias or assumptions which may stereotype a ‘victim’ or a ‘perpetrator’, including in relation to gender. Understandings of abuse must be evidenced based.

All people will have reasons for not reporting abuse, and therefore barriers to access, but the strategy recognises that our characteristics can influence these barriers.

These may include:

- challenge in recognising or identifying the behaviour as abusive, and that you are experiencing abuse;
- feelings of embarrassment or shame;
- being afraid of the repercussions of reporting including in relation to child access.

SAFE ACCOMMODATION



“Sanctuary are super quick, they are amazing, it (the adaptations) was done within a few days and I felt my house was as secure as MI5 after”

“It doesn’t matter if I have a big house, I can’t be in it with someone who is violent”

Commitments

To support those who flee abuse and seek support in safe accommodation the Partnership will:

- have the right safe accommodation options, and specialist support, that meets the needs of anyone experiencing abuse whether they are male, female, nonbinary or trans, non-disabled or disabled, whether they are experiencing abuse from a partner or family member and whatever their sexual orientation or ethnicity;
- strengthen options for people facing multiple barriers when trying to access safe accommodation, which may include dependencies or mental health support needs;

- ensure safe accommodation options for all family types, including those with older male children and larger families are available;
- increase awareness of options for support where people may own assets;
- explore opportunities to provide short-term accommodation for people at risk of facing multiple barriers, such as homelessness and domestic abuse;
- recognise the importance of pets for those who are needing to flee. We will work to raise awareness of the housing options and support services, which aim to prevent families fleeing abuse from having to give up their pets;
- recognise that some individuals experiencing abuse will be homeowners and seen to have assets, for some this may limit their accommodation options. We will work to raise awareness of the available support routes for these residents across Kent and Medway.

Homeowners

We recognise that some individuals experiencing abuse will be homeowners and for some this may limit their accommodation options. Shared home ownership can also facilitate post separation economic abuse. We will work to raise awareness of the available support routes for these residents, across Kent and Medway.

To ensure that services are able to respond and meet the needs of our diverse population the Partnership will:

- increase service uptake for under-represented groups by seeking to address barriers to access and improve accessibility of services;
- reduce barriers to access for those living in rural communities;
- strengthen links with community groups, faith groups and leaders to expand on opportunities for partnership work;
- further collaborate to develop needs led work and support the specialist ‘by and for’ market (services that are run by the community that they are designed for);
- explore ways to promote learning and development on issues around intersectionality, including mental capacity, coercive controlling behaviour and financial and economic abuse;
- work to increase access for those experiencing multiple barriers by using a multi-agency approach to support the work of our commissioned domestic abuse services, including the introduction of multi-agency meetings and panels to achieve the best possible outcomes.
- increase professional awareness of possible options to support those with No Recourse to Public Funds including charity options.

Immediate Needs continued

Reducing risk

"I called the police and that was the first time I called the police on him for domestic violence, and this was probably like the 15th 16th thing that's happened between us."

Domestic abuse takes multiple forms with risk impacted by a number of factors; this includes the abusive persons history, recent separation from the person perpetrating abuse, whether the person experiencing abuse is pregnant or has a young child and, the barriers they experience in working with services amongst other factors. In keeping people safe risk must be managed and where possible reduced.

To support strong management of risk the Partnership will:

- establish the multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) hub and case management system to strengthen our response to the highest risk domestic abuse cases;
- work with the Community Safety Partnership and Safeguarding Boards to ensure that learnings from Domestic Homicide Reviews, Safeguarding Adult Reviews and Children's Safeguarding Practice reviews are supported;

- work to increase participation with, and referrals to multi-agency tasking and coordination (MATAC) groups, which are in place for those at high risk of repeating abusive behaviours;
- where a person is perpetrating abusive behaviour, work together to ensure timely information sharing about abusive incidents that allows for risk management and coordinated actions that promote accountability and disrupt behaviours;
- support processes in place to notify both the person who has experienced the abuse and professionals to ensure that the appropriate measures are in place prior to prison release dates;
- strengthen the Offender Focused Approach in investigation of crimes linked to Violence Against Women and Girls;
- increase availability and access to programmes aiming to support people perpetrating abusive behaviour to make sustainable change in their relationships;
- increase the awareness of harassment and stalking including the signs, the risk and how it can escalate, ensuring services work collaboratively to respond.
- explore approaches to increase professionals' access to specialist domestic abuse advice to aid risk management and safeguarding practice.

- recognise risks caused by the emotional and Psychological impact of abuse and associated coping mechanisms, promoting healing centered working across the Partnership.

Strengthening services

It is important that we use all resources wisely to ensure the strongest support available for those impacted by domestic abuse. This means working collaboratively to utilise opportunities and commission where gaps in existing services are identified.

The definition of domestic abuse is inclusive of sexual abuse where this forms part of the domestic abuse experienced. It is important that services align so that people receive the expert care and support needed.

To utilise opportunities to strengthen provision, the Partnership will:

- work towards creating a central resource which lists commissioned services to support collaborative commissioning and increase awareness of provision including with front line professionals;

Immediate Needs continued

- work across our services to identify opportunities to extend collaborative commissioning, starting by identifying priority themes;
- provide a quick and effective response to people seeking domestic abuse support through streamlined referral pathways and clear information and guidance for professionals;
- continue to work to identify funding and bidding opportunities, supporting our providers to collaborate to bring together strong bids;
- work to identify lobbying opportunities to enable the Partnership to support services which help people in the community or in other accommodation options including temporary accommodation;
- make sure that referral and signposting is clear for people impacted by abuse and the professionals working to support them, including creating accessible journey maps across different services to aid understanding of possible processes and interactions;
- work to ensure that domestic abuse services are aligned to deliver expert care to those that need it.

Highlighting civil options

Reporting incidents of abuse to the police, and navigating the criminal justice system, may not always be the first or preferred route for a person experiencing abuse. This may be for reasons such as fear of reprisal or previous negative experiences of the justice system.

There are various civil options available to people experiencing abuse, such as non-molestation orders and occupation orders which can help to protect adults and their children, and disrupt the behaviour of the individuals perpetrating the abuse.

Some civil orders, such as Stalking Protection Orders can be obtained by Police and used as a preventative tool within policing. For information on all of the civil orders available please see the Crown Prosecution website <https://www.cps.gov.uk>

To increase uptake of available civil options the Partnership will:

- grow awareness of the civil options that are available to people experiencing domestic abuse;
- ensure a victim centred approach when handling breaches of civil orders;
- where possible, work to strengthen the conditions and wording of orders obtained by Police;

- ensure that professionals are aware of civil orders and how to signpost people experiencing abuse to support services which can help them to obtain the relevant orders.

Experiences of justice

For those experiencing domestic abuse the decision to report offences to the police or to seek help from services is not taken lightly and can be daunting. People experiencing abuse want to be listened to, taken seriously, for the person offending to be held accountable, and to be able to make their own choices about what happens next.

To strengthen experiences of justice the Partnership will:

- increase professional training on gathering evidence of coercive and controlling behaviour to support conviction rates;
- advocate for greater specialist domestic abuse support for those who are going through the criminal justice system;
- hold those using abusive behaviours to account through the criminal justice system, this includes exploring and offering help to change behaviours through effective interventions.

Immediate Needs continued

People who use abusive behavior can attempt to use services that this partnership provides as a tactic to perpetuate and further the abuse. This can include allegations of abuse against the person they are abusing, making false allegations around parenting and children, reporting that the person experiencing abuse has unmanaged mental health issues the malicious use of police call outs and of the courts.

To support the person experiencing abuse the Partnership will:

- promote training, policies and practice guides that are inclusive of identifying coercive behavior, recognising the typologies of abuse and responding safely to counter allegations;
- utilise relevant legislation to maintain a focus on what is right for the child, prioritising their physical and emotional safety and ensure proceedings are cognisant of the impact on the non-abusive party;
- explore how those impacted by abuse can best be supported in during the family court and fact finding processes;
- promote clear guidance on the availability and use of legal aid;
- support families together where it is safe to do so and it is their choice.

Supporting children and young people during immediate need

“I think, just like, someone to talk to about it, like, yeah, I think someone to just talk to in general because like, sometimes you don’t want to talk about it to your parents, you don’t want to talk about it to your friends... a professional or someone, someone who you feel like you can trust” (child age 14).

“like as a family you can cause you, you kind of forget things when you’re by yourself... So like you [talking about mum] will remember things that I might not remember that are important” (child age 14)

“They did a lot of activities for the kids. And for us, because they took us all to the zoo one day in the summertime, which is really, really nice because I don’t think any of us have really gotten out like that.”

“My child had already taken so much time off school, just like every other kid [because of the pandemic]. But then to add another six months to that and then not have provisions in place for catch ups and stuff... They are doing OK, but they could do with extra support. That is one thing that I would have said and I did ask about, but, I was told that it could be looked into, but I just don’t think it ever happened. Is that if the child’s gonna be out of school longer than a month, if they could somehow implement a tutor to come into refuge, to teach them that would be amazing.”

Children who experience abuse between their caregivers are victims of abuse in their own right, and as such it is important that services are available, and that the Partnership develops its response to children who experience abuse. This includes making sure that where abuse is occurring and a child or young person has been present during an incident, the right people are made aware.

Young people can also experience or use abusive behaviours within their own relationships. Making sure that there is appropriate support and information available for young people is imperative.

Immediate Needs continued

SAFE ACCOMMODATION



Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities may find it more difficult to move to safe accommodation, which is often away from their usual place of residence, routine and home comforts. The move helps ensure safety but can present additional challenges for the child and so it is important that these challenges are recognised when a move to safe accommodation is needed.

Commitments

Tier 1 authorities have a statutory duty to ensure that children have access to support who are in safe accommodation. To improve access to services for children in safe accommodation, the Partnership will:

- offer support for children in safe accommodation, both for children from Kent and Medway who stay in area, and those who are living in safe accommodation in Kent and Medway from other local authority areas;
- ensure that all children and young people in safe accommodation have access to support that is age appropriate and meets their needs, which may include access to ongoing education, counselling, play therapy, advocacy services and other opportunities;

- minimise time out of education for children and young people fleeing with an adult experiencing abuse;
- work with partners to support children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities having their needs considered when moving into safe accommodation.

It is important to recognise that many children and young people stay within their communities, and, in the case where families have separated, may be navigating relationships between parents. Children and young people as witnesses to abuse are likely to experience trauma responses and should be supported. Children and young people’s voices are crucial in developing strong responses. The Partnership will:

- ensure that children’s voices and experiences are represented through formal governance and in designing and reviewing services;
- recognise the importance of schools in supporting children and young people and work collaboratively, sharing information where appropriate to improve outcomes;
- develop comprehensive whole family support, recognising the importance of recovery for wider family networks and blended family groups;
- continue to improve the process for sharing Domestic Abuse Notifications to ensure that it is equitable across the education and healthcare systems.

SAFE ACCOMMODATION



Access to housing

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 introduced changes which impact housing authorities. The Act now extends priority need status to all those who are eligible for assistance and homeless as a result of domestic abuse. This will mean that housing authorities no longer need to consider if a person is vulnerable as a result of their abuse in order for them to access accommodation secured by the local authority.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places requirements on housing authorities in relation to security of tenure when rehousing people fleeing domestic abuse who were an existing lifetime social tenant.

The Act emphasises that support is available to all those fleeing abuse, including those who cross local authority borders, and that housing and support needs for adults and children fleeing abuse should be met irrespectively of whether they have stayed close to home or moved to another authority.

Immediate Needs continued

"I wasn't able to get housing and I think housing is massive. It's such a massive, massive part of leaving because when you've got two children in an abusive situation like that, you do everything to protect them..."

"That's the issue with the whole refuge situation, it's too long. I know there's a housing crisis and these things, but, like I was saying to you earlier about the emotions, you then start falling back into depression because you're still [in refuge]."

If a person is forced to leave their home to find safety, access to a safe place for themselves and their children (if they have them) is paramount. If a person is forced to leave without their children, it is important that their accommodation is safe and is a place that their children can visit.

Once a person is ready, it is also important that they have support to gain secondary or move on accommodation so they can leave safe accommodation at a time which is right for them.

Kent County Council, Medway Council, Borough, District and City councils are working across Kent and Medway to ensure availability of safe accommodation options and to improve access to safe and stable accommodation for people experiencing abuse.

District, Borough and City Councils across Kent and Medway have a protocol in place to support reciprocal moves across borough boundaries. This scheme sets out a commitment to cooperate in a transparent and equitable way to assist applicants to move in exceptional circumstances; and local housing authorities to manage the process of accepting and referring applicants. This can prove to be particularly effective for applicants needing to move out of their current area to a safer one as a result of domestic abuse.

A second scheme has recently been introduced, associated with the Kent Housing Group. This scheme enables individuals and families who are at risk of domestic abuse and who have a social tenancy, to move to a safe area whilst retaining their tenancy. This is a collaboration between social housing providers and landlords to make better use of their housing stock and protect residents who are at risk of domestic abuse.



Immediate Needs continued

To strengthen our housing response, the Partnership will:

- work across our services to understand need and demand for housing for those fleeing domestic abuse;
- explore projects which strengthen the housing response including options for specialised referral and support routes;
- further explore why people are having to be housed in temporary accommodation or may be choosing to move into temporary accommodation rather than safe accommodation options;
- work with the Kent Housing Group as they explore action across temporary accommodation to support availability and quality;
- recognise the importance of social and family networks and how this impacts accommodation choices;
- continue to support those leaving refuge or dispersed accommodation and temporary accommodation to find more permanent, settled accommodation;
- extend training to staff on domestic abuse and homelessness legislation, working to reduce the amount of people impacted by domestic abuse identified as intentionally homeless;
- advance the safety planning knowledge and trauma informed processes within housing settings including through the Domestic Abuse Housing Accreditation
- ensure a consistent Sanctuary approach across Kent and Medway to enable those who wish to remain in their homes to do so, with the addition of security measures.



3. Recovery

What do we mean by recovery?

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.

In this section we will be looking at what the Kent & Medway Partnership will do to support people to recover from these experiences.

Whether the abuse is from a family member or a romantic partner the tactics of abuse may be used to isolate a person from friends and family, to erode self-esteem, distort sense of reality, take away financial autonomy and ability to make decisions. The process of recovery is personal and is not linear.

Each person who is impacted by abuse will have a different vision for what this looks like and how they would like to be supported to achieve this.

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.

Having a robust approach to supporting people to heal from the trauma of abuse is also part of our commitment to the prevention of further abuse.

The impact of abuse on mental health

As a response to the trauma of domestic abuse, many of those affected have mental health support needs, we also know that people using abusive behaviour are more likely to target those who may be more vulnerable due to their mental health needs. Mental ill-health is frequently used against people experiencing abuse, who report barriers to support.

Barriers range from shame and stigma to complicated service landscapes, rigid referral criteria, long waiting lists and a lack of appropriate services. For groups facing additional forms of discrimination and inequality, these impacts can be compounded. Between 60 and 70% of women seeking mental health support have experienced domestic abuse. Despite this, feedback around the mental health response has highlighted a lack of pathways that are tailored to the needs of those recovering from abuse.²⁴

“I still have night terrors. I feel like I’m right back there. I feel like he’s in the room.”

Research shows that trauma caused by domestic abuse can increase rates of mental health support needs, those with existing mental health support needs may also be more vulnerable to domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse can also be linked to problematic substance use (which can be a form of coping mechanism), contact with the criminal justice system and issues around housing homelessness.

24. APPG 2022 Report: The Road to Recovery: Meeting the Mental Health Needs of Domestic Abuse Survivors - Women’s Aid, November 2023 (womensaid.org.uk)

Recovery continued

People who have barriers to access may have experienced multiple episodes of trauma, and or adverse childhood experiences, which increases their likelihood of further trauma such as domestic abuse.

"It gave me a safe space every week. But again, you know, you're talking about 8 years' worth of abuse. It's never gonna come out and be healed in 12 weeks."

"Having counselling support for me and play therapy for the children, without the worry of a waiting list in the community has been the best thing for us."

"I'm currently trying to find some counselling for myself but that's quite a battle at the moment. I need specific trauma counselling and that's quite hard to access without having to pay for it. [...] There's a real gap in service provision with regards to trauma counselling for those that aren't able to pay for it privately."

"I've got anxiety and PTSD and it's really affecting my eating. I've been trying to get more therapy but I've been told I'm not eligible as I don't meet the criteria for support."

"You might have ended your support and feel like you are much better [but] something can still trigger you and put you back there, then there is no support."

Domestic abuse services often operate based on the level of risk caused by the person perpetrating abusive behaviour, but a persons need for services which support recovery, may not correspond to a risk-based model. This also fails to recognise the long-term impact of abuse, which lasts beyond the period of crisis.

In recognising the intersectionality between domestic abuse and mental health support needs the Partnership will:

- promote better understanding of domestic abuse and trauma-informed practice within mental healthcare settings;
- develop mental health support that is responsive to the needs of people who have been impacted by abuse;
- continue to strengthen understandings of suicide and domestic abuse;
- promote service delivery models that look at the needs of a person as well as the risk posed to them by the person perpetrating abuse;
- support opportunities to encourage a goal-based outcome to manage the end of support;
- explore opportunities to provide clear pathways for people who would like support around abusive experiences that are no longer current or posing active risk.

"I think with domestic abuse, it takes a very, very long time to process what's happened... It's something that's a long-term recovery I suppose... I think a lot of things are triggering me and that's bringing back a lot of emotions about what has happened and the way that I feel about myself and I feel like I need the support more now."

Processing experiences and promoting connection

Domestic abuse erodes self-esteem and creates feelings of shame, guilt, and loneliness. Supporting people to understand the abusive tactics that have been used in their relationships and processing the effect that this has had is an important step in recovery, for both adults and children.

*"It's like the calm after the storm, where I've now gone, oh s**t – actually you're not OK. You are harbouring some real trauma that you've never said out loud, that you haven't had time or space to."*

"I think for me [a group programme] would be really good to do because I don't think I totally accept or understand the level of abuse that I went through, because for me it was just a general normal day-to-day thing... I think it would really help me to have a better understanding of the abuse that I actually went through and the trauma that that caused and help me come to terms with that."

Recovery continued

“My eldest is doing the Freedom programme at school. The school are phenomenal... They do play therapy and games... They’re teaching them what a positive relationship looks like.”

About Group Working:

Psycho-educational groups provide a space for domestic abuse education, processing, and recovery. They provide a supportive setting for people to talk about their experiences whilst learning about the tactics used by people using abusive behaviour. This can increase safety, understanding of trauma responses, awareness of warning signs as well as lessening isolation and establishing social bonds.

Groups offer a safe and confidential place for people who would not normally have an outlet, validating each other in an empowering way.

“Doing the phoenix programme has been amazing [...] I looked forward to it because it was communication with other people.”

The tactics of abuse and steps to increase safety, such as moving away, increase isolation and loneliness. Feeling connected to other people is crucial for mental wellbeing and self-esteem.

“I’ve been getting some invites for peer support groups, if I can juggle my working week around I’d quite like to go to those, just to sit with other people.”

“I’m living somewhere where I don’t know anyone. I don’t have any family. You know, I generally don’t have any support, so I’m with the children 24/7, which isn’t a bad thing, but it’s intense... I’m definitely lonely. And then I don’t help myself because I’m so scared of meeting anyone or it happening to me again.”

To promote connection the Partnership will:

- work to ensure there is an equitable and accessible group work service across Kent & Medway for adults and children, promoting joined up delivery;
- seek to deliver groups collaboratively in a wide range of settings to encourage participation;
- support initiatives that help people build confidence and grow their positive social support networks;
- continue to explore programme’s that allow people to remain safely in their own community networks.

25. JDIBrief – Analysis, Repeat Victimization: Summary (1of5) Author: Chainey, S, UCL Jill Dando Institute. Accessed: 30th May 2023. https://www.ucl.ac.uk/jill-dando-institute/sites/jill-dando-institute/files/repeat_victimisation_1-5_all.pdf

Prioritising family bonds

Parenting and family relationships can be deeply affected by the experience of abuse. Abusive tactics are used to isolate and undermine relationships and can also impact on the space and energy to parent in the way you want to. Domestic abuse can both directly and indirectly disrupt the relationship between a parent and their child and between family members.

Supporting all members of the family to process their experiences and rebuild strong healthy bonds is a crucial part of recovery. The non-abusive parent’s needs must be seen alongside their children’s needs.

Children who have experienced abuse can mimic disruptive behaviours, undermining the non-abusive parents’ ability to cope. We also know that the largest predictor of future victimization and perpetration is experiencing or witnessing abuse in the past.²⁵ The intergenerational transmission of risk can be mitigated by supporting parents and children to recover together. Giving parents and children coordinated support and new strategies after abuse is important in creating strong recovery journeys, which are themselves a form of prevention.

The majority of children who have experienced abuse will continue to have contact with the abusive party. In some situations, it may also be appropriate to work with the person using abusive behavior to facilitate healthier parenting and safer co-parenting.

Recovery continued

We must work as a partnership to prioritise children’s emotional and physical safety, as well as the safety of the non-abusive parent.

“In the end, because of his loss of control over me, he then ramped up his control of our daughter.”

“[My son] spent a long time not being able to get over the fact that we weren’t together. But [the abuser] didn’t live here. The school spent a long time talking to him about why, because when [the abuser] lived here, he wasn’t happy... We got to the bottom of it and he said it wasn’t because he wanted mummy and daddy back together but because when mummy and daddy were together it was the last time he consistently saw daddy. It took a good six months to get it out of him. To understand. He would shut down every time we asked why.”

“Everything just got the better of me and I could feel myself losing myself. I wanted to get some help to just try and help me get some strategies in place for my parenting with my children because I felt like I was losing them a little bit as well.”

Recognising the impact of abuse on wider family bonds, the Partnership will:

- promote integrated support for the child/ren and the non-abusive parent, investigating options for whole family support, addressing needs of the individual and of the unit;
- explore providing services that support parenting after experiencing abuse;
- provide services that aim to increase the safety of children by supporting the abusive person as an individual and as a parent, increasing their insight into the impact of their behaviours, whilst holding them accountable for the abuse;
- promoting professional training on the use of counter allegations, misuse of family court and safe child contact arrangements.

Reaching economic independence

Financial and economic abuse is a pattern of coercing and controlling behaviour that dominates a partner or family member’s ability to acquire, use and maintain financial resources.

For many people affected by domestic abuse the impact of abuse can drastically alter their financial situation which may include losing homes or tenancies, property loss or damage. The effects of economic abuse may include unemployment, diminished employment prospects, debt, or coerced debt. This can lead to long-term consequences and can severely limit long-term economic stability and financial independence.

“When you leave refuge the support workers apply for grants for you to try and get furniture and appliances and stuff like that for when you move.”

“It all came down to the fact that we had assets. Whichever avenue I took there were assets, and you could sell your house to release the asset but of course you can’t sell the house it’s not yours to sell it’s in joint names and so it’s a continuous dead end.”

“When people talk about control and coercion, I don’t think there is a way that you can actually articulate how horrific it is when you’re in it.”

“He cancelled all my banking credit cards and transferred all of the money from our accounts so that I couldn’t access any of it.”

The impact of abuse often undermines practical stability and safety, including financial and economic control. The Partnership will:

- work to increase the recognition of financial and economic abuse as a factor in domestic abuse with professionals, who are working with older people or people who have care needs;

Recovery continued

- work to establish clear support for people who have experienced economic abuse and who have left, or are contemplating leaving an abusive relationship or situation;
- provide education and awareness to help people recognise the features of economic abuse and awareness of mechanisms to reduce vulnerability;
- promote access to financial advocacy for people who have experienced abuse;
- utilise the Employer Champion Scheme to involve employers to make sure the workplace is a safe space for people who have experienced abuse;
- increase awareness of specialist support offered by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to those who have experienced abuse, including specific domestic abuse support offered for housing benefit, Job Seekers and Employment Support and Universal Credit.

Recognising the experts

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

This strategy and the commitments in it have been grounded in the experiences of people affected by abuse. By sharing their experiences with the research programmes in both Kent and Medway, giving their ideas and their time, they have shaped the strategy.

We want to say thank you to those who have helped. Without your valuable insight this strategy could not have been formed.

The Partnership also acknowledges the commitment and contribution of voluntary sector provision within this space. Without the dedication of many within the sector services would not function. Many within these services have personally experienced abuse.

Rebuilding identity and empowerment are important factors in recovering from the experiences of abuse. Allowing space for people to grow and to input into the systems and services that they have been a part of should be prioritised.

Offering opportunities to contribute to peer support services, giving access to training and employment is empowering, builds confidence and supports recovery. It is also beneficial for the services and structures around individuals who can benefit from their expertise.

The Partnership recognises the invaluable knowledge of those with lived experience. The Partnership will:

- recognise the importance of peer-support programmes and interventions that work with the local community and informal networks;
- continue to be led by experts by experience in our services and governance structures, promoting greater service user involvement in service design, delivery and policy making.



How we will measure success

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 2027 a review of the strategy will take place to ensure that this approach is still appropriate and that we are achieving our ambitions. The Domestic and Sexual Abuse Executive Group will oversee a delivery plan managed by the governance structure with regular updates on progress being made to the Partnership.

In addition to monitoring delivery of our plan we will use a number of activity indicators to monitor areas of activity within this strategy. Quantitative measurements in this complex area must always be applied with caution but paired with qualitative learnings can help us identify progress.



How we will measure success continued

Activity indicators

Early Intervention and Prevention

- Reach of domestic abuse awareness campaign and website traffic.
- Number of applications for Clare's Law – 'right to ask'.
- Number of disclosures made via Clare's Law – 'right to ask'.
- Number of disclosures made under the 'right to know' – Clare's Law.
- Average length of time that a disclosure takes through Clare's Law.

Immediate Needs

- The average time it takes to wait for children to gain a school place after moving to safe accommodation.
- Enforcement of non-molestation breaches.
- Number of notifications made to schools through Operation Encompass.
- Number of domestic abuse notifications made by Kent Police to services.
- Number of people who have been referred to safe accommodation.
- Number of people who have settled accommodation destinations from refuge.
- Number of people refused safe accommodation.
- Prosecution rates for coercive and controlling behaviour.
- Conviction rates for coercive and controlling behaviour.
- Number of people who are presenting themselves as homeless due to domestic abuse.

- Number of people owed a duty presenting themselves as homeless due to domestic abuse.
- Number of people who have been referred to and accessed sanctuary support schemes.
- Number of people presenting as homeless due to domestic abuse identified as intentionally homeless.
- Number of people accessing safe accommodation who have multiple barriers such as dependencies or mental health support needs.
- Number of people being offered housing through the Kent and Medway housing reciprocal agreement.
- Number of referrals being made to the multi-agency tasking and coordination meeting.
- Number of standard, medium and high-risk cases supported through the partnership commissioned services.
- Number of adults and children accessing commissioned community support.

Recovery

- Number of children and young people who access therapeutic support in safe accommodation.
- Number of people referred and accessing group work (both adults and children).
- Number of people being referred to commissioned perpetrator programmes.
- Number of people accessing and completing commissioned perpetrator programmes.

Appendices

Appendix A: Funding from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

Kent

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

Medway

2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
£592,126	£593,765	£605,643	£617,069

Tier two authorities have been allocated smaller amounts ranging between around £35,000 - £38,000 annually.

Appendices continued

Appendix B: Overview of Legislation

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 works within a wider legislative context. Other key legislation includes:

<i>Upcoming:</i> Online Safety Bill	This legislation is likely to introduce a new set of laws to protect children and adults online and make social media companies more responsible for their users' safety on their platforms.
<i>Upcoming:</i> The Victims and Prisoners Bill	This Bill aims to establish measures to 'better serve victims and the public through improving victims' experience of the Criminal Justice System. ²⁶ The Bill will include statutory guidance and minimum expectations in relation to the role of the Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA), will require commissioners to consider child victims in the delivery of IDVA services and will introduce a statutory duty on Police and Crime Commissioners, health and local authorities around the joint commissioning of domestic abuse support services.
The Police, Crime and Sentencing Courts Act 2022 (including the Serious Violence Duty)	The Police, Crime and Sentencing Courts Act 2022 ²⁷ received Royal Assent in April 2022. Part 2 of the Act creates a requirement for specified authorities to collaborate and plan to reduce or prevent serious violence. Specified authorities are required to work together and plan to prevent and reduce serious violence, including identifying the kinds of serious violence that occur in an area, the causes of that violence (so far as it is possible to do so), and to prepare and implement a shared strategy. In Kent and Medway the definition of 'serious violence' includes domestic and sexual abuse and the Partnership will be working closely with the Serious Violence Prevention Partnership Strategic Board to support this work.
The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017	In 2017 a new law called the Homelessness Reduction Act ²⁸ was passed by Parliament. The introduction of the Act supports people who are homeless, to have access to accommodation. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 changed homelessness legislation to give priority need to people who have experienced domestic abuse. The changes to the legislation mean that, people made homeless due to domestic abuse are given priority need for homelessness assistance.

²⁶. Gov.uk 'Victims and Prisoners Bill' (Mar 2023), Updated: Apr 2023
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/victims-and-prisoners-bill>

²⁷. Gov.uk 'Serious violence duty: Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022' (November 2023), Updated: June 2023 Serious Violence Duty - GOV.UK (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/serious-violence-duty>)

²⁸. GOV.UK 'Homelessness Reduction Act: policy factsheets' (Nov 2016), Updated: Feb 2018
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/homelessness-reduction-bill-policy-factsheets>

Appendices continued

Appendix B: Overview of Legislation

Modern Slavery Act 2015 ²⁹	The Modern Slavery Act 2015 consolidates previous offences relating to trafficking and slavery placing specific requirements on employers and businesses. Modern slavery is often hidden from view and may involve or take place alongside a wide range of abuses and other offences such as grievous bodily harm, assault, rape, or child sexual abuse.
The Serious Crime Act 2015 ³⁰	This Act introduced the offence of coercive or controlling behaviour against an intimate partner or family member and holds a maximum penalty of five years.
The Care Act 2014 ³¹	This legislation introduced the general duty on local authorities to promote an individual's 'wellbeing', which includes considering a person's domestic, family and personal relationships. The Care Act includes Section 42 which states that if an adult with care and support needs (such as a disability) is suspected to be at risk of any form of abuse or neglect, the local authority must make enquiries and take steps to protect them. This includes working with other agencies such as health and the Police and providing independent advocacy when it is needed.
The Protection of Freedom's Act 2012 ³²	This legislation makes stalking and harassment an offence.
The Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 ³³	This legislation extends provisions to combat domestic violence and creates a new offence of 'causing or allowing the death of a child or vulnerable adult.
The Children Act 1989 and the Adoption and Children Act 2002 ³⁴	This legislation places a duty on local authorities to provide services to Children in Need and to investigate the circumstances of a child where they are informed that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm. Section 120 of the Adoption and Children Act extends the legal definition of harming children to include harm suffered by seeing or hearing ill treatment of others, including in the home.

29. Gov.uk 'Modern Slavery Act 2015' (November 2023) <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/30/contents/enacted>

30. Gov.uk 'The Serious Crime Act 2015' (November 2023) <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/9/contents/enacted>

31. Gov.uk 'The Care Act 2014' (November 2023) <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/23/contents/enacted>

32. Gov.uk 'The Protection of Freedom's Act 2012' (November 2023) <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/9/contents/enacted>

33. Gov.uk 'The Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004' (November 2023) <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/28/contents>

34. Gov.uk 'The Children Act 1989 and the Adoption and Children Act 2002' (November 2023) <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents>

Appendices continued

Appendix C: Linked Boards

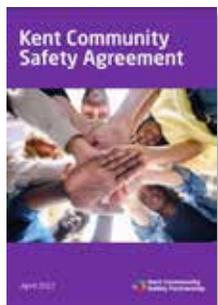
The Partnership has cross representation or updates the following groups:

- Kent Community Safety Board
 - Kent Housing Group
 - Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board
 - Kent Criminal Justice Board
 - Medway Community Safety Partnership
 - The Suicide Prevention Board
 - Serious Violence Reduction Partnership Board
 - Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adults Board
 - Kent Safeguarding Children Multi - Agency Partnership Board
 - Medway Safeguarding Children Partnership
 - The Integrated Care Partnership
 - The Domestic Homicide Steering Group
-



Appendices continued

Appendix D: Linked Strategies



Community Safety Agreement
 The Kent Community Safety Agreement sets out how partners will work together to address key community safety priorities for Kent, one of which is supporting vulnerable people.



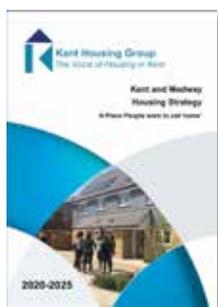
Medway Adult Social Care Strategy
 The strategy sets out Medway’s strategic priorities for action, identifies the improved outcomes for adult social care service users, and looks at how success will be measured.



Kent and Medway Interim Integrated Care Strategy
 The Kent and Medway Integrated Care strategy sets out the shared purpose and common aspiration of partners to work in increasingly joined up ways.



Making Kent Safer
 The making Kent Safer plan sets out the priorities and actions of the police and crime commissioner.



Kent and Medway Housing Strategy
 Sets out the strategic direction for housing across Kent and Medway based on the collective ambitions and aims of local authorities and their housing association partners.



Kent Safeguarding Children Multi-Agency Neglect Strategy
 Sets out the strategic objectives and targets of Kent’s approach to tackling neglect. The strategy also identifies key risk and contributing factors that can have an impact on neglect.



Medway Community Safety Partnership Plan
 The Medway Community Safety Partnership Plan (CSP) brings together a variety of statutory, non-statutory and voluntary organisations with a shared commitment to reduce crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour in Medway.

Appendices continued

Appendix D: Linked Strategies



Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adults Board – Strategic plan

The Kent Community Safety Agreement sets out how partners will work together to address key community safety priorities for Kent, one of which is supporting vulnerable people.



Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adults Board

To safeguard adults who are at risk of sexual exploitation, modern slavery, and human trafficking. The protocol provides guidance to professionals and volunteers from all agencies involved in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all trafficked and exploited adults.



Violence Against Women and Girls Enquiry

The Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy was set up to create a legacy of partnership working designed to make Kent safer for Women and Girls where ever they are.



Serious Violence Duty – Strategy (upcoming)

Kent and Medway has one of 18 Violence Reduction Units (VRU's) formed in 2019 under the Home Office Serious Violence Project's Programme, to drive a whole system, preventative approach to tackling the causes of serious youth violence. The VRU is in the process of developing a strategy based on a strategic needs assessment.

**Kent Drug and Alcohol Strategy
2023-2028**

Better Prevention, Treatment & Recovery and Community Safety.
Kent's 'From Harm to Hope'

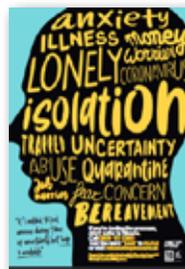
Kent Drug and Alcohol Strategy

The Kent Drug and Alcohol Strategy is in draft format, aiming to be published in 2023. The new strategy aims to prioritise partnership and tackle the consequences of drug and alcohol harm. The Kent strategy will seek to implement a range of harm reduction strategies and ensure there are quality services for very high-risk families, vulnerable people and communities.



Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment Refresh 2022

Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 requires local authorities to assess the need for support for victims of domestic abuse and their children who may need access to safe accommodation. The key objectives of the Domestic Abuse 2022 needs assessment refresh were to update key metrics around the profile of domestic abuse in Kent and to develop an understanding of domestic abuse in relation to children and young people.



Suicide Prevention Strategy

This document aims to help readers understand the national picture and local prevalence of domestic abuse and identify current service provision within Medway.

Appendices continued

Appendix E

Within the strategy we have used language that reflects fairly the language people who have experienced abuse want us to use. The following outlines the meaning behind the language we have used:

Those who have experienced abusive behaviour - individuals who have experienced abuse may not identify as being either a 'victim' or a 'survivor' and we want to be respectful of this. We have therefore focused on the shared experience of abuse.

Those who perpetrate through abuse - we recognise that those who use abusive behaviours may have themselves experienced or witnessed abuse, and we seek to challenge and change these behaviours through prevention and early intervention, immediate need and recovery.

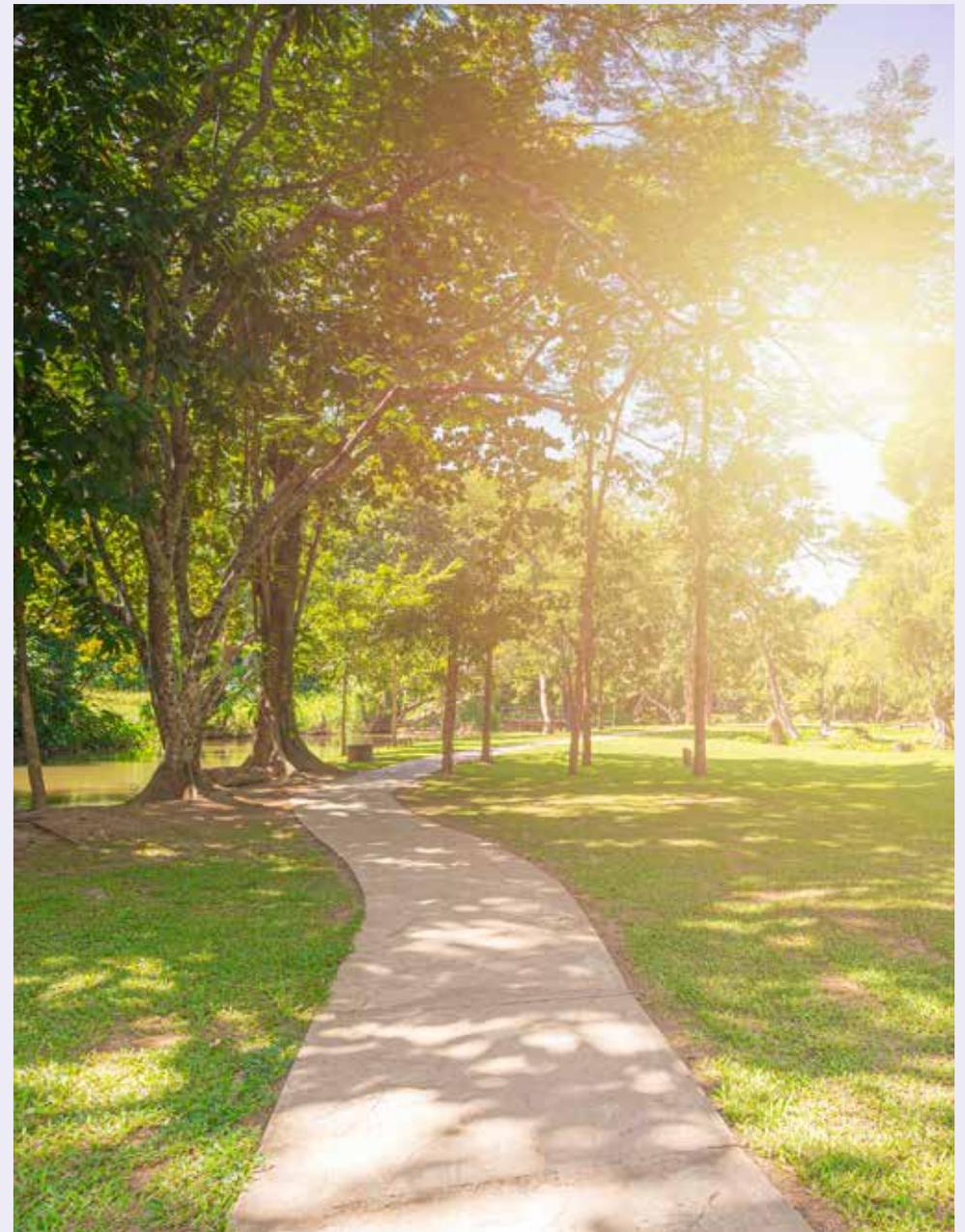
The first step in being able to challenge someone's behaviour is for them to self-identify as using abusive behaviours.

Children who experience abuse - the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 recognises children as victims of domestic abuse if they 'see, hear or otherwise experience the effects of abuse'.

However, this definition also links to that of child abuse (which includes intentional harm, abuse and neglect).

Although these forms of abuse are linked, the strategy is focused on the impact of domestic abuse, we have used the term 'children who experience abuse between their caregivers'.

'By and for' services - these are services that are run by the community that they are designed for.



Further information

For further information about any aspect of this strategy please contact:

Kent County Council

Strategy, Policy and Relationships

PSRPolicy@kent.gov.uk

An executive summary of this strategy has been produced. The executive summary is available in Easy Read and in British Sign Language.

Alternative formats

If you require any of the material in an alternative format or language please email alternativeformats@kent.gov.uk or call **03000 421553** (text relay service number: **18001 03000 421553**). This number goes to an answering machine, which is monitored during office hours.