

# 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 safety<sup>1</sup>. 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 abuse<sup>2</sup>.

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.

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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

# North Somerset Council Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment – Analysis of needs and gaps in current provision

One of the key statutory duties placed on North Somerset Council by the new Domestic Abuse Act 2021 has been to commission an independent Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment to gain a greater understanding of the level of support needs and current service provision for victims and survivors including children, in safe accommodation.

The findings from this needs assessment have been used to inform and underpin the development of this strategy to ensure we are strengthening and broadening our local offer of support.

The needs assessment was developed using a mixed methodological approach, combining national and local data with the voices of those with lived experience across North Somerset. Specifically it included;

- A document review of local policies, strategies and previous reviews (including Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs))
- A review of national prevalence data and localised estimates

- A review of local data from statutory, universal, voluntary and specialist services
- An online survey for victims and survivors of domestic abuse
- Interviews with victims and survivors of domestic abuse

## Recommendations included:

1. Development of a public awareness campaign focussing on improved awareness within the population around the dynamics of domestic abuse, and that non-physical violence is still abuse
2. Public awareness campaigns including information about how perpetrators will be prevented from abuse (e.g. through protective measures) to increase disclosure and help seeking as most victims note fear of the perpetrator as the biggest barrier to disclosure in North Somerset.
3. Exploration of co-located models with the commissioned service to ensure all health settings, but particularly the GP

and mental health services, are able to act as a first point of contact for victims who are most likely to disclose there.

4. Ensure domestic abuse service provision directly offers, or has established pathways with mental health services as this is the highest support need identified throughout the needs assessment.
5. Employers were a key community disclosure point for victims in North Somerset. The local DA partnership should consider an audit of how many organisations have a DA policy including training
6. North Somerset DA partnership should consider a champions network with employers across North Somerset to increase disclosure and ensure employers are aware of pathways to support.
7. The DA partnership should consider conducting a trauma informed working audit across agencies to ensure all agencies understand trauma responses and how to work with victims of domestic abuse

8. Domestic abuse services should be developed with clear pathways with the financial, debt and legal sector locally so that survivors have access to meeting their practical economic needs which was a significant support need identified.
9. Joint working with other regional Local Authorities and Avon and Somerset police to ensure target hardening and the use of protective orders such as DVPN/O's are included within local data collection dashboards. This should include the number applied for, demographics of the victim/perpetrator and support and signposting undertaken.
10. Work with housing and the specialist domestic abuse service to create spaces for victims with a disability as there are currently none available.
11. North Somerset domestic abuse partnership should review the outcomes for perpetrators after a DVPN/O has expired to track whether they return to the home or move on.
12. North Somerset domestic abuse partnership should work with probation to understand the cohort of perpetrators accessing probation services to understand the disproportionate number with a disability
13. Commissioners should work with substance use and mental health services locally to ensure pathways of support are available and skilled to work with perpetrators of domestic abuse, including knowledge of the referral pathways in to specialist services.
14. North Somerset domestic abuse partnership should continuously audit the data all services collect in relation to the age of victims and perpetrators in order to better assess the local need for the next needs assessment.
15. Review the multi agency training offer to all professionals to ensure it includes specific content around identifying and supporting older victims of domestic abuse given the slightly higher population.

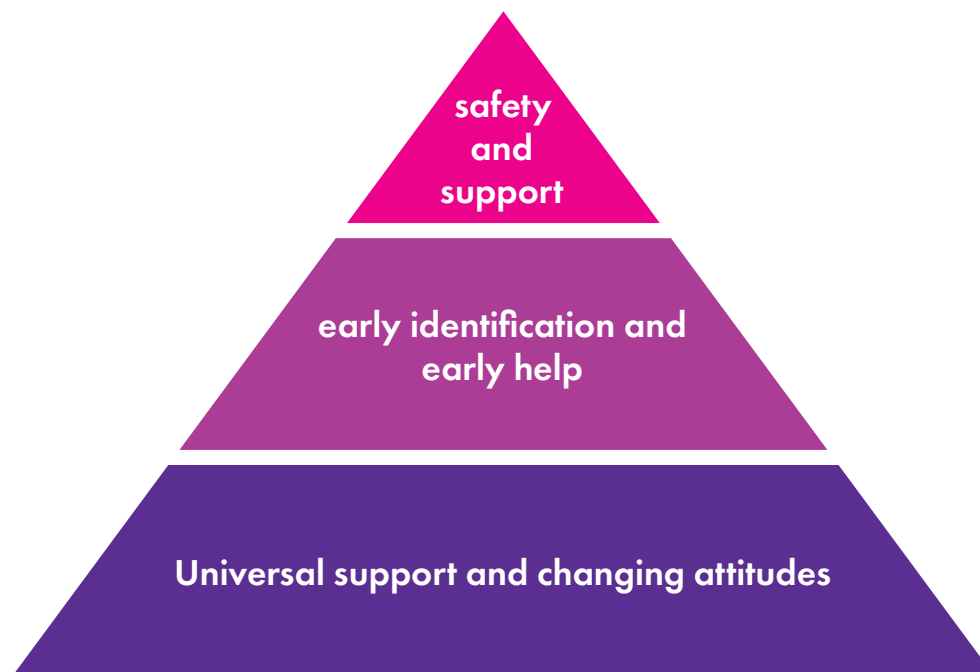
**These recommendations have been incorporated in our strategic work programmes. Progress of strategic action plan will be reviewed quarterly by the North Somerset Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership Board.**



# 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

## 3. Provide

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

secondary

## 2. Protect

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

primary

## 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. <b>Prevent</b> – Universal support and changing attitudes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Change young people’s understanding and reduce societal acceptance of domestic abuse.</li> <li>● Awareness raising and provision of information and training to increase reporting of domestic abuse and accessing of services.</li> <li>● Challenge perpetrators’ attitudes and behaviour.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 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.</li> <li>● Communities and professionals understand what domestic abuse is, the dynamics involved and know how to appropriately respond.</li> <li>● Increased reporting of abuse crimes to police and reducing repeated incidents.</li> <li>● Domestic abuse training is available to all relevant practitioners, organisations and businesses.</li> </ul>
<p>2. <b>Protect</b> – Early identification and early help</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Identification of domestic abuse at an earlier stage and provision of support to prevent escalation or repeated abuse.</li> <li>● Multi-agency partnership working to identify risk early on and provide appropriate support.</li> <li>● Support for survivors and children to escape domestic abuse.</li> <li>● Improved support through health settings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Children and young people at risk of harm are identified and referred appropriately</li> <li>● Survivors have improved resources to remain safe and have their accommodation needs.</li> <li>● Support for survivors and their children provided within specialist safe accommodation.</li> <li>● Improved access to support services for survivors and their children through a variety of settings eg health, GP.</li> </ul>

### 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.

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