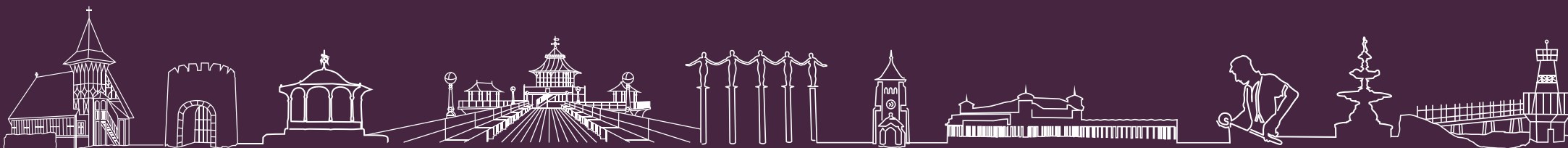
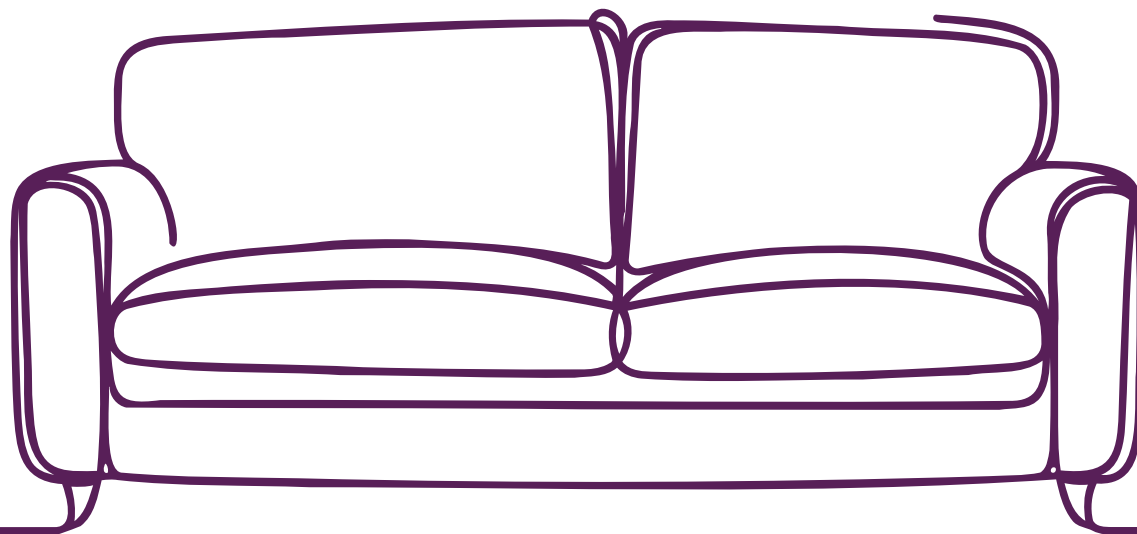


North Somerset Council
**Domestic Abuse
Partnership Strategy**
2024-2027



Introduction

This strategy sets out the key priorities for the North Somerset Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership and details the areas of work we will take collectively and individually as a partnership to tackle domestic abuse and violence against women and girls (VAWG) during the next three years.

All victims, survivors, their children and families deserve to be safe and free from domestic abuse. They deserve to receive appropriate and effective support from the criminal justice system to bring those responsible to justice, as well as support for local agencies and services to support people to recover and move forward with their lives.

Both national and local data demonstrates that 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 (Walby & Towers, 2017). Nationally, around 80%

of victims of domestic homicide are women (Gov, 2024). A man's experience of domestic abuse can be just as severe and traumatic as that of any woman and male victims equally require support which is tailored to their need and risk level. We understand that domestic abuse can happen to anyone regardless of gender. Intersectionality means that some survivors will face additional barriers in recognising domestic abuse and seeking support. We want to ensure that all survivors of domestic abuse are recognised and have equitable access to their support, which meets their needs by professionals who are suitably trained and aware of domestic abuse, intersectionality and the need for a trauma-informed response.

In developing this strategy, key 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 inform our plans and ways of working in North Somerset.

The national picture

Over the past three years there has been considerable advances in both legislation and policy surrounding domestic abuse nationally, increasing recognition and improving practice and support.

The Domestic Abuse Act, which came into force in 2021, has expanded the definition of domestic abuse to include emotional, non-physical forms such as coercive control as well as economic abuse. It recognises children who see, hear or experience the effects of domestic abuse as victims and places statutory duties on local authorities to provide safe, specialist accommodation support for those experiencing domestic abuse, including:

- Provide support for survivors and their children in refuges and other safe accommodation.
- Appoint a multi-agency partnership board.
- Conduct and produce a Needs Assessment.
- Publish a strategy.

- Ensure sufficient provision for minoritised groups, including disabled people, older people, male survivors.
- Report back to the Government on progress.

It is important to note however, 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. This strategy therefore is designed to complement existing local authority housing and homelessness duties.

This legislation along with others builds on the inclusion of domestic abuse within other existing legislation such as Section 42 of the Care Act 2014, which sets out a clear legal framework for how local health and care systems should protect adults at risk of abuse or neglect. It specifies that freedom from abuse (and neglect) is a key aspect of a person's wellbeing.

The Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 introduces new support requirements to protect victims from further trauma, including a new duty to collaborate between the local authority, Police & Crime Commissioner and Integrated Care Board

in providing victim support services and changes to public protection decisions.

Building on the government's Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan (2022), the Domestic Abuse Commissioners Office has piloted a new Domestic Homicide Oversight Mechanism to strengthen learning from Domestic Homicide Reviews. This coincides with the Home Office conducting a consultation and review of existing DHR Statutory Guidance.

The local picture

Domestic abuse is a cross-cutting issue; impacting upon individual's and families' health and wellbeing, their quality of life and their safety. Our domestic abuse response therefore includes wider agencies whose remits include health, criminal justice, substance misuse support, education and social services as well as the important role of voluntary sector services, faith groups and peer support groups. 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.

North Somerset Council, in partnership with neighbouring local authorities, has commissioned a comprehensive Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment to understand the current picture of domestic abuse both locally and regionally and to identify areas of improvement as well as gaps in provision.

Domestic abuse local needs assessment recommendations

A comprehensive Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment was undertaken in December 2024 across North Somerset and with neighbouring local authority areas, which has made the following recommendations. The needs assessment and survivor online survey results have been used to inform our strategic priorities:

Enhance services

- Understand barriers to reporting domestic abuse and engagement with services by means of further consultation with service users and wider services engagement.
- Maximise available resources to respond to the increasing complexity of domestic abuse in order to break the preventative – recovery cycle building on trauma informed approaches. This includes effective pathways for all domestic abuse community and safe accommodation settings.
- Find ways to challenge abusive behaviour and support perpetrators to change’.

Training and education

- Ensure up to date and regular training in responding to local need and changes in legislation, across all statutory and key voluntary/community sector partners. Policy Development.
- Further embed and develop our joined-up strategic responses to domestic abuse at Local Authority and regional level for both community and safe accommodation responses.
- Ensure that children and young people affected by domestic abuse are supported, are recognised as victims, and are supported to access appropriate services, whether in community or safe accommodation.
- Ensure that everyone affected by domestic abuse is enabled to access support through an embedded healthcare response across all settings.

Monitoring and evaluation

- Use the needs assessment supported by funding mapping to give a clear evidence base to identify where funding is most needed to deliver targeted responses that meet local needs – for both community and safe accommodation specialist domestic abuse services.
- Standardise data collection and enhance collaboration for consistent insights into domestic abuse trends.
- Implement a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the effectiveness of housing interventions and make data-driven improvements.
- Collect and analyse data on housing outcomes for survivors to identify gaps and areas for improvement.

Community awareness and education:

- Raise awareness within the community about the availability of safe accommodation options and how to access them.
- Provide education and training for community members and organisations on the importance of safe housing for survivors of domestic abuse.

Work to address domestic abuse contributes to many other multi-agency strategies in North Somerset, including:

- **North Somerset Local Safeguarding Adult Board Strategic Plan 2023-2026**
- **North Somerset Children's Partnership Strategic Plan 2023-2026**
- **North Somerset Housing Strategy 2022-2027**

North Somerset Domestic Abuse Strategic Framework

Our partnership 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 challenge the behaviour of those perpetrating it.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 defines domestic abuse, as:

“Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, threatening behaviour, violence, or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are personally connected to each other.”

The Act also recognises children who are related to the abused or abuser, and who see, hear, or experience the effects of the abuse, are recognised as victims and should also receive specialist, appropriate support.

This strategy is written in the context of the above legal definition, which recognises all forms of abuse including non-physical violence.

We understand that domestic abuse can affect anyone, regardless of age, sex, sexuality, gender, race, religion or belief, socioeconomic circumstances or any disability or limiting condition they may have. It can also affect people at any time throughout their life, from pre-birth, childhood, to working age adults and the elderly. Our local response is driven by a risk-led response and aims to ensure that there are services for all victims of domestic abuse.

North Somerset Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership seeks to build on work carried out in our previous strategy, which created specific pathways of support for adult survivors, children and young people as well as a dedicated pathway of support for those who harm. We want to continue to build on this work and recognise that domestic abuse is increasing both in North Somerset and year on year nationally with the Office of National Statistics reporting police flagged 857,810 recorded offences as domestic abuse-related in year ending March 2024 (ONS website, 2024).

Refuge, the national domestic abuse charity, estimates that police receive a domestic abuse call on average every 30 seconds, with 1 in 4

women and 1 in 6 men in England and Wales will experience domestic abuse in her lifetime. Rising numbers of domestic abuse incidents have resulted in a surge in demand on already stretched public services, with support often coming at crisis point for survivors. We also know that data only gives us part of the picture and there will be many victims who are not represented in any data sets and remain hidden due to underreporting and a lack of recognition.

By implementing a tiered approach to tackling domestic abuse, this strategy aims to ensure we are working to prevent abuse from happening in the first place and providing support and early intervention to the whole family to reduce risk of harm. This requires a system-wide response to domestic abuse to ensure that every contact survivors have with services, is an opportunity to access support and prevent abuse from escalating. We will focus on those who are harming and seek to ensure that domestic abuse remains a priority area of work for agencies in North Somerset.

This strategy builds on previous local working and has strong emphasis on pillars of prevention, protection and provision, identifying domestic abuse as early as possible and limit its impact in the future, with the addition of a further pillar, which recognises recovery and longer-term support is required for survivors. Underpinning the delivery of the strategy is the strategic Action Plan, which details the work to be done and will be reviewed regularly, to ensure that it remains effective and relevant.



Our four aims are to:

1. Prevent

Primary interventions – actions aimed at the whole community as well as those communities identified as more at risk of domestic abuse due to intersecting identities or vulnerabilities.

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.

4. Recover

Follow-on support to enable survivors to recover from domestic abuse and move forward positively with their lives.

Our principles

Strong multiagency and partnership working will ensure we are effective in the work we do to respond to domestic abuse and therefore this strategy is underpinned by these fundamental values and principles:

Survivor led – We will offer specialist, co-produced support to survivors and children affected by domestic abuse, taking a risk-led approach, driven by the survivor's wants and needs.

Trauma informed – We will take a compassionate approach which recognises the need to provide emotionally safe, trustworthy and transparent services, offering choice and control, inclusivity and empowerment.

Accountability – We will recognise the complex behaviours and actions used by those who harm, including using children to control and post-separation abuse, familial abuse, and hold them accountable.

Equitable – We will provide specialist support for survivors from all communities, effectively addressing needs through a trauma-informed, anti-discriminatory and intersectional lens considering additional barriers such as substance misuse, mental health and learning difficulties.

Multiagency working – We will take a whole systems approach to tackling domestic abuse with robust pathways and clear referral routes into quality support services, providing the right support at the right time from all professionals who can recognise domestic abuse and respond effectively and appropriately.

Equity and intersectionality

Domestic Abuse domestic abuse can happen to anyone, from any background, in any relationship however, we recognise that it remains a gendered crime. Women experience higher rates of repeated victimisation and are much more likely to be seriously hurt (Walby and Towers, 2018; Walby and Allen, 2004) or killed than male victims of domestic abuse (ONS, 2023a).

Domestic abuse is rooted in the abuse of power and control and effectively responding to domestic abuse requires actions that take account of broader gender inequalities. The Equalities Act 2010 sets out clear requirements of the public sector to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between people from different groups.

This strategy recognises and responds to the needs of population groups sharing the following protected characteristics including:

- age
- disability
- gender identity
- marriage or civil partnership status
- pregnancy or maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

Through our Local Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment and ongoing engagement with survivors, we are able to identify and work with key groups within our community who are disproportionately disadvantaged in recognition and help-seeking and these detailed within the accompanying Action Plan.

Our priority work areas

Through listening to local survivors' experiences, gathering their feedback from partner agencies and our recent Needs Assessment, we have identified 6 key priority areas of work to enable us to achieve our aims:

Priority 1 – Multiagency cohesion across the system, working together and making domestic abuse everybody's business.

Priority 2 – Prevention work and changing attitudes through targeted communications and interventions to prevent and disrupt at earlier opportunities.

Priority 3 – Early help and support to intervene early to prevent escalation and reduce harm.

Priority 4 – Targeted preventative, educational work with children and young people, raising awareness of healthy relationships, intervening early to support, changing attitudes and identifying those at risk of harming.

Priority 5 – Safety, support and recovery through a robust pathway of support options for survivors and children within North Somerset.

Priority 6 – Holding perpetrators accountable through development of a specific pathway of interventions that address accountability and support to change behaviour.

Outcomes

By working on these identified priorities, we seek to achieve the following outcomes:

- All front-line professionals working across North Somerset health and social care systems and educational settings are equipped to recognise and safely respond to domestic abuse.
- Information and support for local survivors is clear, consistent, and accessible, in a variety of forms.
- Our local communities recognise and understand domestic abuse, are confident to report it and know what services are available in North Somerset.
- Robust and specific pathways are in place to consistently and effectively respond to all types of domestic abuse within families.
- Domestic abuse survivors and their children are offered person centred and trauma-informed support to address specific needs.
- Children in North Somerset have good understanding of healthy relationships.
- Survivors are better supported to navigate the local support offer and remain safely in their own home, with improved access to legal support and improved safety, where appropriate or move into suitable accommodation when they need to leave their home.
- Those causing harm are held accountable for their behaviour through robust local support and behaviour change interventions and offered a range of support options to address harmful behaviours.
- Survivors are treated with dignity and respect and are provided a variety of mechanisms and opportunities within services and projects to use their lived experience to influence service developments.

Governance and Accountability

The North Somerset Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership (DASP) Board will provide strategic oversight and assurance of delivery of this strategy and coordinate domestic abuse work across the area in line with statutory duties. DASP is supported by several sub-groups, working to deliver elements of the associated Action Plan including development of a survivor-led forum.

The Action Plan has been developed by local partners and survivors, to deliver the outcomes agreed in this strategy. For each of our six priority areas, the Action Plan sets out what action will be taken, both as individual agencies and across the whole system, who is responsible for action, what the delivery timescale is and intended outcomes and will be monitored and updated quarterly by the DASP Board.

The DASP Board is governed by and reports into, the North Somerset Community Safety Partnership and is aligned with both the Adults Safeguarding Board and Childrens Safeguarding Partnership in North Somerset.

References and further reading:

- **Key findings from analysis of domestic homicide reviews: October 2019 to September 2020**
- Office for National Statistics (ONS). (2023a). **Domestic abuse prevalence and victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2023.**
- **ONS: Crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2024**
- **Standing Together: The Coordinated Community Response**
- **Walby, S. and Towers, J. (2018) “Untangling the concept of coercive control: Theorizing domestic violent crime”,** Criminology & Criminal Justice, Vol 18, Issue 1.
- **Walby, S. & Allen, J. (2004) Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Stalking: Findings from the British Crime Survey. Home Office Research Study 276.** London: Home Office.
- **Government Support Families Programme**

With thanks to Birmingham Domestic Abuse Prevention Strategy 2024.

This publication is available in large print, Braille or audio formats on request.

Help is also available for people who require council information in languages other than English.

For all enquiries please contact Community.SafetyTeam@n-somerset.gov.uk