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**North Somerset Domestic Abuse
Strategy
2020-2023**

Introduction

This strategy sets out the key priorities for the North Somerset Community Safety Partnership in tackling domestic abuse and outlines the areas for action over the next three years.

Victims, survivors, their children and loved ones deserve help at the time of crisis and to be kept safe. They deserve help to cope and recover from the trauma, support from the criminal justice system to bring those responsible to justice, and action to drive this traumatic and lifechanging crime from our society.

If someone is living with domestic abuse, or has experienced it in the past, it is likely to have an impact upon their mental health and self-esteem as well as upon their physical health and safety¹. If they are also isolated from friends and family and their finances and activities are being controlled; then their options to escape the abuse may be very limited. This can be particularly true if they face another barrier to accessing support, including having a disability, being older, living in a rural area, speaking English as a second language or being part of a community, which is vulnerable to other abuse, such as Gypsies, Roma and Travellers and the LGBT community.

Women are more likely to endure repeated and severe forms of abuse including physical, emotional or psychological abuse. As a result, they are more likely to be frightened and traumatised and to suffer from long term impacts such as disability or mental ill health¹ or to be killed than male victims of domestic abuse².

However, a man's individual experience of domestic abuse can be as severe and traumatic as that of any woman and male victims equally require support which is tailored to their need and risk level.

In developing this strategy, partners have worked together to consider how we can secure the best outcomes, learning from experience and survivor voice, considering evidence of need and looking at national best practice to frame our plans.

¹Walby & Towers, 2017, Walby & Allen, 2004

² Dobash & Dobash, 2004, Hester 2013, Myhill, 2015, Myhill 2017

Thanks to Birmingham Domestic Abuse Prevention Strategy 2018-23

National Strategy

The government's [Strategy to End Violence Against Women and Girls](#) sets out the national agenda.

In addition, the [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) received Royal Assent in April 2021. This makes a clear statement that local areas are expected to work in partnership to develop and deliver ways to support victims of domestic abuse and to challenge those who perpetrate it. The Act is intended to improve the response to domestic abuse as follows:

- **Protect and support victims** – to enhance the safety of victims and the support they receive;
- **Transform the justice process** – to provide support to victims throughout the justice process and an effective response to perpetrators to end the cycle of abuse;
- **Improve performance** – to drive consistency and better performance in the response to domestic abuse; and
- **Promote awareness** – put domestic abuse at the top of everybody's agenda.

North Somerset Council have recently commissioned a Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment, which is currently in draft form. This needs assessment has been used to inform our strategic priorities. It is also one of the statutory requirements placed on local authorities by the Domestic Abuse Act.

Definitions

Domestic abuse is defined as:

Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality.

The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:

- psychological
- physical
- violent or threatening
- economical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional

(Home Office, 2021)

Controlling behaviour is a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate or dependent by isolating them from their friends, family and other sources of support, taking control of their resources, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape.

Coercive behaviour is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten another person.³

Coercive control is “the micromanagement of everyday life. Micromanagement crushes the spirit even more fundamentally than the deprivation of basic necessities because it leaves little space for a person to breathe”.⁴

³https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/142701/guide-on-definition-of-dv.pdf

⁴ Stark, 2007

Economic abuse involves behaviours that interfere with an individual's ability to acquire, use and maintain economic resources such as money, transportation and utilities. It can be controlling or coercive. It can make the individual economically dependent on the abuser, thereby limiting their ability to escape and access safety.

This definition makes it clear that domestic abuse is not limited to physical violence. This wider understanding of what is meant by domestic abuse was underpinned by the Serious Crime Act, 2015 which made controlling or coercive behaviour a criminal offence and is also reflective of the new Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

Sexual Violence is any behaviour of a sexual nature, which is unwanted and committed against someone without the persons freely giving consent. (*Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014*).

This includes but is not limited to – sexual abuse within families, sexual exploitation by individuals and/or groups, online sexual abuse.

Sexual Offences include sexual activity with a child under 16 years of age and are governed by the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (England & Wales). This includes rape and sexual assault.

National Context:

In the year ending **March 2020**, an estimated **2.3 million adults aged 16 to 74 years experienced domestic abuse** in the last year (1.6 million women and 757,000 men).

Each year, more than 100,000 adults are at a high risk of being murdered or seriously injured as a result of domestic abuse. This often occurs within the family home. Over 130,000 children will live in these homes.

Domestic abuse leads to homelessness – 12% (6,820 of 56,580 households accepted as homeless in England in 2017/18) lost their home due to violent breakdown of a former relationship. (*source: MHCLG Table 773: Households accepted by local authorities as owed a main homelessness duty by priority need category, England*).

The cost of domestic abuse is estimated to be approximately £66bn for victims of domestic abuse in England and Wales for the year ending March 2017.

4 in 5 survivors of domestic abuse do not report it to the Police

Only 15% of those who experience sexual violence report it to the Police

2 in 4 UK rapes are committed by a current or ex-partner

Local Context:

During the past 3-years, a yearly increase of domestic abuse crimes and incidents has been recorded in North Somerset, peaking at 2,764 domestic abuse crimes in 2020-21. This is an increase of almost 300 recorded domestic abuse crimes as compared to 2018-19.

The adult population (16+) in North Somerset is currently 175,933. 32,920 of these people will have experienced domestic abuse.

10,120 will have experienced domestic abuse in the past year. Only 3,740 of these survivors are visible to domestic abuse services.

Strategic Framework

Our vision - To work together to reduce the incidence of domestic abuse, ensure the safety and empowerment by those affected by it (both adults and children) and to seek to challenge the behaviour of those perpetrating it.

The North Somerset domestic abuse strategy takes a public health approach. Our **aims** are to:



1. PREVENT

Primary interventions - actions aimed at the whole community, regardless of their experience of domestic abuse.

2. PROTECT

Secondary interventions aim to identify domestic abuse and provide help as soon as possible so that it does not recur or escalate.

3. PROVIDE

Tertiary interventions provide direct support to victims with the aim of reducing the risk of domestic abuse and its impact.

Priority areas/current gaps:

Targeted education in schools, training and awareness-raising for staff to enable earlier intervention and prevention.

Implementation of Part 4 Statutory Duties for Local Authorities as set out in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 to provide support for survivors and children across all levels of risk to access effective and appropriate specialist domestic abuse support and accommodation.

Support for perpetrators through early intervention and behaviour change programmes.

North Somerset Domestic Abuse Strategy 2020-2023 – Overview

Aims:	Actions:	Outcomes:
1. Prevent - Universal support & changing attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change young people’s understanding and reduce societal acceptance of domestic abuse. • Awareness raising and provision of information and training to increase reporting of domestic abuse and accessing of services. • Challenge perpetrators’ attitudes and behaviour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survivors, children and perpetrators are identified earlier and provided with appropriate, effective level of support and intervention to break to cycle of abuse and reduce impact on their lives. • Communities and professionals understand what domestic abuse is, the dynamics involved and know how to appropriately respond. • Increased reporting of abuse crimes to police and reducing repeated incidents. • Domestic abuse training is available to all relevant practitioners, organisations and businesses.
2. Protect – Early identification and early help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of domestic abuse at an earlier stage and provision of support to prevent escalation or repeated abuse. • Multi-agency partnership working to identify risk early on and provide appropriate support. • Support for survivors and children to escape domestic abuse. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and young people at risk of harm are identified and referred appropriately • Survivors have improved resources to remain safe and have their accommodation needs. • Support for survivors and their children provided within specialist safe accommodation.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved support through health settings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved access to support services for survivors and their children through a variety of settings eg health, GP.
Provide – Protection from harm and support to recover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of high quality specialist domestic abuse support through commissioned service provider. • Specialist support for children affected by domestic abuse within safe accommodation settings. • Support for survivors of domestic abuse within the court system. • Challenge abusive behaviour and hold perpetrators to account. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All survivors have equal access to services, which appropriately meet their needs across all levels of risk. • Effective service evaluation and reviews of domestic homicides to ensure lessons are learned and best practice applied throughout all services and pathways. • Survivors and their children experience improved health, resilience and quality of life. • Survivors have increased access to justice and perpetrators are held to account through the criminal justice system.

This strategy is currently in draft form and will be reviewed and amended in line with Government guidance and policy update.

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