

**HERTFORDSHIRE**

**domestic abuse**

**PARTNERSHIP**

# **Domestic Abuse Strategy 2022-2025**

**Published in line with Part 4 (Sect. 57) of the Domestic Abuse Act  
(2021)**

# Section 1: Introduction

## Background

Domestic abuse is one of the most harmful crimes in society with terrible, far reaching, and long-lasting consequences. The majority of domestic abuse is perpetrated in the home which is meant to be a place of safety and nurturing for families, but for victims of domestic abuse the home becomes a place of danger. Domestic abuse is the third most common cause of homelessness.

This strategy will incorporate the statutory duty for all Local Authorities across England and Wales to deliver a safe accommodation and support strategy under the domestic abuse Act (2021). However, Hertfordshire's Domestic Abuse Partnership (HDAP) would like this strategy to be transformative and go beyond victims and survivors within safe accommodation only. The strategy aims to ensure we have a robust response in place to meet the needs of all victims and children as well as working with those using harmful and abusive behaviour to change their behaviour and holding them accountable for the choices they make.

## Defining domestic abuse

The Domestic Abuse Act (2021) creates a statutory definition of domestic abuse based on the previous cross-government definition.

'Abusive behaviour' is defined in the act as any of the following:

- physical or sexual abuse
- violent or threatening behaviour
- controlling or coercive behaviour
- economic abuse
- psychological, emotional, or other abuse
- for the definition to apply, both parties must be aged 16 or over and 'personally connected'.

'Personally connected' is defined in the act as parties who:

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

We will use this definition of domestic abuse throughout this strategy.

## Development of the strategy

This is a partnership strategy and the development of it has been a culmination of the efforts of all agencies across Hertfordshire. The Domestic Abuse Partnership Board (DAPB) set up a task and finish group made up of key stakeholders from all organisations. This task and finish group included:

1. Refuge
2. St Albans Council (representing District and Boroughs)
3. Hertfordshire County Council
4. Hertfordshire Constabulary
5. Safer Places
6. Hertfordshire Joint Children's and Adults Safeguarding Partnership
7. Office of Police & Crime Commissioner
8. Hertfordshire's two Clinical Commissioning Groups

There have been a number of specific pieces of work that have been coordinated to provide us with the evidence base we needed for this strategy. They have included a range of methods including research and consultation events including:

- **The Pathways Project:** In 2021 Hertfordshire County Council conducted research into the pathways available for victims and survivors locally. This included a listening exercise, hearing from those with lived experience through online survey and one to one interviews.
- **Safe accommodation needs assessment (2021):** The needs assessment considered data from across the County to understand housing needs and support requirements for victims and survivors. This also included engagement from key stakeholders through a series of workshops in March 2021 to understand current need, unmet need, and gaps in provision.
- **Partnership strategic development workshops:** In October 2021 the task and finish group led two workshops to hear the views of senior leaders and frontline professionals on the strategic direction and key areas of focus for the next three years.
- **Violence Against Women and Girls needs assessment (2021):** The Countywide Community Safety Unit (CCSU) conducted a needs assessment, analysing local data on all forms of violence against women and girls in the county and the intersection between these and domestic abuse. Hertfordshire are currently working in partnership to develop an integrated approach to VAWG, so although it will be referenced within this strategy, it will have a separate strategy developed which is coordinated with our domestic abuse strategy.
- **Domestic abuse needs assessment (2019):** A full domestic abuse needs assessment was conducted by the CCSU and signed off by the Domestic Abuse Executive Board (DAEB) in 2019 which considered key data from all agencies and recommendations for a future approach.

- **Consultation with our survivor shadow board** which is made up of residents in Hertfordshire with lived experience of domestic abuse and independently moderated by Victim Focus<sup>1</sup>.
- **Roundtable feedback event** with members and providers within the community and voluntary sector, coordinated by For Baby's Sake
- **On online survey** for the public and professionals in Hertfordshire to offer consultation feedback on our draft strategy, which has all been included in this final version.

Hertfordshire Domestic Abuse Partnership extend our gratitude to every individual that has contributed to the development of our strategy. The feedback from those with lived experience, residents and people who work in partner agencies across Hertfordshire was reviewed by the strategy development task and finish group and we hope has been sufficiently reflected in this final document.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.victimfocus.org.uk/>

# Section 2: Our approach

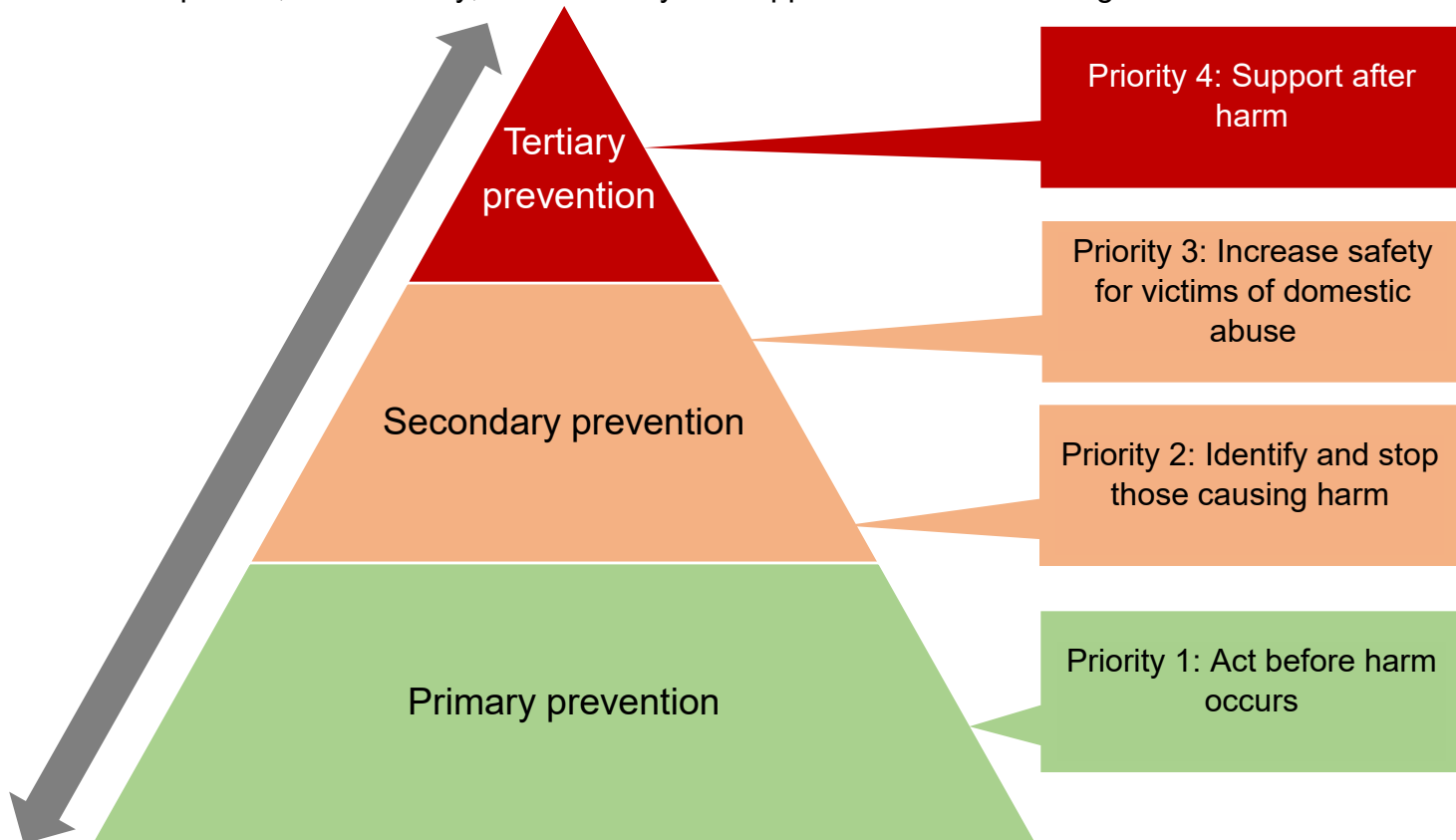
## Our vision

**For Hertfordshire to be a safe place for individuals and families, where domestic abuse is not tolerated and, where it does happen, those experiencing or causing harm have access to the support they need to be free from, or stop using, abusive behaviour and recover from its traumatic impact.**

## Our strategic priorities

For us to realise our vision, our four strategic priority areas will enable us to work from prevention through to recovery for individuals, families, and communities. Our priorities are themed around the continuum of prevention to ensure we develop a long-term approach to change.

We recognise that domestic abuse is complex, and experiences are not linear. These priorities are not aimed to be delivered in this way, rather simultaneously to ensure that the intersectionality of experiences is recognised, and we work within a whole person, whole family, and whole system approach to create change.



These priorities mirror those set out by the national domestic abuse charity SafeLives in their Whole Picture strategy<sup>2</sup>. Each of these priorities will support us to achieve our whole system outcomes framework as outlined in Section 3.

Throughout our strategy we will use the terms harm and safety to articulate our priorities.



#### How we define safety:

Safety refers to individuals being **free from harm, or the risk of harm.**

Specifically, 'being safe' is the condition of being protected from or unlikely to cause danger, risk, or injury. This can be physical safety, but **we recognise that safety is also emotional and psychological safety.**

#### How we define harm:

Harm refers to the **negative consequence or impact** an individual might experience.

These negative impacts can be vast depending on the type of abuse experienced. It can include physical injury, but it could also be non-physical including psychological harm such as trauma.



## Our values and principles

Our priorities set out what we aim to focus on over the next three years, however we know that the way we work is equally important. Underpinning each of our priorities are a set of values and principles that will guide our approach to delivery. These are a commitment to:

- **Being needs led:** Domestic abuse is never **all** of someone's experiences or situation. We will work with people in a holistic way, recognising that the needs of all individuals are different. We will ensure our approach is coordinated to recognise and respond to people's individual needs rather than a one size fits all approach.
- **Working in a strengths-based way:** Victims and survivors are the experts in what they need, and this might be different for different people. We will recognise the strengths and resilience of all people who experience domestic abuse and will work in a strengths-based way to ensure their emotional wellbeing and resilience is prioritised during and after their experience of abuse.
- **Ensuring we are intersectional in our approach:** We will recognise that inequality exists and certain groups within our communities' experience oppression based on their identity. We will recognise that protected characteristics and marginalised groups may experience domestic abuse in different ways and the way services and structures operate must enable them to be accessible to all residents, recognising their experiences. These

<sup>2</sup><https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/The%20Whole%20Picture%20-%20SafeLives%27%20Strategy.pdf>

characteristics can intersect, and we will ensure that we understand how all communities' experiences might impact their needs.

- **Recognising the needs of the whole family:** We understand that families come in all shapes and sizes, and do not always include children. We will apply a broad definition of families to ensure that our strategy is inclusive to all individuals including extended families, informal family arrangements and single people. However, we know that domestic abuse affects the whole family, and we want to ensure that our approach will take a relational perspective. This will include ensuring we take an intergenerational approach by supporting families to recover from the impact of abuse including parenting through trauma.
- **Collaborate across all organisations:** Domestic abuse is everyone's business. Every organisation in Hertfordshire has a role to play, and we want to be clear that working together means working collaboratively and creatively. As part of this we will aspire to deliver a coordinated community response in line with the In Search of Excellence (2021) guidance from Standing Together<sup>3</sup>. This strategy is a whole systems strategy and all organisation's roles will be valued in delivering our priorities.

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<sup>3</sup><https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ee0be2588f1e349401c832c/t/5fd78eaf72a0a65a94da967e/1607962290051/In+Search+of+Excellence+2020.pdf>

# Section 2a: Priority One, Act before someone is harmed

## **Outcome 1: Reduced number of people experiencing domestic abuse.**

### **What we know**

We know that prevention is always better than cure, and we want to take a public health approach to prevention by understanding the risk factors for domestic abuse happening in the first place. A 'public health approach' treats violence like an infectious disease. It suggests that policy makers should search for a 'cure' by using scientific evidence to identify what causes violence and find interventions that work to prevent it spreading. Public health approaches have been successful in changing a range of public behaviours including smoking cessation and wearing seatbelts.

A public health approach takes four steps to violence reduction:

1. Define and Monitor the Problem
2. Identify Risk and Protective Factors
3. Develop and Test Prevention Strategies
4. Assure Widespread Adoption

We will adopt this approach and our objectives within this priority will be to better understand the current picture in Hertfordshire and consider what prevention strategies will work. There has already been considerable international evidence collected on risk factors for intimate partner violence from organisations including the World Health Organisation (WHO) which we will use within our thinking.

These include the following risk factors:

- lower levels of education (perpetration of sexual violence and experience of sexual violence)
- a history of exposure to child maltreatment (perpetration and experience)
- witnessing family violence (perpetration and experience)
- antisocial personality disorder (perpetration)
- harmful use of alcohol (perpetration and experience)
- harmful masculine behaviours, including having multiple partners or attitudes that condone violence (perpetration)
- community norms that privilege or ascribe higher status to men and lower status to women
- low levels of women's access to paid employment



- low level of gender equality (discriminatory laws, etc.)
- past history of exposure to violence
- marital discord and dissatisfaction
- difficulties in communicating between partners
- male controlling behaviours towards their partners

As discussed in the previous section, these risk factors highlight that prevention is a golden thread and even intervening once abuse is happening will have a preventative effect on children and young people living with domestic abuse. Essentially prevention includes a wide range of activities aimed at reducing risks or threats to health and can be separated into a number of levels:

- **Primary prevention** aims to prevent a behaviour before it ever occurs.
- **Secondary prevention** aims to reduce the impact where a behaviour has already occurred – *(this type of prevention will be picked up in priorities 2 and 3 within this strategy)*
- **Tertiary prevention** aims to reduce the impact where a behaviour has occurred and has had lasting effects – *(this type of prevention will be picked up in priority 4 within this strategy)*

To ensure our priorities are distinct, the objectives under this priority will be focussed only on primary prevention, thus attempting to stop and prevent domestic abuse before it occurs.

## What we want to achieve

Objectives:

- **A consistent approach to healthy relationships education across education settings** to develop a zero-tolerance culture amongst children and young people for harmful or abusive behaviour within intimate and family relationships
- **Develop public awareness campaigns** using behavioural insights techniques to reduce public tolerance, including increased awareness and identification, of domestic abuse
- **Increase our understanding of the risk and protective factors that exist in Hertfordshire**, including inequality, to develop and pilot prevention interventions

## Section 2b: Priority two, Identify and stop harm

### **Outcome 2: A reduction or cessation in the use of harmful and abusive behaviours in relationships.**

#### **What we know**

Secondary prevention means we need to identify where harm is happening and reduce the impact it has. This priority focusses on reducing harm by working with those causing it. We know from national evidence that a two-pronged approach is required to ensure we offer opportunities to change and hold those who do not change accountable for their behaviour. This strategy recognises that although there may be factors that impact people using harmful behaviour, such as problematic substance use or mental health needs, using such behaviour is always a choice. This is why our strategy will focus on change and challenge.

National evidence highlights that only around 1% of people using harmful behaviour ever access support to change. SafeLives found that a quarter of high-harm perpetrators are repeat offenders, and some have at least six different victims, which highlights the importance of a robust response to perpetrators to prevent further harm.

Our pathways research in Hertfordshire with victims and survivors highlighted that there is a need to improve our response to perpetrators. We found:

- Victims also wanted help with practical measures like keeping the perpetrator away through better perpetrator management and home security.
- 35% of participants said they wanted support for the person abusing them to change their behaviour. Nationally, a SafeLives survey found that 80% of survivors think interventions for perpetrators are a good idea
- Many victims and survivors spoke of the creative ways their abusers found to breach bail conditions and civil orders. They often felt there were no negative consequences for the perpetrator following a breach, meaning they were more likely to do it again.
- A lot of victims had contacted police about the abuse they were experiencing but in many cases were not safe enough to support the case going to court. This means more evidence-led prosecutions are required, so that victims do not have to unnecessarily put themselves at risk.
- 31% of those consulted needed legal support to help them obtain things like non-molestation orders and financial independence, so that they could flee.

- Many said their risk was increased because they were inappropriately referred to relationship counselling. Others said their abuser was inappropriately referred to an anger management programme.

These learning points have helped us to scope what we need this strategy to deliver in terms of a response to those using harmful behaviour.

## **What we want to achieve**

Objectives:

- To ensure that all perpetrators are identified, held accountable and offered the opportunity to change their behaviour in a coordinated and consistent way.
- Commissioning of services is based on evidence of local need.

## Section 2c: Priority three, Increase safety for those at risk

### Outcome 3: Increased physical and psychological safety for individuals experiencing or at risk of domestic abuse

#### What we know

As discussed in the previous sections, secondary prevention requires us to mitigate the impact of harm once it has occurred. As well as working with those causing the harm to reduce the impact, we also want to ensure that we have adequate systems and provision for victims, including children. This priority is distinct from priority 4, which focusses on support after domestic abuse, as it focusses on the support victims and children may need whilst harm is still occurring.

There has been considerable research and evidence gathered nationally outlining what good looks like in terms of support for victims and children. This has culminated in a range of service standards including:

- SafeLives Insights
- Women's Aid Quality Standard
- Violence Against Women and Girls Shared Sector Standards

We want to build on what we know about best practice from these standards and ensure we have robust pathways and high-quality provision in place for victims, survivors and children based on their individual needs. We sought to find out what victims and survivors support needs were through our pathways research locally, including any barriers to access, and found:

- Only 29% of those consulted reported feeling like they got the right help at the right time
- Victims and survivors of domestic abuse in Hertfordshire think that the main barriers preventing victims from accessing services are:
  - They are scared about what the person abusing them would do if they found out (89%)
  - They feel ashamed or embarrassed (84%)
  - They feel they may be blamed for what happened (74%)
  - They worry it won't be taken seriously (71%)
  - They don't know it's abuse (70%)
  - They don't know who to get support from (69.5%)
- Those who reported domestic abuse to professionals did so most commonly to the police or their GP

- There has also been an increase in the number of people reporting abuse to Children's Services, their employer, their child's school or nursery and confidential helplines in recent years
- Many of those consulted spoke to a friend, family member or colleague about the abuse they were experiencing before, or instead of, reporting to professionals (average of 68%). However, they said their family and friends often didn't know what to say or how to help, and that the information available online didn't help
- A strong mistrust of authority or "the system" was also identified. This often stemmed from negative interactions with individual police officers, healthcare professionals and social workers who they had told about the abuse but did not get help from
- Many of those consulted spoke of how their abuser used child contact to continue subjecting them to domestic abuse once they had left

We have used the findings from the pathways project to develop what we believe is a whole system response for victims and survivors, including key outcomes we want to achieve.

## What we want to achieve

Objectives:

- To promote **help-seeking** and **early identification** of domestic abuse.
- To develop a **clear identification, risk assessment and referral pathway** so victims receive appropriate support as soon as possible.
- To ensure all **agencies work together** to develop a joined up, coordinated offer of support which addresses the safety of victims.
- To ensure **support is accessible to all** victims, including those with protected characteristics, multiple forms of disadvantage and children and young people.
- To ensure all victims can **access a safe place to live** free from domestic abuse.

## Section 2d: Priority four, Support after harm

### **Outcome 4: Reduced impact of domestic abuse for those who experience it.**

#### **What we know**

Even after domestic abuse, we know it takes time and support to feel safe and well again. Tertiary prevention, as discussed previously, refers to the need to support people with the long lasting impact of harm, to ensure they are still able to live life to a good standard. We know that domestic abuse can cause lasting trauma and all victims, including children, should have the support they need for as long as they need it.

Through our local pathways project, we found out more about what support would look like after harm has happened:

- The highest need identified was counselling and therapeutic support, which 48% of victims and survivors said they needed, both at the time of and following the abuse.
- Financial support was needed by many, with numerous victims having to sell their houses and use their savings to live free from abuse. 61% of those who had accessed domestic abuse services said they had hoped those services would provide support around their finances.
- Many said they had to leave behind their friends and family to flee abuse, and that they would have liked support to rebuild their social networks.

#### **What we want to achieve**

Objectives:

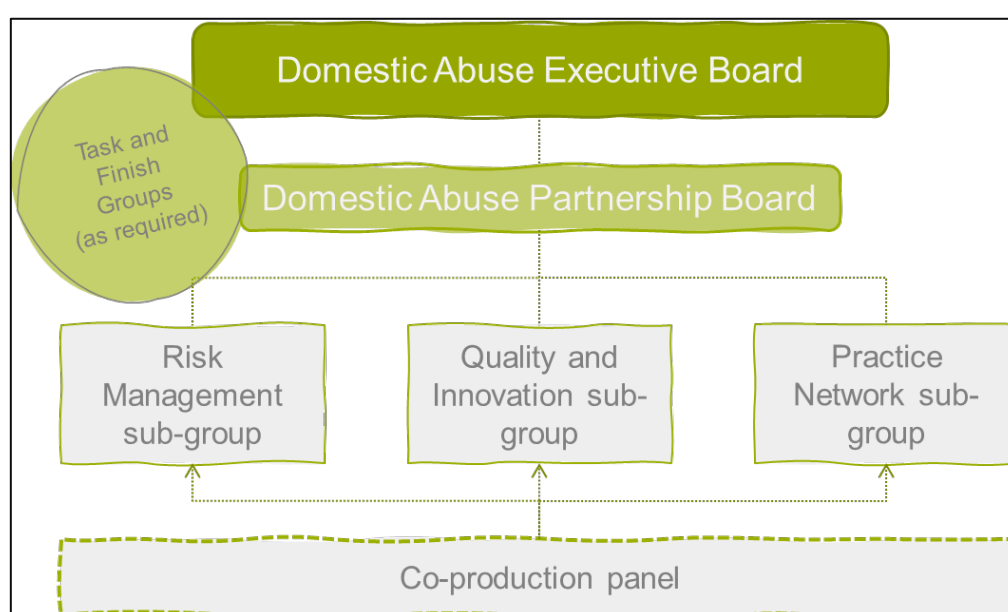
- **Survivors, including children, have access to long term support that helps them to recover from domestic abuse in terms of their practical needs**, including access to move on accommodation where required, and access to economic justice
- **Survivors, including children, have access to long term support that helps them to recover from domestic abuse in terms of their emotional and mental health needs**, including access to trauma-based therapeutic support and peer support.

## Section 3: Delivering the strategy

### Governance

The Domestic Abuse Executive Board will have oversight and accountability for the delivery of this strategy. It will perform the functions of the Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board as set out in the statutory regulations in Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act (2021).

The Board will be supported by the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board who will be responsible for the operational delivery through an annually updated action plan that will sit alongside this strategy.



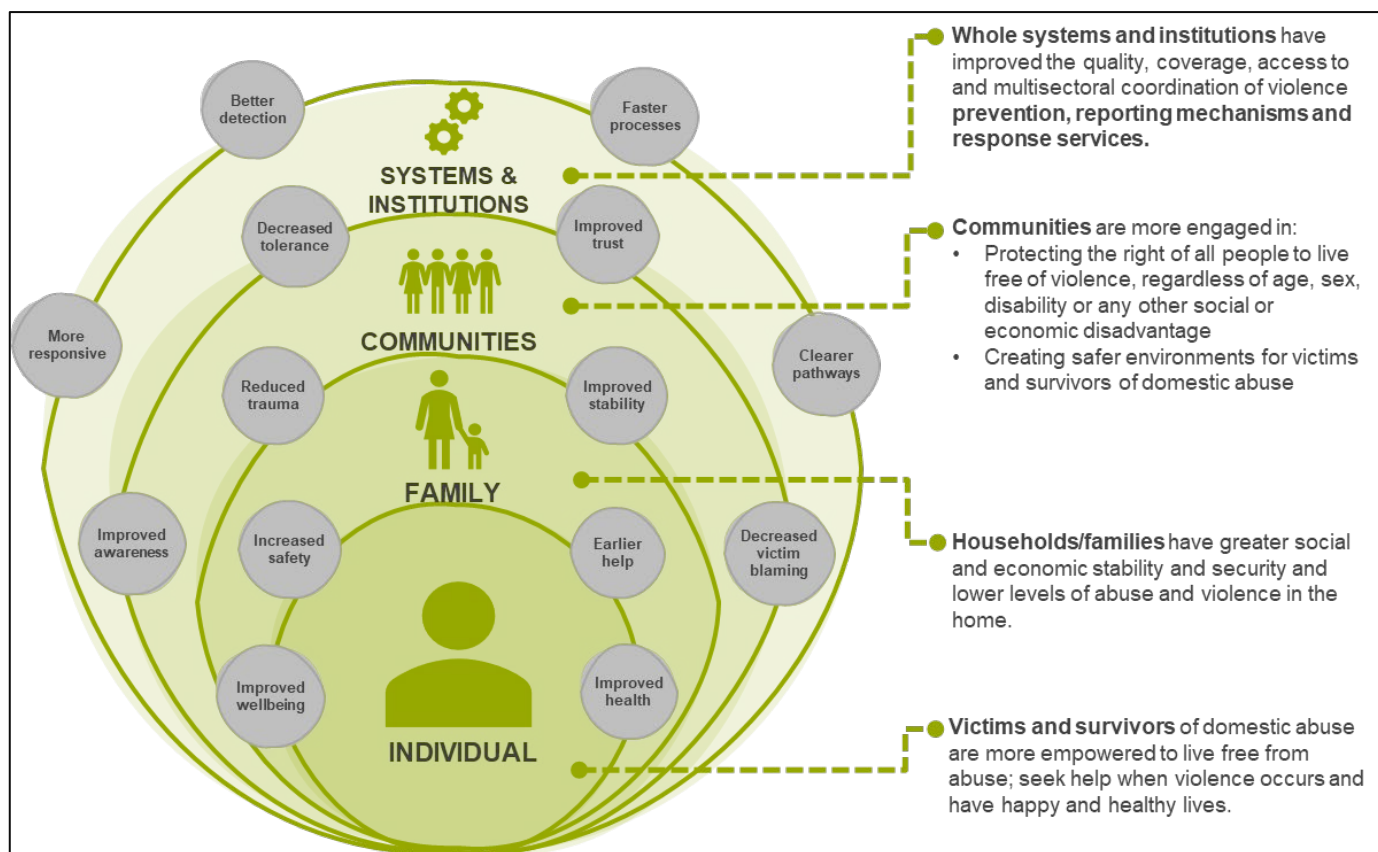
### Budget

The budget for this strategy will be defined by key partner agencies, following this strategy being agreed. It will include the funding received from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and will be reviewed by the Domestic Abuse Executive Board, annually.

### Evaluation and monitoring

#### Measuring success

Each of our priorities will include the development of Key Performance Indicators to help us measure our progress. These will be developed in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council's Public Health team and will be based on our whole systems outcomes' framework. The whole systems outcomes framework was developed through our consultations, assessments and reviews as noted previously. This framework will be used to support us to measure the impact of our strategy.



Overall monitoring of the impact and success will be monitored through the governance structure as discussed above, with the Domestic Abuse Executive Board maintaining strategic oversight of progress.

### Operational monitoring

An operational delivery plan will be developed to outline the key activities that we will deliver under each of our objectives, including which organisation or partnership will be responsible for the delivery. The delivery plan will be SMART and performance management oversight of the day-to-day delivery will be managed through the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board.

We will produce an annual progress report which will be published in line with Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act (2021).