

**Kent and Medway
Domestic Abuse Strategy
2024 - 2029:
Executive Summary
Consultation draft**



Have your say

We want to hear your feedback on our proposed Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse strategy.

Your views are important in helping us ensure that we continue to develop and improve our support and services for people and families affected by domestic abuse.

The consultation will run from the **24th July – 16th October 2023**. Please visit www.kent.gov.uk/domesticabusestrategy to complete the online questionnaire.

If you have any questions, please contact us on PSRPolicy@kent.gov.uk.

What happens next?

Following the end of the consultation a full analysis and report will be completed and will be presented at governance groups, including the Kent and Medway Domestic and Sexual Abuse Executive Group, before the strategy is agreed and finalised. This will also be published on the above mentioned website.

Accessing support

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

If you need support now this can be accessed by telephoning: Victim Support on 0808 168 9276, or visiting <http://www.domesticabuseservices.org.uk>

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.

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.

Introduction

This is a document produced by the Kent and Medway Domestic and Sexual Abuse Executive Group. The Executive group 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 Executives' 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 is an Executive summary of the full Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy. The full strategy includes further information on all areas within this summary.

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 they have supported the development of themes and priorities which are the focus of this strategy. We want to say thank you to those who have helped. Without your valuable insight this strategy could not be formed.

The Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse strategy identifies joint commitments across the Partnership for those impacted by domestic abuse and is inclusive of those who are abused, those who perpetrate through abusive behaviour, 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.

Domestic Abuse

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 created a statutory definition of domestic abuse for the first time. The Act outlined that 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'.

Behaviour is abusive if it consists of the following:

- physical or sexual behaviour;
- violent or threatening behaviour;
- controlling or coercive behaviour;
- economic abuse;
- psychological or emotional control and abuse.

The definition includes children who witness abuse. Children are recognised as victims of domestic abuse independently of the adult who experiences the abuse.

Additionally, so called 'honour-based abuse' is an umbrella term which may include 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 is a form of domestic abuse.

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) and the Childrens Act (Section 17, 1989) and the Human Rights Act (1998).

The Partnership will work where possible to support those impacted by abuse where limits to public funds may be in place, supporting staff training on available routes to support.

Domestic abuse continued

Key Statistics

National statistics

- The crime survey for England and Wales estimates that 5% of adults over the age of 16 and over (2.4 million) experienced domestic abuse in the year ending 2022, (6.9% women and 3.0% men)¹.
- On average the Police in England and Wales receive over 100 calls relating to domestic abuse every hour ².
- One in seven (14.2%) children and young people under the age of 18 will have lived with domestic abuse at some point in their childhood³.

Kent and Medway

- An average of nearly 34,000 calls per year were made to Kent Police relating to domestic abuse in the last 5 years.
- 40% of domestic abuse incidents reported to Kent Police had a child or children recorded as an involved party.
- 93% of Kent Integrated Domestic Abuse Services clients accessed support within the community and 7% of people were supported in safe accommodation (2022/2023).

Safe Accommodation – data from our refuges Kent (2022/2023)

- 209 adults used Kent refuges.
- 48.8% of people in Kent refuges had accompanying children.
- 3.0% of people in refuge identified as lesbian, gay, or pansexual.
- Of those in refuge, 6.7% had a physical or sensory disability and 1.4% had a learning disability.
- 40% of those in refuge identified as needing mental health support (as a secondary need).
- 36.8% of people in refuge came from outside Kent.
- 63.3% of individuals in refuge identified as “White - British” and 25% identified as other ethnic groups.

Medway (2022/2023)

- 59 people accessed safe accommodation services.
- 13% of people who used services were between 16 – 25 years old.
- 47 children were supported in safe accommodation
- 51% of people reported as having a mental health support need.
- 16% of people accessing refuge had a disability
- 21% of people accessing refuge accommodation identified as black or from a minority ethnic group.
- 113 people have benefited from Sanctuary Scheme adaptations.

These statistics and our needs assessment help shape our commitments within our strategy.

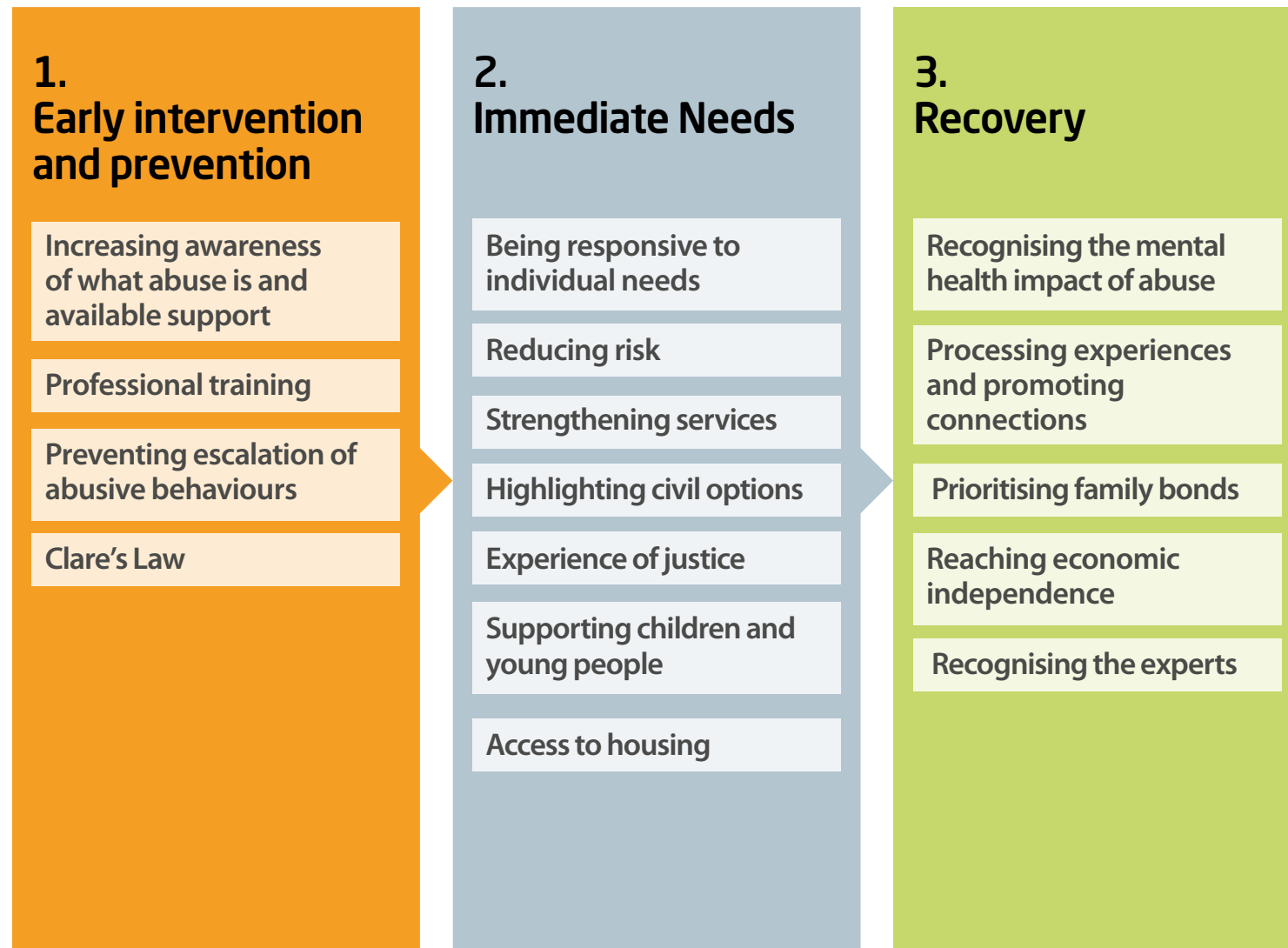
1. Office of National Statistics, Domestic abuse prevalence and trends, England and Wales: year ending March 2022 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabuseprevalenceandtrendsendlandandwales/yearendingmarch2022>

2. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, Increasingly everyone's business: A Progress report on the police response to domestic abuse (Dec 2015) <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/wp-content/uploads/increasingly-everyones-business-domestic-abuse-progress-report.pdf>

3. The impact of domestic abuse on children and young people, available at: <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/impact-on-children-and-young-people/>

Domestic abuse
continued

The commitments of the Partnership are split across three key areas which have been informed by what people with lived experience have told us. These sections are early intervention and prevention, immediate need and recovery.



1. Early intervention and prevention

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

“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 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.”

“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 will increase our capacity to respond to domestic abuse earlier and to prevent abuse from taking place.

Our commitments are summarised here, there is more detail in the full strategy.

1. Increasing awareness of what abuse is and available support

Understanding what a healthy relationship looks like, and what the tactics of abuse include, can support people to recognise what abuse is and the support options available. When a person is ready to reach out for help, they should be able to identify where to turn to for help quickly.

The Partnership will:

- work collaboratively to provide consistent messaging around domestic abuse, increasing

1. Early intervention and prevention continued

awareness that domestic abuse includes coercive, financial, emotional, physical and sexual abuse and can impact anyone;

- increase awareness of the services available and that they are inclusive;
- provide educational resources and proactively reach out to communities who are less likely to access support.

2. Professional training

We need to ensure that professionals working across our services have access to training and development opportunities that give them the skills they need to identify and respond to domestic abuse. Staff should feel confident and empowered to respond to disclosures.

The Partnership will:

- support professionals across our services to understand and identify the many forms of domestic abuse, feel confident in assessing risk and taking a trauma informed response.

3. Preventing the escalation of abusive behaviours

People who perpetrate through abusive behaviours cause significant harm to others. They may themselves have experienced or witnessed abuse and they can be at increased risk of suicide.

We need interventions in place to support the person while disrupting abusive behaviour.

Interventions should be in place to support people identify their harmful behaviour and make changes, whilst services work together to manage risk and prevent further harm.

The Partnership will:

- work with communities to promote positive behaviours and challenge harmful gendered stereotyping;
- support work on bystander interventions and seek opportunities to develop service provision for those showing signs of developing abusive behaviours working with the Violence Reduction Unit, and the Prevent team where appropriate.

4. Clare's Law

Clare's Law gives people the 'right to ask' if their current or ex-partner has previous history of domestic abuse, and the right for Partners to proactively release information if someone is believed to be at significant risk.

By giving people the right information, we can support them to make informed choices about their safety.

The Partnership will:

- increase awareness of Clare's Law, making this as accessible as possible so that people are able to make choices that increase their safety.

2. Immediate Needs

By immediate need 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.

"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."

"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."

"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."

2. Immediate Needs

continued

1. Being responsive to individual needs

The Partnership must ensure that services can meet the needs of our diverse population, recognising that people's experiences of abuse, their journeys, trauma, support needs, and recovery are different.

Some individuals and communities may face multiple and intersecting barriers to support, and our services need to have the knowledge and skills, as well as an understanding of experience to proactively engage and respond.

The Partnership will:

- provide safe accommodation and specialist support that meets the needs of anyone experiencing abuse, strengthening our responses to people facing multiple barriers and increasing service uptake for under-represented groups;
- strengthen links with community groups, faith groups and leaders to expand opportunities for collaborative working, develop needs led work across the specialist 'by and for' market and work to improve the response to those with multiple barriers to access.

2. Reducing risk

Domestic abuse takes multiple forms with risk impacted by a number of factors; this includes whether a person has separated from the

abusive person, whether they are pregnant, their demography and other factors. In keeping people safe, risk must be managed and where possible reduced.

The Partnership will:

- strengthen the processes that enable us to jointly respond to the highest risk domestic abuse cases to increase safety and hold people perpetrating abusive behaviour to account;
- act on learnings when domestic abuse has been fatal or there have been failures in safeguarding adults and children.

3. Strengthening services

The Partnership will work collaboratively to utilise opportunities and commission where gaps in existing services are identified to ensure the strongest support is available for those impacted by domestic abuse.

The Partnership will:

- centralise and share information on commissioned services to increase awareness of available interventions and work to identify opportunities to extend collaborative commissioning working with the marketplace.

2. Immediate Needs

continued

4. Highlighting civil options

There are civil options available to people experiencing abuse, such as non-molestation orders, and occupation orders which can help to protect a person and their children, and disrupt the behaviour of the person perpetrating through abusive behaviours.

The Partnership will:

- increase awareness of civil options and ensure that professionals are able to signpost to relevant services;
- support the investigation of breaches of protective orders.

5. Experience 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.

The Partnership will:

- increase professional training and advocate for greater specialist domestic abuse support for those who are going through the criminal justice system.

6. Supporting children and young people

Children who witness domestic abuse are victims of abuse in their own right. As a Partnership, we will develop our response to children who have experienced abuse, including making sure services are available to support them.

The Partnership will:

- consistently fund support for children in safe accommodation, ensuring they have access to services that are age appropriate, and meets their needs. We will develop projects to minimise time outside of education;
- seek to support the family as a whole, ensuring information is shared appropriately where a child or young person witnesses abuse, recognising the importance of children's lived experiences in designing services and influencing governance.

7. Access to housing

Domestic abuse may impact a person's ability to remain in their own home safely. As a Partnership we are committed to improving access to safe and stable accommodation for people experiencing abuse.

The Partnership will:

- explore projects which strengthen the housing response to those who are unsafe at home, including options for specialised referral and support routes;
- recognise the importance of social and family networks and support people to find more permanent, settled accommodation.

3. 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. The process of recovery is personal and is not linear. The Partnership want Kent & Medway to be a place where people have the opportunity to thrive, to recover from harm to support healing and resilience.

"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."

*"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."

1. Recognising the mental health impact of abuse

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. Many of those affected have mental health support needs and should be able to access support that is tailored to their needs.

To ensure that people get the support they need, the Partnership will:

- promote better understanding of domestic abuse within mental health settings and support access to mental health services that are trauma informed and responsive to the needs of people who have been impacted by abuse.

3. Recovery continued

2. Processing experiences and promoting connections

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 process the effect that this has had is an important step in recovery, for both adults and children.

The Partnership will:

- work to ensure there is equitable and accessible access to group work programmes for adults and children in a wide range of settings to encourage participation;
- support initiatives to build confidence and grow social support networks.

3. Prioritising family bonds

Domestic abuse can both directly and indirectly disrupt the relationship between a parent and their child. A person perpetrating abuse may use tactics that undermine safety and relationships between family members. Supporting all members of the family to process their experiences, rebuild strong healthy bonds and giving parents and children new strategies after abuse is a crucial part of recovery.

The Partnership will:

- investigate an integrated whole family approach

to support, exploring services which aid parenting after experiencing abuse;

- provide services that aim to increase the safety of children by working with the abusive parent to increase their insight into the impact of their behaviours, whilst holding them accountable for the abuse.

4. Reaching economic independence

Financial 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.

The Partnership will:

- raise awareness of financial abuse and the impacts and consequences of this, both within our staff and within our communities;
- work to establish clear routes of support for people who experience financial abuse.

3. Recovery continued

5. Recognising the experts

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.

The Partnership will:

- recognise the importance of peer-support programmes and interventions that work with the local community and informal networks and 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.



Safe Accommodation

The full strategy includes details on Kent County Council and Medway Council’s statutory requirements for people impacted by domestic abuse in safe accommodation. Here we outline the identified gaps in provision and how we will, or have met these gaps.

Kent

Gap identified	How we will or have met the gap
Support services for children and young people in safe accommodation.	We will commission support for children in safe accommodation which includes access to group support, one to one and peer support.
Access to services for people with multiple barriers such as dependency and mental health support requirements.	Specialist independent domestic abuse advisors will continue to support access. Additional training with domestic abuse, mental health and drug and alcohol services will be developed.
Access to secure secondary accommodation options when moving out of safe accommodation.	Tenancy Support Officers have been introduced to increase support and advocacy for those moving from safe accommodation. Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance Accreditation is being sought by all tier 2 authorities, supported by KCC.
Sanctuary options (where a person is offered support and security to enable them to stay in their home).	We will commission a Sanctuary service which will extend the availability of services within Kent.
Access to refuge accommodation for men.	A pilot which will support men in safe accommodation is being developed.

Safe Accommodation
continued

Medway

Gap identified

How we will or have met the gap

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

We will continue to commission an Access Independent Domestic Violence Adviser to offer specialist support for those with barriers to access.

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

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

Support in temporary accommodation.

An additional Independent Domestic Violence Advisor has been brought in to support people facing multiple barriers to access, where Sanctuary measures are 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 and play therapy, for people in both refuge and dispersed safe.

Access to refuge accommodation for men and others who cannot access refuge.

Medway has commissioned a dispersed accommodation scheme for those people where refuge is not suitable/accessible.

How we will measure success

The Domestic and Sexual Abuse Executive Group will oversee a delivery plan managed with regular updates on progress being made across our governance structures.

In addition to monitoring delivery of our plan we will use a small number of focussed activity indicators to monitor our progress and to identify where we may need to make changes.

More details of how we will measure our performance are available in the full strategy.

In partnership with and supported by



Further information

For further information about any aspect of this executive summary please contact:

Kent County Council

Strategy, Policy and Relationships

PSRPolicy@kent.gov.uk

Alternative formats

If you require any of the consultation 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.