

North Somerset

Domestic Abuse Strategy 2020-2023

"What tends to happen with domestic violence is it starts off something that you can't necessarily recognise as domestic violence. So you just kind of think 'okay, that just must have been weird' and then your tolerance changes. So you might accept him, you know, like shoving you into a wall in the first six months. And then by the third year, that might be him pushing you over in the street, but that hasn't happened straight away, it's happened over time. So your tolerance levels have changed"

Survivor, North Somerset

"If I'd have had somewhere I could have gone in the dead of the night when I was getting beaten up, I would have done. One night, until he calmed down, because what I used to have to do is just go and hide in a bush at the street. Wait until daylight and then go home."

Survivor, North Somerset

"I work really hard to have a successful business, but I haven't got any money because I've been paying off his debts, but because he very clearly put them all in my name there was nothing I could do about it unless I went bankrupt, which I couldn't do because I owned my own business."

Survivor, North Somerset



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 health 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.

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

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

Thanks to Birmingham Domestic Abuse Prevention Strategy 2018-23

Local Strategic Context:

Domestic abuse is a cross-cutting issue; impacting upon individual's and families' health, their quality of life and their safety. Therefore, domestic abuse requires a response from a range of key agencies whose remit includes health, criminal justice, substance misuse support and social services. Work to reduce domestic abuse is carried out by many single agencies, as part of their core business, as well as through joined up actions developed via multi agency plans and strategies.

Work to address domestic abuse contributes to many multi-agency strategies in North Somerset, including the North Somerset Sustainable Community Strategy, 2008-26, North Somerset Local Safeguarding Adult Board Strategic Plan 2018 – 2021 and more recently as part of the North Somerset Housing Strategy, which is currently in draft form.

This Domestic Abuse Strategy also links into the objectives contained within the **North Somerset Council Corporate Plan**

National Strategic Context:

In July 2021 the Home Office published its new VAWG strategy. **Strategy to End Violence Against Women and Girls** sets out the national agenda.

The strategy highlights a number of important challenges in responding to domestic abuse including the fact that prosecutions are showing a downward trend. It states that fewer cases of domestic abuse, rape and sexual assault are being charged by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and progressing to court.

In 2019/20, 34% fewer domestic abuse cases were prosecuted compared to 2014/15. At the higher spectrum it also highlights the number of homicides, of which domestic homicide accounts for around a fifth of all homicides, and it is estimated that the cost of each homicide to society is £3.7 million (2021/22 prices).

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 survivors** – to enhance the safety of survivors and children 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.

Definitions

The new Domestic Abuse Act (2021) has created, for the first time, a cross-government statutory definition of domestic abuse, to ensure that domestic abuse is properly understood, considered unacceptable and actively challenged across statutory agencies and in public attitudes. The definition of domestic abuse is in two parts. The first part deals with the relationship between the abuser and the abused. The second part defines what constitutes abusive behaviour.

Statutory Definition of abuse (Domestic Abuse Act 2021):

Behaviour of a person (“A”) towards another person (“B”) is “domestic abuse” if:

- A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and
- the behaviour is abusive.

Behaviour is “abusive” if it consists of any of the following:

- physical or sexual abuse;
- violent or threatening behaviour;
- controlling or coercive behaviour;
- economic abuse (see subsection (4));
- psychological, emotional or other abuse; and it does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.

“Economic abuse” means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on B’s ability to:

- acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or
- obtain goods or services.

For the purposes of this Act A’s behaviour may be behaviour “towards” B despite the fact that it consists of conduct directed at another person (for example, B’s child).

The Act considered two people are “personally connected” to each other if any of the following applies:

- they are, or have been, married to each other;
- they are, or have been, civil partners of each other;
- they have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated);
- they have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been terminated);
- they are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other;
- they each have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child
- they are relatives.

As well as developing a definition in statute, the Act (2021) also positions children as direct victims in their own right for the first time. That means any reference within the Act to a victim of domestic abuse includes a reference to a child who:

- sees or hears, or experiences the effects of, the abuse, and
- is related to A or B.

Local Authority Statutory Duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021:

The new Act includes a number of measures for Local Authorities including placing a statutory duty on Tier 1 Local Authorities to provide support to victims of domestic abuse and their children within refuges and other safe accommodation. It has created a four-part statutory framework for the delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in safe accommodation and provide clarity over governance and accountability:

- Assess the need for accommodation-based domestic abuse support for all victims in their area, including those who require cross-border support.
- Develop and publish a strategy for the provision of such support to cover their locality, having regard to the needs assessment.
- Give effect to the strategy (through commissioning/de-commissioning decisions).
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy.

North Somerset Council is required to appoint a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board which it will consult as it performs certain specified functions.

Within the Act there is a definition to explain what safe accommodation and support means.

This duty does not require local authorities to provide domestic abuse victims with accommodation, it requires them to assess the need for accommodation-based support and deliver a strategy to meet this need. It therefore does not replace existing housing and homelessness duties.

North Somerset Council, along with neighbouring local authorities, have commissioned a comprehensive Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment to understand the current support available and to identify areas of improvement as well as gaps in provision. This needs assessment has been used to inform our strategic priorities. Commissioning decisions in relation to accommodation and support will be based on evidence of local need as established through this needs assessment.

Defining safe accommodation

Safe accommodation includes;

- Refuge accommodation
- Specialist safe accommodation
- Dispersed accommodation
- Sanctuary Schemes
- Move-on and/or second stage accommodation
- Other forms of domestic abuse emergency accommodation

Temporary accommodation such as homelessness hostels, hotels and bed and breakfast accommodation is not considered under this definition.

Defining support

- Overall management of services within relevant accommodation
- Support with the day-to-day running of the service
- Advocacy support
- Domestic abuse prevention advice
- Specialist support for victims
- Children's support
- Housing-related support
- Advice service
- Counselling and therapy

National Context:

Domestic abuse is a widespread issue, affecting millions across the UK. On average the police receive an emergency call relating to domestic abuse every 30 seconds³.

It is estimated that each year an estimated 5.5% of adults aged 16 to 74 years (2.3 million) experienced domestic abuse⁴. Of these, up to 100,000 victims are at risk of being murdered or seriously injured as a result of the abuse they are experiencing (SafeLives). However, the problem is much bigger than shown in official statistics. Researchers⁵ estimate that domestic abuse statistics are 140% higher than those stated in the Crime Survey for England and Wales.

Refuge estimates that on average two women a week are killed by perpetrators of domestic abuse and up to 30 women every day will attempt to take their own life due to the abuse. Domestic abuse-related homicides account for approximately 35% of all homicides in England and Wales; on average two women a week are killed by

their current or former partners.

Data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) highlights that 58% of women murdered by their partner were still in a relationship with them and 29% were separated. A 2009 national analysis of Serious Case Reviews found evidence of past or present domestic abuse in over half (53 per cent) of cases⁶.

Home Office (2019) research shows that domestic abuse had an economic and social cost of around £66bn in 2016/17. This huge sum includes amongst other costs: the social cost of physical and mental harm, the cost of policing, justice, medical and mental health response and lost economic potential from people unable to be at work.

Local Context:

In 2020 the total population in North Somerset was 215,052. To estimate the prevalence of domestic abuse we consider the population aged over 16 in line with the statutory definition of domestic abuse. There are 175,933 individuals aged 16 or over in North Somerset of which we can estimate around 32,920 will have experienced domestic abuse over their lifetime.

On an annual basis, this equates to 10,120 individuals every year who experience domestic abuse (both familial and intimate partner violence). Police data highlights that in North Somerset 40.1% of all violent offences are domestic abuse related.

3 Office for National Statistics citing Homicide Index, Home Office (Published Online: Office for National Statistics, 2015 – Go to the first bulletin table and click on the tab labelled Figure 2.5)

4 (ONS, 2020)

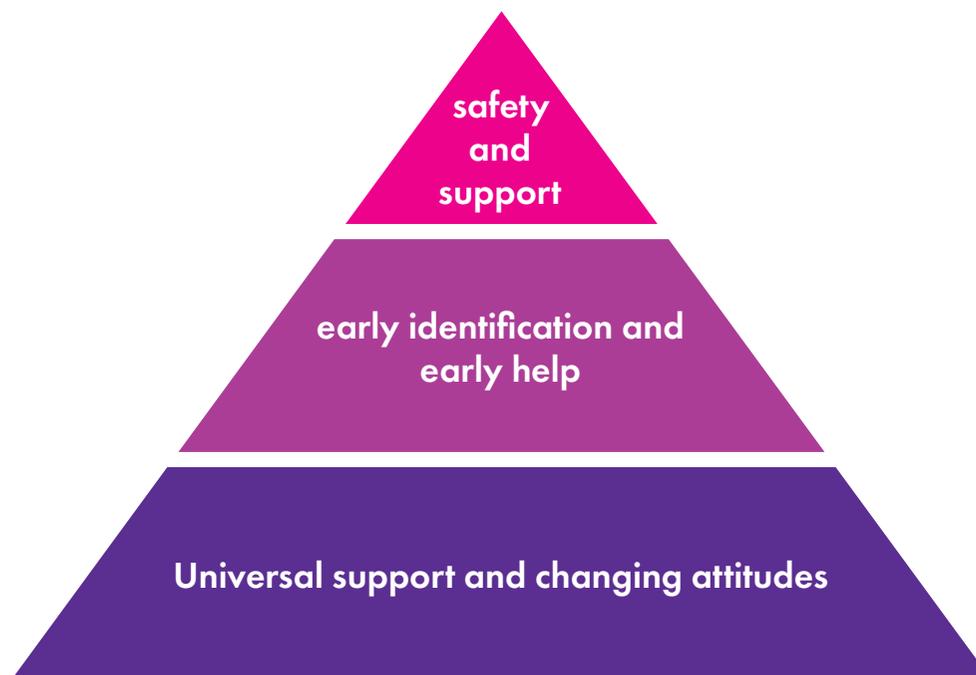
5 Pease and Farrell, Home Office Research Group

6 Brandon, M., Bailey, S., Belderson, P., Gardner, R., Sidebottom, P., Dodsworth, J., Warren, C. and Black, J. (2009) Understanding Serious Case Reviews and their Impact: A Biennial Analysis of Serious Case Reviews 2005-7. London: Department for Children Schools and Families.

North Somerset Domestic Abuse 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:



tertiary

secondary

primary

3. Provide

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

2. Protect

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

1. Prevent

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

North Somerset Domestic Abuse Strategy 2020-2023 – Overview

Aims:	Objectives:	Outcomes:
<p>1. Prevent – Universal support and changing attitudes</p>	<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.
<p>2. Protect – Early identification and early help</p>	<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. ● Improved support through health settings. 	<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. ● Improved access to support services for survivors and their children through a variety of settings eg health, GP.

Aims:

3. **Provide** –
Protection from harm
and support to recover

Objectives:

- 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.

Outcomes:

- 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 will be reviewed and amended in line with Government guidance and policy update.

For further information please contact Hannah.gray@n-somerset.gov.uk

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