A large, leafy tree stands on the left side of a vast, green grassy field. The sun is shining brightly from the top left, creating a lens flare effect. In the background, there is a line of trees and a clear blue sky with some white clouds. The foreground is filled with green grass and small white flowers.

Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy 2024 - 2029: Summary

Accessing support

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

You can access domestic abuse services by contacting Victim Support for assessment and referral to your local service by calling **0808 168 9111** or using the **Live Chat** facility. 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**. If you are concerned about your use of abusive behaviour the Respect helpline is available on **0808 8024040**.

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.

If you can't speak out loud, you can press 55 so that the operator knows you need help. You can also video call 999 to communicate in BSL for free by visiting the 999 BSL website or downloading the app.

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

Introduction

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 people with lived experience 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.

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 a summary of the full Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy. The full strategy includes further information on all areas within this summary.

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 or have been abused, those who perpetrate through abusive behaviour, and children who experience abuse between their caregivers, 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 received Royal Assent at the end of April 2021, creating a statutory definition of domestic abuse for the first time.¹ 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;
- financial or economic abuse;
- psychological or emotional control and abuse.

The definition includes children who experience abuse between their caregivers. Children are recognised as victims of abuse independently of the adult who experiences the abuse.

‘Honour-based’ abuse may include physical abuse, forced physical traumas such as breast flattening or female genital mutilation, psychological pressure or forced marriage. This is a violation of human rights and is a form of domestic abuse.

This strategy also seeks to coordinate aims and delivery on domestic abuse where this includes sexual abuse and to support coordinated working on sexual abuse and violence across Kent & Medway.

Kent County Council and Medway Council have a responsibility through the Domestic Abuse Act to assess the need for, and provide support for, those in safe accommodation for all those impacted by abuse and their children.

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.

¹. Domestic Abuse Act 2021
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/contents/enacted>

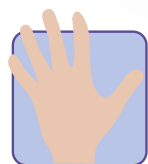
Domestic abuse continued

Key Statistics

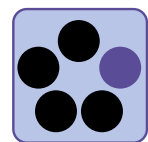
National statistics



An estimated 2.4 million adults aged 16 and over have experienced domestic abuse within the last year. This is a prevalence rate of around 5 in 100 adult.²



Between April 2018 and March 2021 there 269 women and 104 men were victims of a domestic homicide.³



Around 1 in 5 children have been exposed to domestic abuse in their household.⁴

Kent and Medway



1 in 5 recorded crimes (22%) in Kent and Medway are related to domestic abuse.⁵



Over 63,000 adults in Kent and Medway were projected to have experienced domestic abuse in 2021-2022.⁶



Over 24,000 children in Kent & Medway live in a household where an adult was experiencing domestic.⁷

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

1. 208 people accessed Kent County Council commissioned refuge.
2. 51.9% of people in Kent refuges had accompanying children.
3. 6.3% of people in refuge identified as lesbian, gay, or pansexual.
4. Of those in refuge, 8.2% had a physical or sensory disability and 1.9% had a learning disability.
5. 42.3% of those in refuge identified as needing mental health support (as a secondary need).
6. 63.9% of individuals in refuge identified as “White – British” and 31.7% identified as other ethnic minority groups.
7. 52.4% of people in refuge came from outside Kent

Medway (2022/2023)

1. 59 people accessed safe accommodation services in Medway.
2. 47 children were supported whilst in safe accommodation.
3. 15 adults and children accessed counselling and play therapy in refuge.
4. 21% of people accessing refuge accommodation in Medway identified as black or from a minority ethnic group.
5. 13% of people were between 16 – 25 years old.
6. 51 % of people reported as having a mental health need.
7. 16% of people had a disability in refuge.
8. Over a year 113 people have benefited from Sanctuary Scheme adaptations to enable them to remain safely in their homes.

2. “Office of national Statistics, Domestic Abuse prevalence and trends, England and Wales: November 2023”
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabuseprevalenceandtrendsenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2022>

3. ‘Office of National Statistics: November 2023’
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabusevictimcharacteristicsenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2022#domestic-homicide>

4. ‘NSPCC, Child abuse and neglect in the UK today, November 2023’
[Child abuse and neglect in the UK today | NSPCC Learning](https://www.nspcc.org.uk/learning-and-research/child-abuse-and-neglect-in-the-uk-today/)

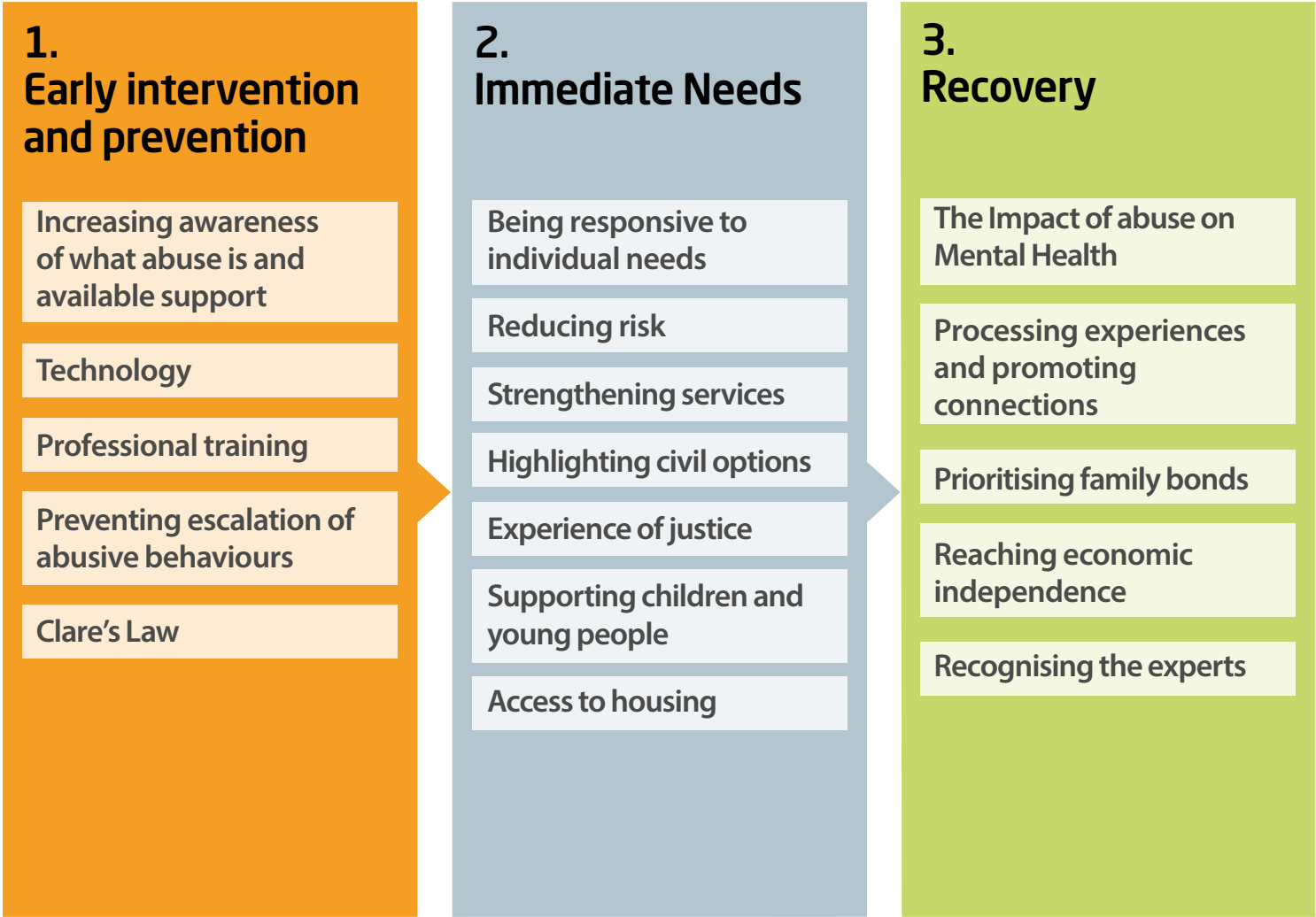
5. Domestic Abuse Statistics Data Tool, Home Office, November 2022

6. “Childrens Commissioner, Local vulnerability profiles, November 2023”
<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/vulnerable-children/local-vulnerability-profiles/>

7. From Kent & Medway’s service reports 2022-23: Internal data

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, 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 [is] really important."

"Communication with different generations is key – different forms for different ages e.g. TV (awareness) for older people, social media and TikTok for younger generations - targeted messages for different generations"

"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 awareness that domestic abuse includes coercive, financial or economic, emotional, physical, honour-based and sexual abuse and can impact anyone;
- increase awareness of the services available and that they are inclusive;

1. Early intervention and prevention continued

- provide educational resources and proactively reach out to groups currently not accessing services;
- increase awareness of technologies used to perpetrate abuse so it can be more easily recognised and prevented.

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, and to feel confident in assessing risk and taking a trauma informed, healing centred response;
- ensure training is available for staff on areas such as options for support, the additional barriers experienced by different people and how to explore and challenge behaviour linked to interpretations of culture which put people at risk of harm, abuse or death;
- to support staff across our organisations to remain safe at work whilst taking a robust approach to any allegations of abusive behaviour made against our staff.

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 public sector 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

"The IDVA service was amazing – I was so lonely; I didn't know how to do anything- didn't know how to use the TV because I wasn't allowed to before. If someone was able to check in with a phone call more frequently would have been very helpful, every day or every few days after referral."

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:

- recognise that people's journeys, trauma and support needs are different and our individual characteristics affect the risk of experiencing domestic abuse, the abusive tactics used and sometimes, the support we need;

- 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 the abusive persons history and intent, whether there has been recent separation, whether they are pregnant or have a young child, the barriers they experience when working with services 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;

2. Immediate Needs continued

- recognise risks caused by the emotional and psychological impact of abuse and associated coping mechanisms;
- 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 streamline referral pathways and identify opportunities to extend collaborative commissioning working with the marketplace.

4. Highlighting civil options

There are civil options available to people experiencing abuse, such as non-molestation orders, stalking protection 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. For more information on all of the civil orders available please see the Crown Prosecution website.⁸

The Partnership will:

- grow awareness of civil options, ensure a victim centred approach and ensure that professionals are able to signpost to relevant services;
- work to strengthen the conditions and wording of orders and 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 on gathering evidence of coercive and controlling behaviour and advocate for greater specialist domestic abuse support for those who are going through the criminal justice system;
- promote training, policies and practice guides that are inclusive of identifying coercive behavior, recognising the typologies of abuse and responding safely to counter allegations.

8. <https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/domestic-abuse>

2. Immediate Needs

continued

6. Supporting children and young people

Children who experience abuse between their caregivers 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 experiences abuse between their caregivers, recognising the importance of children's lived experiences in designing services and influencing governance.

7. Access to housing

Domestic abuse may impact a persons 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 safety planning knowledge, trauma informed processes and options for specialised referral and support routes;
- recognise the importance of social and family networks and support people to find more permanent, settled accommodation;
- have the right safe accommodation and specialist support to meet the needs of those experiencing abuse and strengthen options for people facing multiple barriers when trying to access safe accommodation;
- offer age-appropriate support that meets the diverse needs of children in safe accommodation, minimise time out of education and support children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities having their needs considered when moving into safe 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 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."

"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."

"You might have ended your support and feel like you are much better something can still trigger you and put you back there, then there is no support."

*"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."*

1. The impact of abuse on mental health

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.

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

Parenting and family relationships can be deeply affected by the experience of abuse. Abusive tactics are used to isolate and undermine relationships and can also impact on the space and energy to parent. The intergenerational transmission of risk can be mitigated by supporting parents and children to recover together. Giving parents and children coordinated support and new strategies after abuse is important in creating strong recovery journeys, which are themselves a form of prevention.

The Partnership will:

- promote integrated support for the child/ren and the non-abusive parent, investigating options for a 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 and economic 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 financial and 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 and economic independence.

3. Recovery continued

The Partnership will:

- raise awareness of financial and economic 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 and economic abuse.

5. Recognising the experts

The experts in domestic abuse are those people who are living or have lived through abusive experiences. The Partnership will continue to be led by the voices of those who have experienced abuse. The Partnership

also acknowledges the commitment and essential contribution of voluntary sector provision within this space.

The Partnership will:

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

Here we outline the identified gaps in provision and how we will, or have met these gaps.

Kent	
Gap identified	How we will meet or have met the gap
Support services for children and young people in safe accommodation.	We have commissioned 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. Enhanced therapeutic support for those 16 and over has been commissioned to improve access to refuge.
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 have commissioned 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 has been commissioned.

Safe Accommodation
 continued

Medway	
Gap identified	How we will meet 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 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.