



Domestic Abuse Strategy 2022-2025

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

Foreword

The Government's commitment to tackling domestic abuse has been outlined in the recent publication of its [Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan](#) (March 2022). Having a national framework to work within is hugely important. Equally important is taking a joined up, local approach to tackling one of the most harmful crimes in society that has far-reaching and long-lasting consequences.

The Domestic Abuse Act (2021) has given Local Authorities increased impetus to tackle the issue of domestic abuse at a local level – with a statutory duty for all local authorities to deliver a safe accommodation and support strategy. In Hertfordshire, we want to do more than this.

Although exact figures relating to domestic abuse in Hertfordshire are unknown, research undertaken as part of our Pathways Project is helping ascertain its prevalence. We can roughly estimate that more than 114,000 women and 78,000 men in the current Hertfordshire population will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime. In the last year alone, we estimate that 42,285 adults (aged 16-74) in Hertfordshire will have experienced some form of domestic abuse. We can also estimate that over 48,607 children (aged under 16) in the current population (as of mid-2023) will have experienced domestic abuse in their lifetime.

This is not acceptable. We want Hertfordshire to be a safe place for individuals and families, where domestic abuse is not tolerated. Where it does happen, we want to make sure that 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.

We recognise that domestic abuse is complex, and experiences are not linear. Reducing the impact and prevalence of domestic abuse in Hertfordshire is not simple. We know that we must work with partners to ensure that everyone is kept safe from harm.

The current Hertfordshire Domestic Abuse Partnership (HDAP) was created in 2016 to develop a localised approach to support and prevention. This partnership between local government, the police, healthcare providers and voluntary sector organisations has resulted in the development of a multi-agency approach to reducing the prevalence and impact of domestic abuse in Hertfordshire.

Our new prevention-based partnership strategy is a culmination of this collaborative approach. It represents our ambition to be transformative. By intervening at an early stage, we will support individuals before they reach crisis point. We want to work



David Lloyd

Police and Crime
Commissioner
for Hertfordshire



Tony Kingsbury

Executive Member
for Adult Care,
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together to challenge and change mindsets; to identify and respond to risk and harm better; to improve safeguarding and safety and to expand support available for all.

We understand that we cannot achieve our ambitions without placing those who have experienced domestic abuse at the heart of all we do by introducing a whole system, ecological model to create change. Our Co-production panel will play a key role in delivering the strategy: “Domestic abuse is a prevalent and detrimental problem that persists within society, and within our communities. Hertfordshire County Council recognise that the response to domestic abuse must be collaborative.

“We are the Hertfordshire Domestic Abuse co-production panel; we are a panel of six members with lived experience. Hertfordshire County Council have commissioned us along with VictimFocus to play a part in the response to Domestic Abuse within our county, together we contest oppressive practice, victim blaming and the pathologising of those subjected to Domestic Abuse.

“We are an independent panel and a voice for victims. We want to improve the response to domestic abuse, and we aim to do this through challenging and scrutinising current strategies, ensuring our lived experience is not only considered, but that it is paramount.”

In a supporting statement Cllr Tony Kingsbury said: “In Hertfordshire, we want to make sure all victims and survivors of domestic abuse can access the right help for them, at the right time. We want to create a whole person, whole family, whole system coordinated response to enable change. We want to meet all the needs of victims and work with abusers to provide opportunity for behaviour change whilst holding them accountable.

“Domestic abuse ruins lives, sometimes irreversibly. We all have a part to play in making Hertfordshire a safer place for everyone and making sure everyone in Hertfordshire can feel safe in their own home.”

David Lloyd, Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire, said: “We are always working on new and effective strategies to tackle domestic abuse-related behaviours and to limit the harm which it causes. Partnership working is essential in delivering many of these projects.

“The practice of drug testing in custody suites has been expanded recently to include those arrested on suspicion of domestic abuse-related offences, with the aim of preventing further offending linked to drug taking. My office has also overseen the expansion of victim services specifically for those experiencing domestic abuse. This service has now seen thousands of victims offered additional help and support since its launch during the first pandemic lockdown.

“I fully support the work of the Hertfordshire Domestic Abuse Partnership which enables us to work together to reduce these highly damaging patterns of behaviour.”

Section 1a: 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. In addition to the statutory definition the Act has stipulated that children should be seen as direct victims in their own right where they live within households where there is domestic abuse. As such, when we use the term 'victim' throughout our strategy, we are referring to both adult and child victims, and more detail about what w

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 2020/21 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 Joint Strategic 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 Focus¹.
- **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 ('the 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.

Given that victims and survivors of domestic abuse are the experts in what need they need, Section 1b will provide more background on the findings of the Pathways Project. This will highlight what life is like for Hertfordshire residents who have, or are being, subjected to abuse.

¹ <https://www.victimfocus.org.uk/>

Section 1b

The Domestic Abuse Pathways Project: A review of the support needs of victims and survivors of domestic abuse in Hertfordshire and how they are currently being met

The need for research into domestic abuse in Hertfordshire

Although there is a plethora of research into domestic abuse nationally, there appeared to be a gap in research into the experiences and needs of victims of domestic abuse in Hertfordshire specifically. Those with lived experience of abuse are the experts in what they need, and so their input is vital to the development and improvement of Hertfordshire's response to domestic abuse. Without victims and survivors telling us what they want and need, we can but guess what is best for them.

Because we know anyone can experience domestic abuse, we also know they can seek help in many different ways. This is why we also needed to understand more about domestic abuse from those working in people-facing professions, as they are often the people that spot the signs. By asking questions about people's professional experience of domestic abuse, including what they see and how they respond to suspected or confirmed cases of domestic abuse, this will also help us to improve services and support for victims.

As well as thinking about what victims and survivors need, we also needed to understand and critically review what we already have. As such, there was a clear need to conduct a mapping exercise to fully understand the pathways in to support for victims across the county. We could then compare this to what victims and survivors are telling us they need, to see what was missing.

This research sought to fill these gaps in local research by:

- Consulting with victims and survivors of domestic abuse in Hertfordshire about their experiences and support needs
- Assessing the actual or perceived barriers that prevent victims from accessing support services
- Using local and national data to estimate the extent and prevalence of domestic abuse in the county
- Talking to frontline professionals about their experiences of working with victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse
- Mapping and critically reviewing the current support offer for victims and survivors

Key findings

To conduct this research, we consulted with victims and survivors across Hertfordshire. Overall, we consulted with 642 people who had or were experiencing domestic abuse. We also conducted interviews with a further ten victims, to get a

deeper understanding of their experiences and needs. The table below provides an overview of the top-level findings according to the research aims and objectives.

Table 1 - Top-level findings from the research

Victim consultation	
Research Aim	Key findings
To explore the experience of victims and survivors in Hertfordshire, including the tactics used by perpetrators to abuse them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on the survey results, the most common types of abuse victims experienced were bullying and intimidation, isolation, and physical abuse. 83% of victims were abused by a <i>current or former partner</i>. 25% were abused by a family member (most commonly by a parent). Common tactics used by perpetrators were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Isolation tactics Economic abuse Misuse of child contact arrangements Making counter allegations of domestic abuse Using technology to stalk and harass Finding creative ways to breach bail conditions and civil orders
To explore the support needs of victims and survivors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 The next most identified need was legal support, which 31% of victims said they needed. Victims also wanted help with practical measures like keeping the perpetrator away through better perpetrator management and home security. Financial support was needed by many, with numerous victims having to sell their houses and use their savings to live free from abuse. It was identified that the timing of support was very important to victims, with only 29% of those consulted feeling like they got the right help at the right time The most important factors participants felt a domestic abuse service should include were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 24-hour service Confidential One-to-one support – face to face Help to recognise the abuse Drop-in Best way to promote services were identified as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internet search engine GP notice board

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Through social media ○ Poster/advert in public amenities ○ Hospital notice board
To assess the actual or perceived barriers that prevent victims from accessing support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victims and survivors of domestic abuse in Hertfordshire think that the main barriers preventing victims from accessing services are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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%) • A strong mistrust of authority or "the system" was also identified in the analysis of the qualitative data generated by the consultation
Help seeking behaviour of victims and survivors in Hertfordshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who reported domestic abuse to professionals did so most commonly to the police or their GP. • There has 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. • 18% of those who experienced abuse in the last year did not tell anyone • 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%)
Where possible, to estimate the level of need and the demographic profile of victims in Hertfordshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We can roughly estimate that 114,147 women and 78,003 men in the current Hertfordshire population will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime. • In 2020, we estimate that 42,285 adults aged 16-74 in Hertfordshire will have experienced some form of domestic abuse
Process mapping and consultation with professionals	
Research Aim	Key findings
To map safeguarding criteria and processes and identify whether there are points at which victims of domestic abuse might get lost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In some safeguarding processes, the referral pathway into specialist domestic abuse services was not specified, meaning there is a reliance on safeguarding professionals to use their own knowledge of what help is available to victims

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In some cases, DASH risk assessments are not carried out when domestic abuse has been identified. Generally, this is because staff have not been trained in how to conduct a DASH. • Guidance for Customer Service Centre staff at Hertfordshire Council, who triage most safeguarding concerns reported by the public, is limited in terms of which team within safeguarding they should send the safeguarding concern to. The guidance on what constitutes domestic abuse is also limited, mainly to physical abuse.
<p>To understand from professionals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The common support needs their clients (who have experienced domestic abuse) have • Their level of understanding of domestic abuse • The awareness of specialist domestic abuse support available • Challenges they experience in relation to the referral pathway when trying to support those experiencing domestic abuse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 80% of professionals consulted come across domestic abuse in their role. 9% 'always' see it in their job role. • There was some confusion about the causes of domestic abuse. Many incorrectly identified the following factors as causes of domestic abuse: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Stress (84%) ○ Unemployment (80%) ○ Ill health, including poor mental health (77% and 88% respectively) ○ Substance misuse (85%) • Specialist services professionals were most aware of were Safer Places and the Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy Service • Most professionals would most likely call a local domestic abuse helpline (25%), conduct an internet search (22%), or speak to a domestic abuse champion (19%) if they needed advice on supporting a victim of domestic abuse as a professional • 88% of professionals said they would feel comfortable discussing the domestic abuse with the person concerned

Section 1c

Independent Scrutineer for the Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (2023), 'Domestic Abuse in Hertfordshire'

The Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSCP) has a clear process for monitoring and evaluating the efficacy of its work.² This includes the appointment of an independent scrutineer, who each year conducts several 'deep dives' on topics proposed by the HSCP. These deep dives may involve needs assessments, multi-agency audits and reviews, all of which result in a report that is then published on the [HSCP's webpages](#).

In July 2023, the HSCP tasked their Independent Scrutineer with evaluating the response to child victims of domestic abuse in Hertfordshire. This followed a national review on this topic by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel.

The HSCP's review considered how well agencies (including Police, Children's Services, Health, Probation and Community Safety) were working together to identify and respond to domestic abuse. This involved examination of:

- How the strategic response to domestic abuse in Hertfordshire is coordinated.
- The provision of specialist domestic abuse services.
- The efficacy of multi-agency risk management processes, such as the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC),
- The interface between MARAC and Child Protection/Children in Need (CiN) plans where domestic abuse is been identified.

This review reported several recommendations, including:

- Improving strategic links and governance for domestic abuse between different partnership boards, including the HSCP and Hertfordshire Domestic Abuse and VAWG Partnership ('the Partnership').
- Strengthening join-up between community safety and safeguarding functions.
- Building dedicated services for children as victims of domestic abuse.
- Improving family courts and child contact processes.

Following this review, the Partnership, HSCP and the Independent Scrutineer worked jointly to develop an action plan based on the review's recommendations, against which significant work has already been undertaken.

It was also agreed that this Strategy would be updated to highlight the impact of domestic abuse on children and work being undertaken, in Hertfordshire, to support children who are victims and survivors of domestic abuse.

² There are three organisations who are jointly responsible for the partnership arrangements for keeping children safe, per government guidance on 'Working Together to Safeguard Children', 2018. These include Hertfordshire County Council, Hertfordshire Constabulary and the Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board.

Foreword from the HSCP's Independent Scrutineer, Nicky Pace

The Domestic Abuse Act (2021) acknowledges the substantial impact of domestic abuse on children, which includes '[harm] to emotional and psychological wellbeing as well as effects on education, relationships, risky and harmful behaviour and housing and accommodation'.³

The Act considers a child to be a victim of domestic abuse when they witness, hear or experience the effects of domestic abuse and are related to the victim or perpetrator of the abuse. This is a positive step forward, as legal recognition of children as victims of domestic abuse should:

- give children greater protection through Domestic Abuse Protection Orders
- enable professionals to take action to protect children at risk of domestic abuse
- help authorities ensure there are specialist domestic abuse support services for children and young people.

Research shows that countless children will be subjected to domestic abuse in their lifetime. Nationally, it has been found that:

- An estimated **160,000 children** in England are currently living in households where domestic abuse is taking place.⁴
- As many as **1 in 5 children** in the UK are exposed to domestic abuse during childhood (under 18).⁵
- At the time they start school, at least **one child in every class** will have been **living with domestic abuse since they were born**.⁶
- **75%** of children on **Child Protection Plans** live in households with domestic abuse.
- In the year ending March 2023, **32%** of **Children in Need Assessments** reported one parent abusing another (up 6% from 2019).
- An estimated **187,750 babies** were present at **police callouts** for domestic abuse every year in England.
- Despite the number of children being subjected to domestic abuse, only **2.8%** of **MARAC referrals came from Children's Social Care** in the year ending June 2023.⁷

In Hertfordshire, the 2023 census estimated that 243,035 (20%) of the current population were aged under 16.⁸ If one in five children are exposed to domestic abuse

³ Wedlock, E. & Molina, J. (2020) 'Sowing the Seeds: Children's experience of domestic abuse and criminality'. Available at: [Sowing the Seeds: Children's experience of domestic abuse and criminality — University of Bristol](#)

⁴ Women's Aid, 2024, 'Children: the hidden victims of domestic abuse'. Available at: [Children: the hidden victims of domestic abuse - Women's Aid \(womensaid.org.uk\)](#)

⁵ Barnardo's, 2020, 'Not just Collateral Damage: The hidden impact of domestic abuse on children'. Available at: ['Not just collateral damage' Barnardo's Report 0.pdf \(barnardos.org.uk\)](#)

⁶ SafeLives, 2017, 'Children, young people and the involvement of children's services'. Available at: [Children's services Insights data briefing - SafeLives](#)

⁷ SafeLives, 2023, 'MARAC data – key findings'. Available at <https://safelives.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Marac-data-Q2-2023.pdf>

⁸ HertsInsights, 2023, 'Population Profile for Hertfordshire'. Available at: <https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/881ccb3a8b2b44afa72d1dc3d7db3aca/E10000015?clear=true>

during childhood, this means there are over **48,607 children in Hertfordshire**, currently, that will have been **subjected to domestic abuse** during their lifetime.

The following data is also available for Hertfordshire in relation to children as victims of domestic abuse:

Provision	Children supported and/or referred
Support in safe accommodation, including refuge accommodation, dispersed accommodation and support to remain safe in their own home. ⁹	<p>In the year ending March 2024, 242 children were supported in safe accommodation.</p> <p>The number of children supported, by age, is as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0-1 years – 39 • 2-4 years – 69 • 5-10 years – 96 • 11-15 years – 29 • 16-18 years - 9 <p>The average length of stay in safe accommodation for this period was eight months.</p>
The Hertfordshire Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy (IDVA) service	<p>In the year ending March 2024, the IDVA service received 853 referrals for adults over the age of 16. 545 (64%) of those referred had children under the 16. In total, there were 2,295 children associated with the 545 adult victims referred.</p>
Hertfordshire Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs)	<p>In the ending June 2024, a total of 1,332 cases were discussed at MARAC. These cases involved 1,454 children. Additionally, there were 20 victims discussed at MARAC aged 16-17 and 21 perpetrators aged 16-17.</p> <p>11 (0.8%) of the referrals received in the year ending June 2024 were from Children's Services.</p>
Hertfordshire Domestic Abuse Related Death (DARD) reviews (formerly Domestic Homicide Reviews or 'DHRs' – both DARD and DHR are used interchangeably here). ¹⁰	<p>Since DHRs were implemented in 2011, 47 reviews have been conducted in Hertfordshire. In 16 of these reviews, the victim and/or perpetrator had dependent children under the age of 18.</p> <p>Since 2021, there have been 10 children associated with Hertfordshire DARD reviews.</p>

⁹ When in safe accommodation, children are provided with the following dedicated support:

- child-orientated counselling/therapy which includes group support and emotional support.
- specialist support for protected characteristics (e.g. immigration, translation)
- specialist support for physical health needs (e.g. drug/alcohol support)
- children's support through play therapy and advocacy

¹⁰ These are conducted when a person aged 16 or over has, or appears to have, died because of domestic abuse (including suicides where the circumstances give rise to concern). These reviews are held to identify learning.

Hertfordshire's response to children as victims of domestic abuse

This Strategy aims to ensure 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.

Since the inception of this Strategy, the HSCP and the Partnership have worked jointly on several initiatives to support children. Work in this area has been further strengthened through the implementation of the recommendations from the HSCP's recent scrutiny, progress against which is monitored through a joint action plan between the HSCP and the Partnership.

Examples of work undertaken to improve the response to children as victims of domestic abuse include (but are not limited to):

- A thorough **review of MARAC** and the establishment of a Task and Finish Group, reporting to the Partnership's Risk Management sub-group, to implement improvements (including those relating to the interface between MARAC, Child Protection and Child in Need processes).
- A **review of how the HCSP and Partnership work together**, to ensure both partnerships are working effectively together to make children safer.
- The development of a **network of professional domestic abuse champions** across agencies and departments, including Children's Services and Hertfordshire Constabulary.
- Joint working between the HCSP's Learning and Development sub-group and the Partnership's VAWG sub-group to develop a **multi-agency training package** on VAWG, including domestic abuse.
- The Herts and West Essex Integrated Care Board's development of **training** and a **toolkit** on domestic abuse for **General Practitioners**.
- Development of an **advocacy service for all forms of VAWG**, with more targeted support for children.
- Plans to implement '**One Stop Shops**' across Hertfordshire, where all victims, including children, can access **bespoke support for a diverse range of needs**, including safety planning and therapeutic support.
- Implementation of a **Housing Advocacy service**, and provision of **Flexible Funding**, to support victims in accessing to safe accommodation.

The Partnership will continue to work jointly with the HSCP, and other multi-agency partnerships, where relevant, to ensure that the objectives of this Strategy are delivered for both child and adult victims of domestic abuse.

Section 2: Our approach

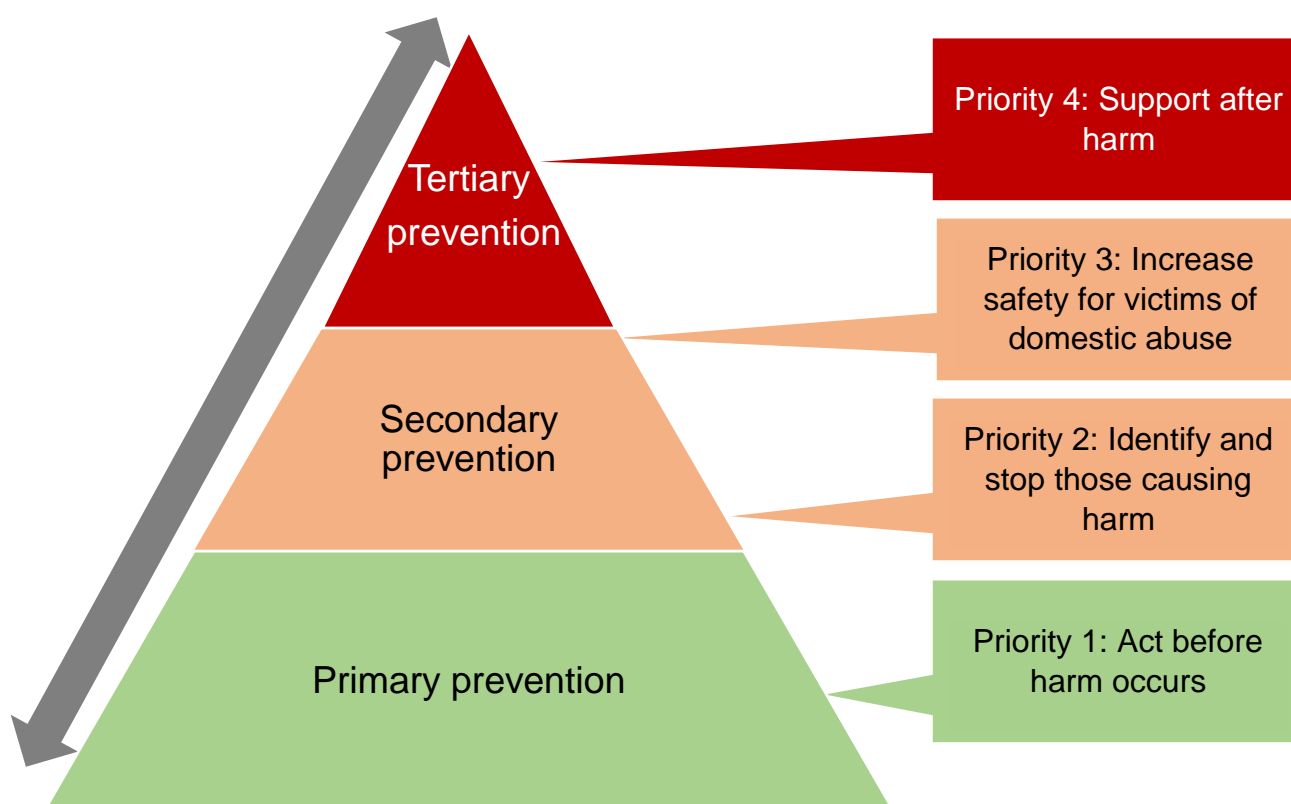
Hertfordshire's vision

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

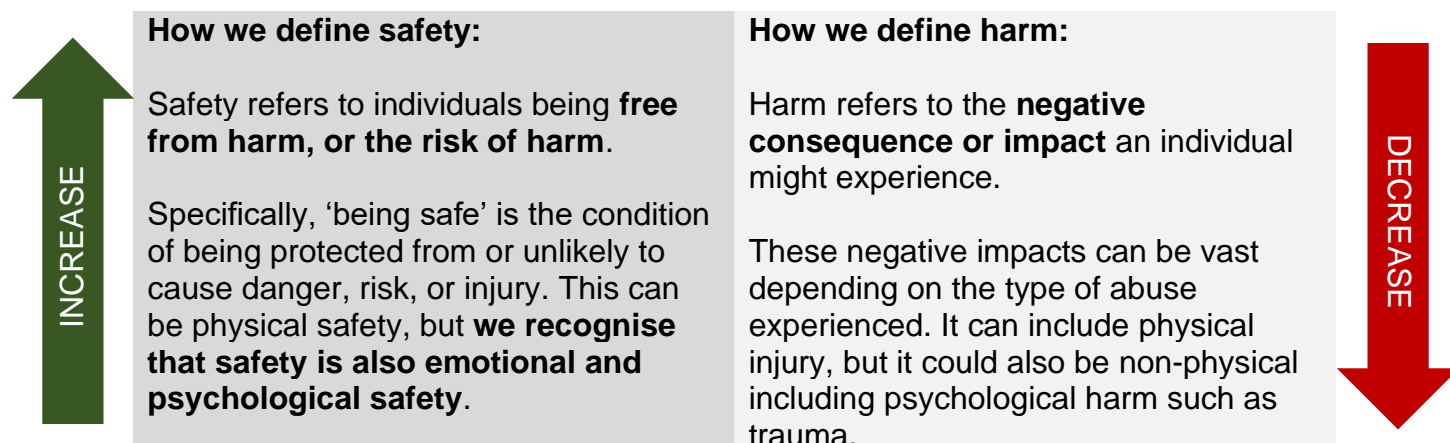
For us to realise our vision, our four strategic priority areas will enable us to work through a prevention lens, through to recovery for individuals, families, and communities. Our priorities are themed around the continuum of prevention to ensure we develop a long-term approach to change.

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 strategy¹¹. 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.



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

¹¹<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 Together¹². This strategy is a whole systems strategy and all organisation's roles will be valued in delivering our priorities.

¹²<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ee0be2588f1e349401c832c/t/5fd78eaf72a0a65a94da967e/1607962290051/In+Search+of+Excellence+2020.pdf>

Section 2a

Priority 1: Act before someone is harmed

Priority vision: A county in which individuals and organisations work proactively to reduce the risk of domestic abuse before harm occurs and builds resilience amongst the local population.

Primary outcomes: Increased awareness and reduced public tolerance of 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 linked this priority will be focussed only on primary prevention, thus attempting to stop and prevent domestic abuse before it occurs.

Our strategic objectives

1. Develop communication and engagement plan aimed reducing public tolerance and changing problematic attitudes and beliefs around domestic abuse.
2. Develop a consistent approach to healthy relationships education which includes content on harmful and abusive behaviours within intimate and family relationships where appropriate.
3. Develop and pilot prevention interventions to reduce the prevalence of risk factors for domestic abuse that exist within Hertfordshire and/or promote protective factors and resiliency.

Section 2b

Priority 2: Identify and stop those that cause harm

Priority vision: A county in which perpetrators of domestic abuse are proactively identified, held accountable for their behaviour, and supported to change.

Primary outcome: Reduced use of harmful and abusive behaviours in intimate and family 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 want 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.

Our strategic objectives

1. Develop a unified offer of support for those identified as using abusive or harmful behaviour in intimate and family relationships with clear referral pathways.
2. Create a consistent multi-agency approach to identifying, assessing, and managing risk of harm from perpetrators.
3. Strengthen the criminal justice response to ensure those using harmful behaviour are brought to justice.

Section 2c

Priority 3: Increase safety for those at risk of harm

Priority vision: A county in which individuals and organisations work together to keep victims of domestic abuse safe from further harm, with effective systems and high-quality services that deliver on safety related outcomes.

Primary outcome: Increased safety for individuals experiencing or at risk due to 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.

Our strategic objectives

1. Develop a clear identification, risk assessment and referral pathway into services so victims receive appropriate support as soon as possible.
2. Support agencies to work together to address the risk and safety of victims through the provision of a high-quality Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) model.
3. Commission high-quality, accessible support services for victims of domestic abuse that deliver on safety related outcomes, including support within safe accommodation and provision for standard, medium and high-risk victims.

Section 2d

Priority 4: Freedom after harm has occurred

Priority vision: A county in which individuals, families and communities can access the support they need, for as long as is needed, to help them overcome the impact of domestic abuse.

Primary outcome: Increased engagement with services offering support for domestic abuse and wider support needs.

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.

Our strategic objectives

1. Develop, commission, and monitor a double district one stop shop model across Hertfordshire to work with victims to meet their holistic needs (e.g. housing, legal, financial, therapeutic).
2. Implement a Whole Housing Approach to ensure all victims can access a safe place to live from which to rebuild their lives following domestic abuse.

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.

Update: September 2024

Please note that the Hertfordshire Domestic Abuse Partnership expanded its remit in 2023 to include all forms of VAWG, including domestic abuse.

The Governance of this strategy remains the same as when it was published, except for a new sub-group which was established in 2023 to develop the Partnership's strategic response to VAWG (updated governance structure below).



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 include Key Performance Indicators to help us measure our progress against our intended outcomes. These have been 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).