

Hertfordshire's Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy

2026-2029

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FOREWORD FROM THE HERTFORDSHIRE DOMESTIC ABUSE CO-PRODUCTION PANEL AND COLLECTIVE

“ As survivors of coercive control and domestic abuse, this strategy represents more than policy, it is a collective commitment to believe, protect, and empower people who have endured the unthinkable. Abuse is not only physical; it is emotional, economic, and systemic. The harm continues long after separation, through court processes, financial hardship, and the challenge of recovery while raising children. That is why this strategy must not only focus on preventing harm but also sustaining survivors beyond crisis.

The public health approach is essential, but prevention alone is not enough if recovery is not fully understood. Healing takes time and requires safe housing, financial independence, and trauma-informed professionals who recognise the influence of culture, faith, and identity. Systems must be designed to support recovery rather than inadvertently re-traumatising survivors through disbelief, delays, or procedural barriers.

Behind every statistic is a real person, someone who was silenced before being heard. Survivors are not defined by what happened to us; we are parents, professionals, and community members rebuilding our lives while navigating systems that were never built with us in mind. For women of faith or refugee backgrounds, barriers can include stigma, fear of dishonour, and isolation. True safety must therefore be inclusive and culturally responsive.

The success of this strategy depends on valuing survivor expertise as equal to professional expertise. Survivors should not only be consulted but meaningfully involved in designing, reviewing, and evaluating the work to ensure it remains grounded in real experience. We hope the strategy also commits to addressing post-separation trauma, recognising that coercive control and harm often continue long after the relationship has ended.

We would like to see a stronger focus on a survivor voice-led approach, so those with lived experience can help shape and monitor delivery, ensuring that commitments lead to meaningful change. Recovery must include economic stability, access to housing, and opportunities for employment, as these are vital to rebuilding lives. Children who have lived through abuse should be recognised as survivors, with consistent and trauma-aware support to help them heal and thrive.

Finally, success should be measured not only through data or prosecution rates, but by whether survivors feel safe, respected, and believed. For many of us, safety was never handed to us, we had to fight for it within every system we turned to. A strategy like this should ensure no one has to fight that hard again.

When policy is shaped through survivor voices, it becomes more than a strategy; it becomes a promise that Hertfordshire can be a place where recovery, dignity, and hope are truly possible for everyone.

”



Hertfordshire Domestic Abuse Co-Production
Panel and Collective

November 2025

FOREWORD FROM THE HERTFORDSHIRE VAWG PARTNERSHIP'S CHAIR

“ I am proud to introduce Hertfordshire’s first ever Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy. This strategy represents a significant step forward, as the Hertfordshire VAWG Partnership broadens its focus beyond domestic abuse – as previously outlined in their Domestic Abuse Strategy (2022-2025) - to a wider spectrum of harm.

We use the term VAWG to talk about types of abuse known to be disproportionately perpetrated by men against women and girls, including (but not limited to) domestic abuse, sexual abuse, stalking and harassment, female genital mutilation, forced marriage and so-called ‘honour-based’ abuse. These forms of harm are rooted in gender inequality and discrimination, and it is only through acknowledging their interconnectedness that we can develop an effective response. This type of approach also aligns Hertfordshire with national and international VAWG frameworks.

We know that people’s experiences of VAWG are not the same, being shaped by factors like race, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexuality, age, and socio-economic status. These overlapping identities can create additional barriers to safety and support, and we have embedded intersectionality into this strategy as part of our commitment to making sure no one is left behind.

This strategy is not the work of any one agency, representing the collective commitment and insight of the VAWG Partnership. We have worked collaboratively with our statutory partners, specialist services, and people with lived experience to ensure the strategy is grounded in evidence and informed by those who understand the realities of VAWG. We are grateful to our partners and experts for sharing their time, specialist knowledge, and passion in developing this strategy.

Together, we can create a Hertfordshire where women and girls are safe, supported, and able to thrive — in their homes, their communities, and their futures. ”



Sarah Perman

Chair of the Hertfordshire VAWG Partnership
Director of Public Health for Hertfordshire County Council

FOREWORD FROM THE HERTFORDSHIRE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER

“ Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is unacceptable and a stain on our society. It is one of the most significant challenges facing our communities. Nationally, one in eight women experienced domestic abuse, sexual assault or stalking in the year to March 2025.

While these crimes can affect anyone, we should be clear and unambiguous that domestic abuse, stalking and sexual offences are overwhelmingly perpetrated by men against women. Reducing VAWG requires behaviour change from men, not women.

Everyone in Hertfordshire deserves to feel safe and free from abuse and harm, whether in their own homes or in their local community.

This strategy aligns closely with my Police and Crime Plan: Fighting Crime, Making Hertfordshire Safer. This sets out a clear priority to protect people from violence, abuse and exploitation, including a specific focus on preventing and disrupting high harm crimes such as VAWG. The Police and Crime Plan is built on five core objectives, which shape Hertfordshire Constabulary’s work and provide the foundation for our contribution to this strategy.

Policing has an important role to play: proactively keeping vulnerable people safe, ensuring there is a relentless pursuit of perpetrators and ensuring victims and survivors are supported through the criminal justice system. VAWG is a core policing priority both in our local Plan and national requirements.

Making Hertfordshire safer is not something the police can do alone. Preventing violence and supporting survivors requires public services, the criminal justice system, charities and employers to all recognise the part they play. Everyone in Hertfordshire can challenge harmful behaviour and attitudes and support those who have experienced abuse.

I am grateful to everyone who has contributed to the development of this strategy, especially the survivors who have shared their experiences. Their voices are central to shaping a system that is compassionate, trauma informed and focused on achieving justice.

There is more that we need to do beyond this strategy. The 2025 public consultation carried out by the partnership showed that many women in Hertfordshire want to see more action to make their local area safer. It’s essential that all those with a role in community safety respond to that call.

As Police and Crime Commissioner, I will continue to work closely with Hertfordshire Constabulary to strengthen the response to VAWG, hold the Chief Constable to account for progress, and ensure that victims receive high quality support throughout their journey.”



Jonathan Ash-Edwards

Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire

FOREWORD FROM THE ASSISTANT CHIEF CONSTABLE

“ Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is one of the most serious and complex challenges we face across Hertfordshire. It causes profound harm to individuals, families and communities, and undermines the sense of safety that everyone has a right to expect. For policing, VAWG is both high harm and high volume, and addressing it requires a relentless, coordinated and sustained response.

I am proud to support Hertfordshire’s first VAWG Partnership Strategy. It reflects a shared commitment across agencies to prevent harm, protect those at risk, and hold perpetrators to account. Crucially, it recognises that VAWG is not an issue that any single organisation can solve alone, but one that demands a whole system response grounded in partnership, evidence, and the voices of survivors.

Hertfordshire Constabulary’s VAWG Strategy has been developed to complement this wider partnership approach. It sets out our policing priorities: strengthening investigative standards, relentlessly pursuing perpetrators, and ensuring a consistently high quality, victim centred and trauma informed response. We are committed to improving how we identify risk, respond to vulnerability, and support victims and survivors throughout their journey, recognising children as victims in their own right and working to build trust and confidence in policing.

Our approach is underpinned by the national 4P framework — Prepare, Prevent, Protect and Pursue — and a strong focus on professionalism, data driven decision making, and organisational culture. We are equally committed to working with partners across the criminal justice system, local authorities, health, education, and specialist services, ensuring our activity aligns with the broader public health and prevention ambitions set out in this strategy.

We recognise the importance of listening to lived experience. Through our Independent Advisory Group and partnership engagement, we will continue to learn from victims and survivors to improve how we respond and to ensure our services are inclusive, fair, and effective for all communities.

This partnership strategy represents an important step forward. By aligning our collective efforts — from prevention and early intervention through to enforcement and long term support — we can strengthen our response and deliver meaningful change.

Together, we can create a Hertfordshire where women and girls are safer, better supported, and confident that they will be listened to and protected. ”



Nick Caveney
Assistant Chief Constable Crime & Public Protection
Hertfordshire Constabulary

FOREWORD FROM COUNCILLOR AJANTA HILTON

“ I am honoured to support Hertfordshire’s first Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy. This strategy is more than a document — it is a promise to our residents that we will work tirelessly to create a safer Hertfordshire for everyone.

VAWG is a profound injustice. It damages lives, families, and communities, and it undermines the values we hold dear. Tackling it requires more than words — it demands action, partnership, and a commitment to change. That is why this strategy focuses on prevention, accountability, and support, ensuring that those affected are never left behind.

Our approach reflects Hertfordshire County Council’s RISE values:

- We improve **R**esidents’ lives
- We work with **I**ntegrity
- We act **S**ustainably
- We champion **E**quality and fairness

At Hertfordshire County Council, we know that no agency can tackle VAWG alone, as doing so requires every part of the system – including health, education, housing and the criminal justice system - to play its role. Hertfordshire is fortunate to have a VAWG partnership that already benefits from strong multi-agency commitment and that places survivor voices at the heart of their work.

I am proud to champion this strategy and the values it represents. I believe that together, we can build a Hertfordshire where everyone is safe, supported, and empowered to thrive. ”



Councillor Ajanta Hilton

Executive Member for Public Health and Community Safety
Hertfordshire County Council

INTRODUCTION

Co-produced with victims, survivors, practitioners and decision makers, this strategy sets out Hertfordshire's collective vision to prevent and respond to all forms of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG).

This strategy is intended for **professionals and organisations** across Hertfordshire who have a responsibility for one or more of the following:

- Preventing VAWG
- Supporting victims and survivors
- Holding those who cause harm to account

This strategy is also for **members of the public**, to make sure they are both supported and have the tools they need to challenge harmful attitudes, recognise abuse, and create a culture in Hertfordshire where VAWG is not tolerated.

This strategy has been developed by the Hertfordshire VAWG Partnership, a multi-agency collaboration that brings together organisations across the county who have a role to play in tackling VAWG. The agencies that make up the Partnership include (but is not limited to):

- **Police and criminal justice agencies**, including Hertfordshire Constabulary, the Hertfordshire Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, Hertfordshire Probation and the wider court system.
- **Health partners**, including the Herts and West Essex Integrated Care Board, Hospital Trusts and other NHS Trusts, including those providing mental health services.
- **Local authorities** including Hertfordshire's ten District and Borough Councils and Hertfordshire County Council
- The **Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector**, including specialist VAWG services
- The **Hertfordshire Domestic Abuse Co-Production Panel** and **Collective**

This ambitious strategy will be accompanied by a detailed delivery plan which will outline the actions we will take as a Partnership to achieve our objectives. We will monitor and evaluate this strategy at regular intervals to ensure it is effective.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) causes significant and lasting harm to individuals, families and communities in Hertfordshire. This strategy sets out a coordinated, partnership-led response to prevent harm, protect victims and survivors, hold those who cause harm to account, and support recovery.

VAWG is rooted in gender inequality, harmful social norms and power imbalances, and exists on a spectrum ranging from 'everyday' misogyny and harassment to serious violence and homicide. While recognising that people of all genders can experience abuse, this strategy is grounded in evidence that women and girls are disproportionately affected and face distinct risks and barriers to safety.

The strategy adopts a public health approach, focusing on action across the whole system and at every stage of prevention. It is underpinned by being gendered, trauma-informed, intersectional and survivor voice-led, with survivor expertise embedded through co-production in the design, delivery and monitoring of services. The four strategic priorities are:

PRIORITY 1: ACT BEFORE HARM OCCURS

Tackling root causes through prevention, education, male allyship, communications and early intervention

PRIORITY 2: IDENTIFY AND STOP THOSE CAUSING HARM

Strengthening perpetrator identification, risk management, accountability and behaviour-change pathways

PRIORITY 3: INCREASE SAFETY FOR VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS

Improving identification, risk assessment, referral pathways, community services and safe accommodation

PRIORITY 4: SUPPORT AFTER HARM HAS OCCURRED

Enabling long-term recovery through holistic, accessible and community-based support

Together, this strategy commits Hertfordshire to a clear, survivor-centred and evidence-led approach to ending violence against women and girls.

HERTFORDSHIRE'S VISION FOR VAWG

For Hertfordshire to be a safe place for individuals and families, where 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.

LINKING WITH UK GOVERNMENT'S VAWG STRATEGY

In December 2025, the UK government released their long-anticipated VAWG strategy. This strategy has three 'pillars', which align closely with the priorities and objectives of Hertfordshire's VAWG strategy.

The Hertfordshire VAWG Partnership has made sure that this strategy links, where it needs to, to the government's strategy. Some differences remain, but these relate to issues that sit outside of local influence and require action at a national level.

The table below gives a summary of where the UK government and Hertfordshire VAWG strategies align.

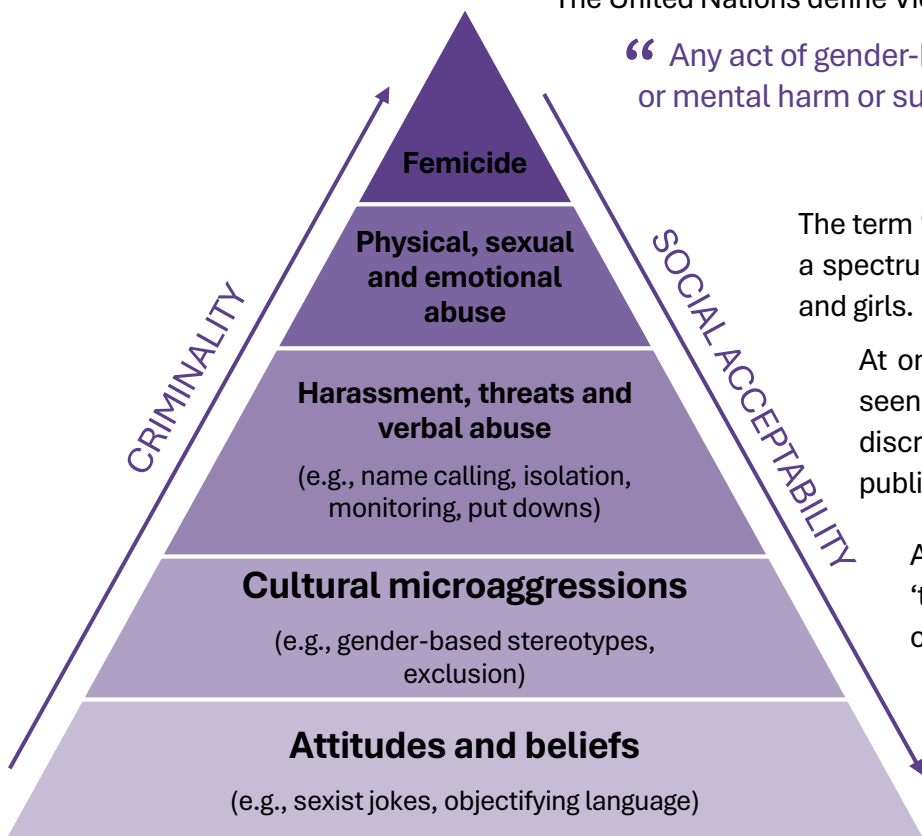
UK GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES	HERTFORDSHIRE PRIORITIES	WHERE THE STRATEGIES ALIGN
Prevention and early intervention	Priority 1: Act before harm occurs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Working with educators ✓ Healthy Relationships programmes ✓ Public campaigns
Relentless pursuit of perpetrators	Priority 2: Identify and stop those causing harm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Identifying perpetrators and managing the risk they pose ✓ Increasing use of orders (such as stalking protection orders, domestic abuse protection orders) ✓ Perpetrator intervention programmes ✓ Working with courts
Support	Priority 3: Increase safety for victims and survivors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Collaborative commissioning of support services ✓ Increasing specialist support within health settings ✓ Support in safe accommodation ✓ Responding to intersecting need
	Priority 4: Support after harm has occurred	

What is Violence Against Women and Girls?

BACKGROUND: WHAT IS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS?

The United Nations define Violence Against Women and Girls as:

“ Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life ”



The term ‘VAWG’ therefore does not refer to specific acts or behaviours. Instead, it is a spectrum of multiple and related acts and behaviours that cause harm to women and girls.

At one end of this spectrum, there are acts and behaviours that are generally seen as “less severe”, such as cat-calling, wolf whistling and use of discriminatory jokes, all of which are used to make women feel intimidated in public spaces.

At the other end of the VAWG spectrum, there is femicide, which means ‘the intentional murder of women because they are women’ within ‘the context of the overall oppression of women in a patriarchal society.’

Whilst not all acts of VAWG are violent (in fact, many won’t be physical or criminal), same ‘golden threads’ run through all forms of VAWG; discrimination, unequal power relations, gender stereotypes and harmful social norms.

BACKGROUND: WHAT IS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS?

Hertfordshire's 2025 Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) on VAWG brings together local and national data on VAWG, alongside research, to explain the need to focus on women and girls.

Understanding the focus on women and girls: What does our JSNA say?

- “ Violence affects individuals of all genders, and it is important to acknowledge that men and boys can also be victims. However, the focus on violence against women and girls is based on evidence and policy that recognises the gendered nature and disproportionate impact of this issue. Specifically:

Disproportionate impact of violence

Women and girls experience domestic abuse, sexual violence, coercive control and domestic homicide at significantly higher rates than men

Societal and cultural factors

VAWG is rooted in societal norms, power imbalances, and structural inequalities that specifically target women and girls

Legal and policy recognition

National and international frameworks (e.g. the UK Government's VAWG Strategy) identify VAWG as a distinct issue requiring targeted responses

Unique barriers to support

Women and girls often face specific and multifaceted challenges in accessing support, including fear of stigma, financial insecurity, cultural pressures, and service availability

Tailored interventions

Addressing VAWG effectively requires specialised services, prevention strategies and approaches that focus on empowerment, transforming gender norms, and addressing intersectional vulnerabilities

Focusing on VAWG does not mean ignoring violence against men. It means recognising that gender matters in how violence is experienced, perpetrated, and addressed, and that women and girls face specific risks and harms that require tailored support and intervention. ”

BACKGROUND: WHAT IS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS?

Types of VAWG

Earlier, we said that VAWG does not refer to specific acts or behaviours. However, there are many which are considered to fall under the VAWG “umbrella”, as shown on the left of this page. These are the forms of VAWG that are within the scope of this strategy.

How can men, boys and non-binary people be supported under a VAWG strategy?

This strategy recognises that male victims, and survivors who do not otherwise identify as female, will face their own barriers to getting the help that they need. We will therefore make sure that men, boys and non-binary people get the right support for their needs, as part of this strategy, balancing this with a recognition that the offences in scope of this strategy disproportionately effect women and girls.

A robust VAWG response not only protects and empowers women and girls, but also contributes to safer, healthier communities for everyone. By challenging harmful norms and promoting respectful relationships, it helps reduce violence more broadly — benefiting men and boys by fostering environments where they too can thrive free from fear, stigma, or pressure to conform to damaging stereotypes.



BACKGROUND: CHILDREN AND VAWG

Unfortunately, data shows that many children will be subjected to VAWG. For example, a 2021 OFSTED report found that nearly 90% of girls and 50% of boys had been sent unwanted and explicit pictures. 92% of girls, and 74% of boys, also said sexist name-calling happens ‘a lot’ or ‘sometimes’ to them and other people their age.¹

It is important to note that children experience abuse differently from adults, and their needs are shaped by age, dependency, and developmental stages. They may be harmed directly or as witnesses to abuse, and the abuse they experience may occur within the family, peer relationships, or through online exploitation.

The nature of abuse perpetrated against children may also differ depending on a child’s gender. For example, boys are more likely than girls to be made to look at pornography, be pressured to have sexual relationships or have intimate images of themselves circulated without their consent – often by other boys or men.¹ Girls, however, are more likely to be subjected to sexual violence, especially online.²

Certain forms of VAWG are also more prevalent among girls, such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). UNICEF estimates that 230 million women and girls worldwide have been subjected to FGM, which is commonly carried out on girls between infancy and 15 years of age.

The impacts of VAWG on children can be wide-ranging, affecting emotional and psychological wellbeing, behaviour, development, and educational outcomes. Domestic abuse and other types of VAWG are classed as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), which have been demonstrated to have long lasting consequences that extend into adulthood.

This strategy recognises that some forms of VAWG disproportionately affect children and that the long-term impacts on their health and wellbeing can be profound. It therefore acknowledges the need for dedicated, age-appropriate support, prevention, and safeguarding responses that reflect children’s specific experiences and vulnerabilities. Much of this work sits within ‘Priority 1’ of this strategy, which looks to prevent harm before it occurs.

¹ Ofsted (2021). *Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges*.

² Children’s Commissioner for England (2013). *“Basically...porn is everywhere”*.

³ UK Parliament (2025). *Violence against women and girls in schools and among children and young people*.

BACKGROUND: WHAT IS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS?

Domestic abuse

The Domestic Abuse Act (2021) introduced a statutory definition of domestic abuse, which says:

Behaviour of a person (“A”) towards another person (“B”) is “domestic abuse” if—

- a) A and B are each **aged 16 or over** and are **personally connected** to each other, and
- b) the behaviour is abusive.

Behaviour is “abusive” if it consists of any of the following—

- a) **physical or sexual abuse.**
- b) **violent or threatening behaviour**
- c) **controlling or coercive behaviour**
- d) **economic abuse**
- e) **psychological, emotional or other abuse**; and it does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.

For the purposes of this Act, A's behaviour **may be behaviour “towards” B**, despite the fact that it consists of **conduct directed at another person** (for example, B's **child**).

The Act considers individuals to be ‘personally connected’ if any of the following applies:

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

The Act, under Section 3, also states that children are victims in their own right.

Stalking

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust, a specialist charity that supports victims of stalking, defines stalking as ‘a pattern of fixated and obsessive behaviour which is repeated, persistent, intrusive and causes fear of violence or engenders alarm and distress in the victim’.

Stalking can consist of any type of behaviour such as regularly sending flowers or gifts, making unwanted or malicious communication, damaging property and physical or sexual assault.

There is also a legal definition of stalking in the Harassment Act (1997).

BACKGROUND: WHAT IS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS?

Sexual assault

The term 'sexual assault' is commonly used to refer to any form of sexual violence or abuse that is unwanted. The [Sexual Offences Act 2003](#) says that someone commits sexual assault if any of the following happens:

- They intentionally touch another person.
- The touching is sexual.
- The other person does not consent to the touching.
- They do not reasonably believe that the other person consents.
- The touching can be with **any part of the body** or with **anything else**.

It could include:

- Kissing.
- Touching someone's genitals, breasts or bottom – including through clothing.
- Touching any other part of the body for sexual pleasure or in a sexual manner – for example, stroking someone's thigh or rubbing their back.
- Pressing up against another person for sexual pleasure or in a sexual manner.
- The perpetrator making someone else touch them in a sexual manner.
- Touching someone's clothing if done for sexual pleasure or in a sexual manner – for example, lifting up someone's skirt.

Sexual abuse may be perpetrated by strangers, friends, acquaintances, current or ex-partners, or family members. Where perpetrated by a partner, ex-partner or family member, sexual abuse may also classify as domestic abuse.

Child sexual abuse

Legally, a child is any person who is aged under 18. Child sexual abuse involves forcing or inciting a child to take part in sexual activity, regardless of whether the child is aware of what is happening.

It may involve physical contact including rape or oral sex, or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. It may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or exploiting or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet) or prostitution.

Child sexual offences, as defined under the Sexual Offences Act, include:

- Sexual activity with a child
- Causing or inciting a child to engage in sexual activity
- Engaging in sexual activity in the presence of a child
- Causing a child to watch a sexual act
- Arranging or facilitating commission of a child sex offence

BACKGROUND: HARMFUL PRACTICES

What are they?

Harmful practices are forms of violence which have been committed primarily against women and girls in communities and societies for so long that they are considered, or presented by perpetrators, as part of accepted 'cultural' practice. The most common are forced or early marriage, so called 'honour' based abuse, female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM) and other lesser reported forms such as faith-based abuse, virginity testing, menstrual huts, acid attacks, corrective rape and others. Some of these have already been defined.

Harmful practices are not unique to any one culture or religion, and as with other forms of VAWG, they are rooted in gender inequality. However, intersections with other forms of oppression – such as perceived notions of honour - can escalate risk and create unique barriers to identification and disclosure.

What have we done to understand more?

There is limited data on harmful practices and a low level of understanding about them, both in Hertfordshire and nationally.

To understand more, we consulted with specialists from by-and-for organisations that work with victims and survivors of Harmful Practices, including:

- Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKWRO)
- Asian Women's Resource Centre
- Forward UK
- Southall Black Sisters

Their suggestions and advice have been considered when drafting this strategy and the objectives that sit within it.

BACKGROUND: HARMFUL PRACTICES

So-called Honour-Based Abuse

Karma Nirvana, a specialist organisation that supports victims of so-called Honour-Based Abuse (HBA), defines HBA as a form of domestic abuse motivated by the abuser's perception that a person has brought or may bring 'dishonour' or 'shame' to themselves, their family or the community. It can take many forms, and can be complex to identify, but centres around the idea of controlling individuals to make them behave in certain ways or subscribe to certain beliefs.

For some people, the concept of 'honour' is prized above the safety and wellbeing of individuals, and to compromise a family's 'honour' is to bring dishonour and shame – which can have e consequences. As a result, this can be used to justify many types of abuse, and even disownment or physical harm.

Forced Marriage

Forced Marriage is where a person uses violence, threats or coercion to cause another to enter into a marriage and believes or ought to believe that the conduct may cause that person to enter into the marriage without free and full consent. It may involve:

- Taking someone overseas to force them into marriage, regardless of whether the marriage actually occurs.
- Doing anything intended to cause a child to marry before their 18th birthday, even if no coercion or force is used.
- Causing someone who lacks the mental capacity to consent to marry, whether they are pressured into the marriage or not.

Female Genital Mutilation

Female Genital Mutilation, or FGM, is where a person excises, infibulates or otherwise mutilates the whole or any part of a girl's labia majora, labia minora or clitoris which is not medically necessary.

Exploitation

'Exploitation' is a broad term that encompasses a range of offences.

Sexual exploitation is when one person or a group of people abuse or attempt to abuse a position of vulnerability, power, or trust, for sexual purposes. This includes, but is not limited to, profiting financially, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.

It is **child sexual exploitation** when the victim and survivor is under the age of 18, and can include prostitution, trafficking and modern slavery. Modern slavery is the illegal exploitation of people for personal or commercial gain.

Trafficking is also a form of VAWG when it involves the recruitment, transportation and exploitation of adults (without their knowledge or consent) and children, for the purposes of sexual exploitation across international borders and within countries ('internal trafficking').

INTERSECTIONALITY

VAWG often intersects with other aspects of an individual's identity, influencing their experiences and access to support. To understand the depth of this issue and its implications, it's crucial to adopt an intersectional approach - one that acknowledges the diverse identities and experiences of survivors. In this section of our strategy, we consider how sociocultural, economic, and political factors such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and other individual characteristics can affect victims.

LGB+ PEOPLE

Survivors who are lesbian/gay, bisexual, or another (non-heterosexual) orientation (hereby referred to as LGB+ survivors) are more likely to have attempted suicide, self-harmed, experienced abuse from multiple perpetrators, faced historic abuse by family members, and have higher levels of additional support needs (such as drug or alcohol use). They may also face abuse based on their sexual orientation, which can be used as a tool of control within abusive relationships.

Research shows that LGB survivors seek support in different ways, and this needs to be reflected in our strategy. To better understand LGB victims needs, we worked with Galop, Impactful Governance and Equation. Some of their comments, including feedback from LGB+ survivors, are included here and has been used to tailor our objectives. We will continue to work with specialist, by-and-for organisations in the delivery of this strategy.

Some LGBTQ+ survivors in Hertfordshire have reported not feeling safe, and have moved to places where they feel they may be more accepted, such as London or Brighton

“My IDVA was lovely, but they had not worked with a gay man before. Because of this, I don’t think my experiences were fully understood”

Universal services often want to put LGBTQ+ people into a heteronormative box

TRANSGENDER MEN AND WOMEN

Transgender men and women face high levels of violence, abuse and discrimination¹. This has only increased in recent years, especially since the 2025 UK Supreme Court ruling that the legal definition of a woman, for the purposes of the Equality Act (2010), would be based on biological sex. This has created uncertainty about how the decision will be interpreted in practice. The Partnership will continue to support services to implement any further guidance, so that support remains appropriate and accessible for all groups.

In developing this strategy, we worked with Galop, Impactful Governance² and Equation³ to try and understand more about trans men and women's experiences of abuse and the support that they need. Through Galop, we heard directly from survivors, and we share some of their experiences here. Their insights have shaped our objectives, and throughout this strategy’s delivery, we will continue working with trans survivors and specialist organisations to ensure we provide the right support

I never know how somebody is going to react to my identity

I feel like I’m putting my life and dignity into their hands

I wouldn’t feel safe in a communal refuge

By speaking to an organisation for LGBTQ+ people “I knew I wouldn’t be judged or have to explain myself”

¹ Transgender people over four times more likely than cisgender people to be victims of violent crime - Williams Institute

² <https://www.galop.org.uk/news/galop-response-to-ehrc-code-of-practice>

OLDER PEOPLE

Like most of the UK, Hertfordshire has an aging population. Of the estimated population of Hertfordshire at mid-2024, 216,310 (17.5%) were aged 65+. 288,003 (21.7%) are projected to be over 65 by 2047.

Compared to victims under 60, victims aged 61 and over are more likely to:

- be subjected to abuse from an adult family member
- be living with the perpetrator after getting support
- have a disability

Older victims will also often suffer abuse for much longer than younger victims. This is because identifying older victims of abuse is hindered by a interconnected barriers, such as:



Unfortunately, data from Hertfordshire VAWG services show few people over 60 are accessing support. Many services are ill-equipped to support victims with complex health or cognitive needs, and concerns about leaving behind dependent perpetrators further complicate decisions.

CARERS

8.1% of Hertfordshire residents in 2021 provided unpaid care, according to the ONS Census, 2021.

Research has shown that carers are more likely to be female and more likely to be subjected to abuse. For example, a 2025 study in England found that..

**1 in 3
carers**

**reported being
subjected to
domestic
abuse**

Carers were more likely than non-carers to be victims of physical, emotional and sexual forms of abuse, and people with experience of both caring responsibilities and domestic abuse have poorer mental and physical health outcomes.

Carers may feel they have to stay with the person hurting them due to their vulnerability, while high-cost care options and financial concerns deter both victims and families from seeking help. Many services lack specialist domestic abuse training, particularly smaller organisations, and temporary accommodation often fails to meet mobility needs or be suitable for older people. Cultural expectations and stigma can pressure women to resume caregiving roles post-separation, even amid ongoing coercive control. Physical safety is also a concern when perpetrators control essential care equipment, exacerbating victims' vulnerability.

Some young carers may seek early relationships or start families to avoid future caregiving responsibilities, particularly in cultures where there is a strong expectation for family members to provide care. Additionally, cultural beliefs can create barriers to accessing external support, as accepting outside help is sometimes perceived as a failure, leading families to feel obligated to care for abusive relatives themselves.

DISABILITY

8.1% (172,675) of Hertfordshire residents assessed themselves as disabled under the Equalities Act 2010.

Research shows that women with disabilities are more likely to be subjected to domestic abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual assault than women without disabilities

SafeLives research has also found that victims with disabilities suffer more severe and frequent abuse over longer periods of time than non-disabled victims. Women with disabilities may also feel more isolated and feel they are unable to report the abuse, or they may be dependent on the abuser for their care.

MENTAL HEALTH

Research supports the existence of a bidirectional relationship between mental health and domestic abuse, where domestic abuse leads to mental health difficulties but can also render people more vulnerable to domestic abuse¹.

SafeLives research shows that 42% of people accessing support from a domestic abuse service had mental health problems and 17% had planned or attempted suicide.

Another study found that women who have experienced extensive physical and sexual violence are more than twice as likely to have a problem with alcohol than those who have little experience.

Furthermore, women with reduced mental capacity are at significantly greater risk of experiencing violence, particularly sexual and interpersonal violence, due to compounded vulnerabilities such as dependency, communication barriers, and societal neglect.

SUICIDE

Evidence has shown that there is an increased risk of suicide among women that have been abused or have experienced coercive and controlling behaviour.

A 2025 UK study found that 26% of women with mental disorders who died by suicide had experienced domestic abuse.

26%

Factors such as unemployment and adverse life experiences were found to intersect suicide and domestic abuse, suggesting that overlapping disadvantages can increase risk.

The Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme report on domestic homicides and suspected victim suicides identified that²:

- Suspected suicide victims were slightly younger than victims in other types, mostly under 45 years' old.
- There were fewer victims from minority ethnic groups, possibly indicating under-identification of suspected suicides amongst minority ethnic groups.
- Previous non-fatal strangulation by the suspect of this or a previous victim was more present amongst this type of case.
- As with intimate partner homicide, (attempted or actual) separation was also present in a sizeable number of cases.

¹ [Safe-and-well-Mental-health-and-domestic-abuse-spotlight-report.pdf](#)

² [Domestic Homicides and Suspected Victim Suicides During the Covid-19 Pandemic 2020-2021](#)

HOMELESSNESS

The Women’s Rough Sleeping Census was first conducted in 2022, led by Single Homeless Project in conjunction with Solace Women’s Aid. In 2024, Hertfordshire took part in the Women’s Rough Sleeping Census for the first time. The women with lived experience who made up the focus group when planning the census reported that most of them had experienced a type of VAWG while they were homeless and/or rough sleeping.

Of the 60 women who completed the survey, 26 were accessing support from a specialist domestic abuse or sexual violence support service. A third of all surveys were completed with the help of a specialist domestic abuse or sexual violence support service.



SafeLives research published in 2018 shows that 32% of homeless women say that domestic abuse contributed to them becoming homeless, and that 62% of single homeless people are ‘hidden’ from support services and official statistics.

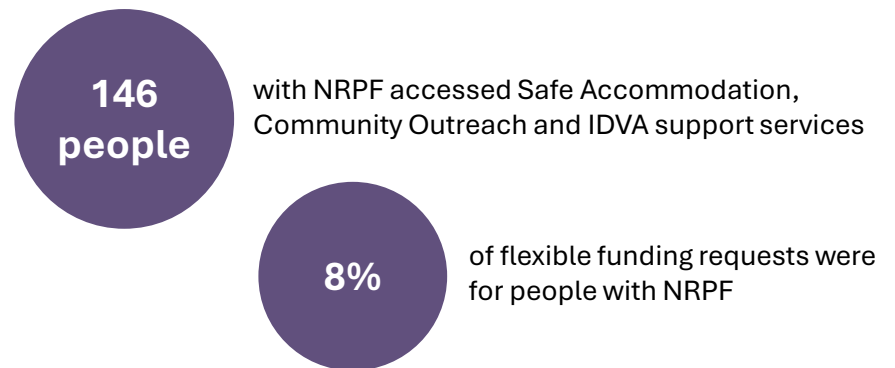
Research from Crisis shows that around 7% of people facing homelessness will experience sexual assault at some point, and that 13% of homeless women reported being raped in the past 12 months prior to research publication. Additionally, 92% of mothers facing homelessness report being subjected to e physical and/or sexual violence at some point in their lives.

NO RECOURSE TO PUBLIC FUNDS

NRPF prevents a person from accessing most welfare benefits and housing assistance due to their immigration status. It can often leave people trapped with abusive perpetrators, increases their vulnerability to further exploitation and limits their access to safety. They are often unable to leave the abuse due to:

- A lack of finances
- Cultural and language barriers
- Fear of immigration enforcement and other authorities
- Immigration status used as a tool of coercive control
- Ineligibility for safe accommodation

Between April 2024 and March 2025, in Hertfordshire:



RACE & ETHNICITY

Rates of violent victimisation are higher amongst some ethnic groups. For example, the 2023/24 CSEW shows that women of Mixed ethnicity were more likely than any other ethnic group to report being a victim of domestic abuse or harassment.

A 2022 Ofcom report found women from minority ethnic groups in the UK were three times more likely than white women to have seen or experienced sharing of intimate images without consent and four times more likely to have received an unsolicited sexual image or video.

People from minority ethnic groups may also be more reluctant to report abuse to the police for a range of reasons, including concerns about the impact or stigma on their wider family or community, language difficulties or feeling distrustful of the police.

Research shows that domestic abuse is a significant issue for the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) community. A recent study estimated that:



The isolated nature of GRT communities can lead to domestic abuse being seen as ‘normal’ by successive generations of both women and the close-knit nature of the community can act as a barrier to victims seeking support if someone is unable to access services privately.

The Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme (VKPP), which reports on domestic homicides and suspected victim suicides, identified that there were fewer BAME victims – possibly indicating under-identification of suspected victim suicides amongst minority ethnic groups.

RELIGION

The Faith and VAWG Coalition state that “many survivors with a faith feel that across society in general, including some specialist VAWG services, there is a lack of understanding of their experiences of abuse. There is also a significant knowledge gap around the barriers that many survivors of faith face when seeking support, due to their religious identity, their faith community, structural inequality and experiences of spiritual abuse”.¹

The Coalition also note that “the experiences and needs of women from faith backgrounds are diverse and intersect significantly with race, ethnicity, class, ability, language, immigration status and even denominational belonging. For instance, a White Anglican woman’s experiences will be very different to a Black Christian Pentecostal woman”.²

Local faith leaders (who are part of the Hertfordshire Faith and Health Board) have also reported that survivors may face additional abuse and discrimination based on their faith, and that this is often directed at women. Equally, faith and religion can be sources of comfort for victims and survivors, and faith communities can play a central role in helping tackle VAWG. It is therefore key that we continue to work with faith leaders in the delivery of this strategy.

¹ Addressing spiritual abuse in ending violence against women and girls: guidance by the faith & VAWG coalition

² Keeping the Faith: Hertfordshire’s Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy (2026-2029)

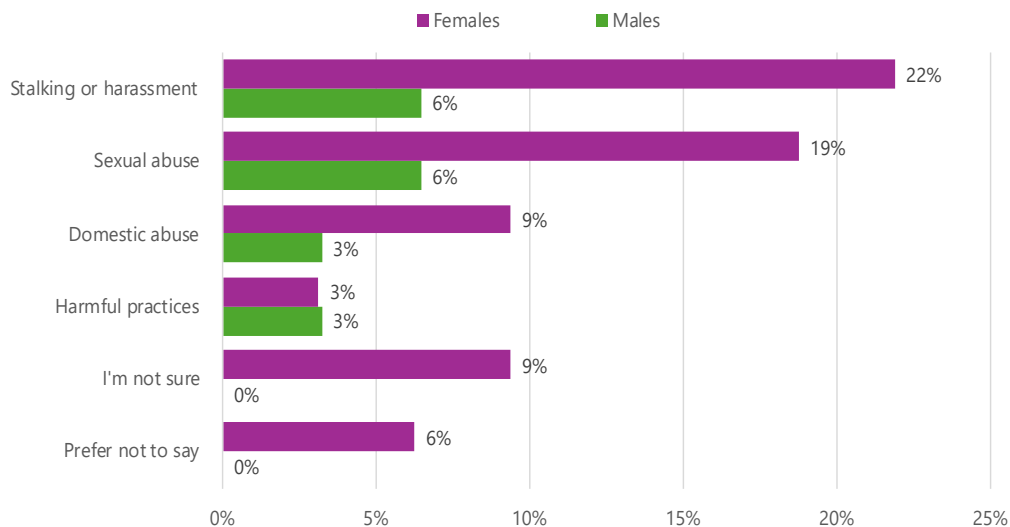
CHILDREN

As part of the VAWG survey in 2025, we sought the views of boys and girls aged 0-17.



72% of children that completed the 2025 Hertfordshire VAWG survey have seen or experienced misogynistic behaviour

Through the survey, girls reported experiencing abuse more often than males across all types of abuse, with stalking/harassment (22%) and sexual abuse (19%) being the most common types of abuse among girls.



38% of girls (n=12) reported experiencing one or more of the abuse types listed, compared to 13% of boys. Females reported a higher prevalence of abuse across categories, with stalking and harassment (22%) and sexual abuse (19%) the most reported types.

SEND

Individuals with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) often experience unique vulnerabilities that can significantly affect how abuse and trauma manifest. For children and adults with SEND, trauma may present in ways that differ from typical patterns—such as heightened anxiety, regression in skills, increased sensory sensitivities, or changes in communication and behaviour. These signs are frequently misinterpreted or overlooked by professionals, leading to missed opportunities for intervention.

Survivors with SEND may struggle to articulate their experiences or understand that what happened constitutes abuse, making disclosure less likely. Similarly, perpetrators with SEND may lack awareness of boundaries or the harmful nature of their actions, which complicates safeguarding responses.

Professionals play a critical role in identifying these indicators, yet many report feeling underprepared to recognise trauma in individuals with complex SEND needs. Building confidence and competence in this area is essential. This includes understanding how trauma can intersect with cognitive, emotional, and sensory differences, and ensuring access to specialist support tailored to SEND-specific needs. Currently, there is a gap in community-based resources that help children with SEND understand domestic abuse and develop protective strategies.

DRUG AND ALCHOL USE

Caution should be taken when making inferences about the relationship between alcohol and/or drug use and violence victimisation, as substance use can make a person more vulnerable to victimisation and can also increase a person's risk of substance dependency as a consequence.

Victims of domestic abuse have a higher rate of substance misuse (whether it starts before or after the abuse) compared to women who have not experienced domestic abuse and at least 20% of high-risk victims report using drugs and/or alcohol.

In many cases, substance misuse is cited by victims as a way to cope. Perpetrators may also use dependency to prevent victims from attending alcohol treatment, so that they can continue to control them in this way.



MALE VICTIMS

Whilst we know that VAWG disproportionately effects women and girls, this strategy recognises that male victims, and survivors who do not otherwise identify as female, will face their own barriers to getting the help that they need.

For example, we know that male victims and survivors are less likely to recognise that they are experiencing abuse and may fear that they won't be believed due to myths like "boys/men can't be abused", alongside wider societal stigma and gendered norms that also contribute.

Boys and men may also not know what help is available and/or may think that there is no help or support available for male survivors. The [Men's health strategy](#) states that very few services exist to support male victims of domestic abuse or sexual violence. Boys and men may have also been let down in the past by professionals, and this may delay them asking for help again.

Research conducted with male victims and survivors by the CPS, through specialist organisations supporting them, also had a number of key findings in relation to masculinity and victimhood, including:

Feeling that being abused diminishes their masculinity, particularly when the abuser is a woman

Facing assumptions that they should have been able to defend themselves or prevent the abuse

Having their sexuality questioned or stereotyped if raped or assaulted by another man

Having sexual abuse by older women dismissed or minimised²

²Crown Prosecution Service public statement on male victims of domestic abuse, rape, sexual offences, stalking, forced marriage, honour-based abuse, child abuse, prostitution, pornography, obscenity and human trafficking with a focus on sexual exploitation

INTERSECTIONALITY: LINKING WITH OTHER STRATEGIES

Due to the intersectional nature of VAWG, this strategy will need to link with other strategic responses being implemented across Hertfordshire.

We will make sure that we link with other partnerships and boards in the delivery of this strategy, including (but not limited to):

- The Hertfordshire Safeguarding Adults Board
- The Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership
- The Hertfordshire Criminal Justice Board
- The Hertfordshire Youth Justice Management Board
- The Serious Violence Action Group
- The Hertfordshire Growth Board mission on Healthy and Safe Places

APPROACHES THAT UNDERPIN OUR WORK



Experiences of abuse – and access to support and justice – can be different for different groups of people. Some will be affected disproportionately due to their race, ethnicity, sexuality and orientation, gender identity, disability, age, social class, immigration status, nationality, or faith. This strategy will consider how different aspects of identity may intersect, and what steps can be taken to remove any barriers to support these intersections may create.

WHOLE PERSON



Acts of VAWG are interconnected and part of a spectrum of violence that is underpinned by gender inequality. This strategy will set out support for men and boys who experience similar types of abuse to women and girls, as we know they will face their own unique challenges in getting help. This strategy does, however, focus on the disproportionate nature of VAWG and the need to tackle gender inequality to have a real impact.

GENDERED



VAWG has a significant impact on the wellbeing of survivors, and the trauma caused is often long-lasting. This strategy has been developed with this in mind, considering how victims can be supported to recover from trauma, how we can ensure victims are not re-traumatised when trying to get support and how we can help professionals to understand and respond to the different ways trauma presents.

TRAUMA INFORMED



We take a survivor voice-led approach, placing the experiences, insights, and priorities of those affected by VAWG at the heart of decision-making. This approach actively involves survivors through co-production to shape and deliver services, addressing real barriers victims face. Co-Production is a continuous process that strengthens trust and ensures our strategy delivers real change for those affected by VAWG.

SURVIVOR VOICE

TAKING A SURVIVOR-LED APPROACH

Our survivor voice-led approach

Survivor voice centres the experiences and expertise of individuals who have been through abuse or trauma, recognising them as ‘experts by experience’.

The Partnership takes a survivor voice-led approach, embedding survivor voice throughout the design, delivery and monitoring of its services, from engaging with 71 women as part of developing the first Women’s Homelessness Census to the development of Hertfordshire’s Domestic Abuse Panel and Collective. Over 40 survivors of VAWG were consulted directly to help shape this strategy alongside feedback from over 3,000 residents in Hertfordshire as part of our recent VAWG survey.

In Hertfordshire, embedding survivor voice requires a long-term approach to ensure structured, meaningful involvement at every stage of strategy delivery. Working with the following principles of co-production:

- Early engagement
- Formal representation within governance structures
- Being trauma informed
- To move beyond “consultation” to co-production
- Continuous feedback
- Compensation
- Accessibility

Hertfordshire’s Co-Production Panel and Collective

The panel was first established in 2021 to play a key and collaborative role in delivering the Hertfordshire Domestic Abuse Strategy (2022-2025) and improving the responses to domestic abuse.

The Co-Production Panel sits within the Partnership’s governance structure and consists of ten survivors, led by an independent facilitator. We also have a growing Collective of survivors who influence and shape the Hertfordshire VAWG Partnership strategy and delivery.

“We want survivors to know we care and together we can make a difference now and for future generations.”

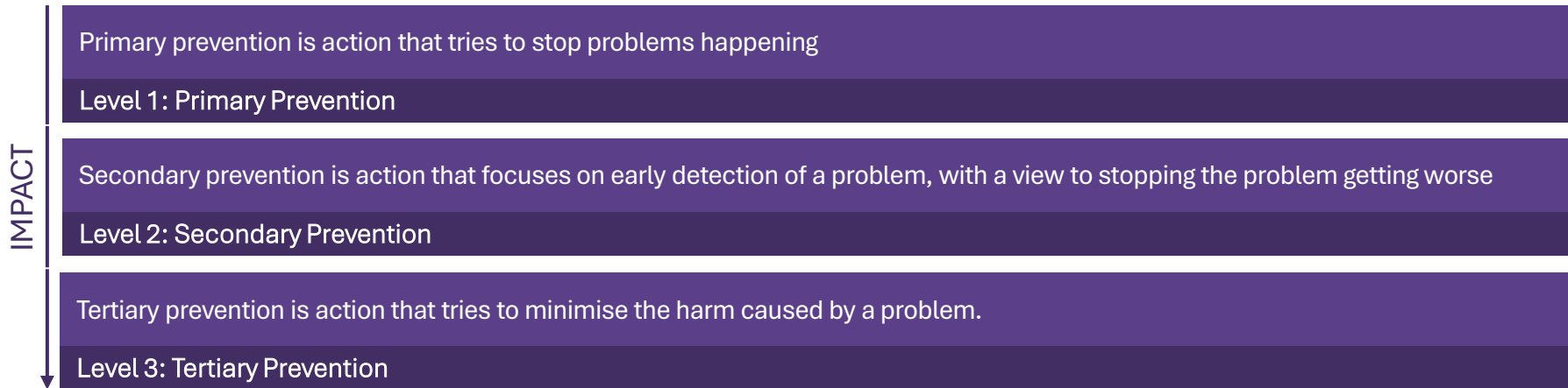
“Being a member of the Co-Production Panel is a meaningful and impactful experience.”

“As a panel, we pride ourselves on fostering a welcoming atmosphere that is free from judgement...When I first joined the panel, I was hesitant to speak. However, the encouragement and support from fellow members helped me find my voice, assuring me that my perspective was valued.”

“There is one goal, and the empathy and compassion only a survivor can give is unique and paramount, we provide real understanding of mindset, behaviours, mental and physical challenges, and for me most importantly, insight into how to navigate recovery and the obstacles that come with it.”

A PREVENTATIVE APPROACH TO VAWG

This strategy takes a public health approach to preventing VAWG. Within a public health approach, there are **three levels of prevention**:



When it comes to tackling VAWG, a combination of primary, secondary and tertiary interventions are needed to achieve meaningful change. Across the UK, the focus has tended to be on secondary prevention; this can be seen in national campaigns to improve the criminal justice response to VAWG and increase the amount of support available to victims.

Whilst these interventions are vital, there has been growing recognition in recent years of the importance of primary prevention, which aims to stop VAWG from happening in the first place. In Hertfordshire, primary prevention will be a particular area of focus, recognising that **the earlier we act, the bigger the impact we can have.**

HERTFORDSHIRE'S PRIORITIES

To allow us to achieve our vision, our **four strategic priorities** are themed around the continuum of prevention.



As a nuanced approach is needed in response to the different acts and behaviours on the VAWG spectrum, this strategy will consider how the objectives under each strategic priority need to be tailored depending on the type of VAWG being addressed.

SUMMARY OF PRIORITY 1: ACT BEFORE HARM OCCURS

Our objectives:

1. Support education settings in Hertfordshire to adopt a coordinated, whole-school approach to preventing VAWG
2. Increase the number of White Ribbon accredited organisations across Hertfordshire to promote male allyship
3. Develop and implement an annual communication and engagement plan to reduce public tolerance of VAWG and change problematic attitudes and beliefs.
4. Partner with by-and-for organisations to raise awareness of Harmful Practices, increase our understanding of how we can prevent them and develop practical strategies for prevention initiatives

PRIORITY 1: WHY AND HOW WE SHOULD ACT BEFORE HARM OCCURS

Why is it important to act before harm occurs?

It is important to tackle the root causes of VAWG to effect lasting change as otherwise, we can only treat the symptoms when they appear; at this point, harm has already occurred.

How can VAWG be prevented?

The causes of VAWG are rooted in gender inequality, harmful social norms and gender stereotypes, all of which are still prevalent in society today. This means that the best ways to prevent VAWG is by taking a gender transformative approach and:

- Tackle the root causes of the violence- especially harmful gender norms, stereotypes, and power imbalances between men and women
- Challenge misogyny and the attitudes and behaviours that foster male violence against women and girls
- Create a culture based on equal rights and respect
- Reduce public tolerance of all acts and behaviours on the VAWG spectrum.

Our concept of gender, and how we express it, starts at an early age. It's informed by what we see our parents doing, how we're dressed, the toys we're given to play with and what we see in the media we consume.

Children quickly start to feel the pressure of gender stereotypes, believing they must behave in certain ways depending on their sex. These stereotypes then become engrained in children's lives, and beliefs like "women should be kind and caring" and "men should be strong and not show their emotions" can reinforce gender inequality in later life. The cumulative effect of this can be seen reflected in statistics, which show that men continue to occupy the majority of senior leadership positions whilst a disproportionate amount of unpaid domestic and care work is done by women. These same gendered norms — particularly those linked to superiority, power and entitlement — have also been identified in the Men's Health Strategy¹ as risk factors for men and boys perpetuating VAWG.

Consideration can also be given as to how our primary prevention work can connect to the Prevent agenda. Prevent identifies and supports individuals who may be susceptible to terrorist ideologies, including those that promote violence and extreme misogyny. By increasing partnership work across agendas we can ensure responses are coordinated and effective.

PRIORITY 1: AN OVERVIEW OF OBJECTIVE 1

Support education settings in Hertfordshire to adopt a coordinated, whole-school approach to preventing VAWG

OBJECTIVE 1

It is important to support children and young people, from an early age, to have healthy relationships and more equal gender relations. Beyond Equality, an organisation who specialises in this, note that this is particularly important for boys, whose ‘formative moments are often marked by a pressure to behave a certain way, to present as a certain type and to *be* a certain version of the perceived ideal of masculinity.¹

Whilst it is recognised that schools play a critical role, preventing VAWG requires a whole-system early years and community approach. This includes early years providers, families, health services and community organisations, alongside schools. Within this wider system, schools are a key setting for prevention work, with a “whole-school approach” recognised as best practice². A whole-school approach involves the entire school community — including staff, leadership, parents and external partners — working together to prevent and respond to VAWG. It integrates policies, curriculum, staff training, student engagement and community involvement to create a safe, equitable environment and challenge harmful norms.

Key elements include:

- Policy and leadership commitment – clear safeguarding and VAWG policies
- Curriculum integration – teaching about gender equality, consent, and healthy relationships
- Staff capacity building – training teachers and staff to identify and respond to VAWG
- Student participation – empowering students as active participants in prevention
- Community and parental engagement – connecting with parents and local services
- Monitoring and evaluation – tracking progress and impact

We have heard from schools, and other people working in the education sector, that there would be some challenges in delivering such an approach, including:

- Limited resources - lack of funding for staff training, curriculum development, and specialist support
- Curriculum pressures - insufficient time within the school timetable to embed additional content
- Monitoring and evaluation gaps - difficult to measure impact and outcomes of prevention work

As part of this strategy, we will work with schools and those working in the education sector to try and overcome some of these challenges.

¹ The Armour of Masculinity

² Hertfordshire's Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy (2026-2029)

Teaching relationships education to prevent sexual abuse

PRIORITY 1: WHAT WILL WE DO TO ACHIEVE OBJECTIVE 1?

Support education settings in Hertfordshire to adopt a coordinated, whole-school approach to preventing VAWG

OBJECTIVE 1

What will we do to achieve this objective?

We will:

- Support education settings to integrate **age-appropriate Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) content** on healthy relationships, consent, gender equality, and online safety, in line with the 2025 RSHE statutory guidance
- Support education settings to develop **training and guidance for school staff** — including leadership, teaching, and support staff — to help them recognise, respond to, and challenge VAWG-related behaviours, supported by Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2025
- Work with education providers to increase access to **positive male role models** for students
- Roll out awareness-raising campaigns and **support materials for families/parents**, including how to recognise behavioural changes, having difficult conversations and providing early help.

PRIORITY: AN OVERVIEW OF OBJECTIVE 2

Increase the number of White Ribbon accredited organisations across Hertfordshire to promote male allyship

OBJECTIVE 2

Whilst Male allyship is essential to tackling VAWG, it should work alongside efforts to empower women and girls. This includes creating opportunities for female leaders, amplifying women's voices in decision-making and ensuring that systems and structures support gender equality. According to White Ribbon UK (a specialist charity), 'allyship to women and girls means men taking action every day to challenge misogyny and sexism in the attitudes and behaviours that they witness, in systems and the media'.¹

According to the charity, male allyship has a number of benefits, such as:

It helps to create a more equal and safer society for all women and girls to live free from the fear of violence.

It helps to break down harmful gender norms and stereotypes, that perpetuate and attempt to legitimise violence against women and girls.

It has a direct impact on boys and men, promoting healthy expressions of masculinity - allowing them to express themselves emotionally and eradicating limiting ideas of what it means to be a man.

Many organisations in Hertfordshire are already White Ribbon accredited, meaning that they are recognised by the charity for their work on VAWG and how they are engaging men and boys as allies to challenge harmful attitudes and behaviours.

To help foster male allyship across Hertfordshire, we would like to expand the number of White Ribbon accredited organisations in the county, with particular focus on community groups.

¹ Allyship: The key to real culture change — White Ribbon UK

PRIORITY 1: WHAT WILL WE DO TO ACHIEVE OBJECTIVE 2?

Increase the number of White Ribbon accredited organisations across Hertfordshire to promote male allyship

OBJECTIVE 2

What will we do to achieve this objective?

We will:

- Reach out to schools, pharmacies, and community organisations, particularly with a male dominated workforce, and support them in applying for White Ribbon accreditation
- Explore opportunities for all organisations in the Partnership to demonstrate their commitment to ending VAWG, such as seeking White Ribbon accreditation or becoming a supporting organisation, where appropriate and feasible.
- Work in partnership with White Ribbon accredited organisations across Hertfordshire to develop and deliver our White Ribbon action plans, with a particular focus on training, policies, the work of male ambassadors and gender equality in the workforce.

PRIORITY 1: AN OVERVIEW OF OBJECTIVE 3

Develop and implement an annual communication and engagement plan to reduce public tolerance of VAWG and change problematic attitudes and beliefs

OBJECTIVE 3

Communications and engagement

Messages to challenge harmful social norms, educate the public, and inspire change are all key in tackling VAWG. We know that we will need to have a robust communications and engagement plan in Hertfordshire to change perceptions of VAWG and stop abuse from occurring, and that different people will need to be communicated with in different ways.

What will we do to achieve this objective?

- We will have an annual communications plan, with tailored campaigns and engagement work for different groups of people.
- We will run campaigns on:
 - Debunking myths about VAWG and its causes
 - Reducing victim-blaming
 - The signs of different forms of abuse and where to get help
 - Empowering people to report VAWG
- We will work with victims and survivors to co-produce campaigns.

PRIORITY 1: AN OVERVIEW OF OBJECTIVE 4

Partner with by-and-for organisations to raise awareness of Harmful Practices, increase our understanding of how we can prevent them and develop practical strategies for prevention initiatives

OBJECTIVE 4

Harmful Practices

Harmful practices require a distinct prevention approach within Priority 1 because they are underpinned by specific cultural, social and community dynamics that demand tailored engagement and specialist led interventions.

We asked harmful practices specialists what we can do in Hertfordshire to prevent harm before it occurs, and they told us that we should include distinct objectives for tackling Harmful Practices in our strategy, to make sure work in this area isn't sidelined or minimised. They told us that these objectives should focus on the role of community and faith groups in engagement and awareness raising, alongside working with the health sector.

What will we do to achieve this objective?

We will:

- Continue to work with by-and-for specialists to develop an engagement plan
- Enable relevant specialists to engage with community and faith groups to raise awareness, collect data on Harmful Practices and identify primary prevention interventions

SUMMARY OF PRIORITY 2: IDENTIFY AND STOP THOSE CAUSING HARM

Our objectives:

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

PRIORITY 2: WHY WE NEED TO IDENTIFY AND STOP THOSE CAUSING HARM

Secondary prevention means we need to identify where harm is happening and reduce the impact it has. This priority focuses on reducing harm by working with those causing it.

This strategy recognises that while factors such as problematic substance use or mental health needs may be present, they do not cause abuse. The decision to use harmful behaviour is always a choice. This is why our strategy will focus on change and challenge.

We know from national evidence that a two-pronged approach is required to ensure we offer opportunities to change but also hold those who do not change to account for their behaviour. The first 'prong' centres around working with those causing harm to change their behaviour – these types of intervention are sometimes referred to as 'perpetrator programmes' or 'behaviour change programmes'.

Evidence on what works in relation to these programmes is still underdeveloped, but the evidence base is beginning to grow. Locally, the Chrysalis Centre has been established to deliver a range of behavioural change intervention programmes tailored to the needs of those using abusive behaviours. Independent evaluation of the Chrysalis Centre found that perpetrators who had undertaken an intervention demonstrated an 81% reduction in domestic violence crime compared to a control group. While such programmes are showing results, the lack of secure, long-term funding is a challenge.

Those causing harm also need to be held to account, especially where behaviour change hasn't been possible. Unfortunately, conviction rates for all forms of VAWG continue to be low, both locally and nationally. This has resulted in many victims and survivors losing faith in the criminal justice system.

We asked victims and survivors in Hertfordshire what we should be doing to identify and stop those causing harm, and they told us that we need to do more to:

- Work together to identify those who cause harm and reduce the risk they pose
- Hold people who cause harm responsible for their actions through the criminal justice system
- Support those causing harm to help them change their behaviour

Across all objectives, we will make sure that there is consistent support provided to victims and survivors where work is being done with the person(s) causing them harm. More detail on victim support is provided under Priority 3.

PRIORITY 2: AN OVERVIEW OF OBJECTIVE 1

Create a consistent multi-agency approach to identifying, assessing, and managing the risk of harm from perpetrators

OBJECTIVE 1

Identifying and managing harmful behaviour

Working collaboratively to accurately identify, assess and manage harmful behaviour is essential to preventing escalation and repeat abuse.

Early identification enables agencies to intervene sooner, put appropriate safeguards in place, and reduce the risk to victims and survivors. This is supported by mechanisms such as the [Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme](#) (Clare's Law), which enables information about a person's history of abusive behaviour to be shared where necessary to prevent harm. Assessing the risk posed by those using harmful behaviour is a critical part of this process. Effective assessment goes beyond isolated incidents to consider patterns of behaviour, frequency, severity and escalation, including coercive control, stalking and post-separation abuse. Effective management not only addresses immediate risks but also helps to disrupt patterns of behaviour and break the cycle of harm.

People who use harmful behaviour may come into contact with multiple agencies — including police, health, housing, education, social care, probation and employers — often without their behaviour being identified or connected across systems. A coordinated, multi-agency response is therefore essential to avoid missed opportunities for intervention. A consistent approach across agencies reduces fragmentation, strengthens accountability, and ensures that no single organisation is left managing risk in isolation.

What will we do to achieve this objective?

We will:

- Collaborate to determine the best methods for identifying and assessing risk posed by perpetrators across all forms of VAWG
- Ensure compliance with safeguarding frameworks, including the appropriate use of Clare's Law disclosures as part of wider risk assessment and safety planning, and implement robust management of known perpetrators.
- Increase use and enforcement of protection orders, including Domestic Violence Protection Orders, FGM Protection Orders, Forced Marriage Protection Orders and Stalking Protection Orders.
- Develop formal information-sharing agreements and escalation pathways for all forms of VAWG, so that partners can work together to identify those causing harm at the earliest opportunity.
- Use [MATAC](#) (Multi-agency tasking and coordination) to identify and target repeat/high-harm perpetrators and align escalation routes to [MAPPA](#) (Multi-agency public protection arrangements).
- Ensure victims and survivors are provided with specialist support when those causing them harm have been identified and are being worked with.
- Engage with employers and support them with challenging harmful behaviours with employees and developing appropriate VAWG policies

PRIORITY 2: AN OVERVIEW OF OBJECTIVE 2

Strengthen the criminal justice response to ensure those using harmful behaviour are brought to justice

OBJECTIVE 2

Holding perpetrators accountable

Partners across policing, prosecution, courts, probation, and victim services are working together to improve outcomes for survivors by ensuring perpetrators are held to account. However, challenges remain in ensuring consistency across agencies, reducing attrition rates in prosecutions, and building survivor confidence in the justice process.

Hertfordshire Constabulary maintains its own VAWG strategy, which sets out the organisation's specific operational, professional and behavioural standards. This police-focused strategy sits alongside the Partnership VAWG Strategy, ensuring that the Constabulary's statutory responsibilities around enforcement, investigation, safeguarding and workforce culture are fully reflected within the wider multi-agency approach.

The Constabulary's VAWG strategy is built around four strategic pillars—Prepare, Prevent, Protect and Pursue—each with clear objectives to drive a coordinated and effective response. Further details on the Constabulary's VAWG strategy can be found [here](#).

What will we do to achieve this objective?

We will work together to review criminal justice outcomes in relation to VAWG, including number of referrals to CPS and conviction rates, identifying where we can make improvements locally.

This objective aligns closely with Hertfordshire Constabulary's own strategic response to VAWG, and we will ensure that our delivery plan for this objective is aligned with that of the Police, supporting its delivery as a partnership in whatever way we can.

PRIORITY 2: OVERVIEW OF OBJECTIVE 3

Develop a unified offer of support for those identified as using abusive or harmful behaviour in intimate and family relationships with clear referral pathways

OBJECTIVE 3

Supporting behaviour change

Holding people to account for their behaviour is essential, but accountability alone is rarely enough to prevent repeat abuse. Without opportunities to address the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that underpin violence and abuse, patterns of harm are likely to continue — placing victims, survivors and wider communities at ongoing risk.

Behaviour change interventions and programmes, like those offered by the Chrysalis Centre, tackle root causes which helps to prevent future abuse. These programmes provide structured opportunities for those using harmful behaviour to recognise the impact of their actions, and challenge entitlement and control.

Without these interventions, people using harmful behaviours often repeat them. Combining accountability with behaviour change provides a dual approach that is more effective in the long term.

What will we do to achieve this objective?

We will:

- Embed Chrysalis Centre, or similar model, as the primary single front door for perpetrators across all risk levels
- Commission and route people who cause harm into behaviour-change programmes
- Ensure automatic safe parallel support for survivors linked to a behaviour-change programme case
- Launch partnership-wide campaign highlighting accountability and behaviour-change help via Chrysalis Centre, or similar model

SUMMARY OF PRIORITY 3A: INCREASE SAFETY FOR VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS (THROUGH COMMUNITY SERVICES)

Our objectives:

1. Support Hertfordshire agencies and communities to identify and respond to VAWG through provision of training, tools and links to specialist services.
2. Ensure there are robust risk assessment processes for all forms of VAWG
3. Work collaboratively with the Partnership to ensure Hertfordshire has an effective Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) model for victims of domestic abuse
4. Develop a clear referral pathway into services so that victims receive appropriate support, as soon as possible, without the need to repeat their experiences.
5. Commission high-quality, accessible, community-based support services for victims of all forms of VAWG, regardless of the level of risk posed to them

PRIORITY 3A: WHY WE NEED TO INCREASE SAFETY FOR VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS THROUGH COMMUNITY SERVICES

Building on Priority 2, which focuses on stopping the perpetration of abuse, we also want to make sure that we have the systems and services needed to keep victims and survivors safe from abuse.

The support victims and survivors need will often vary depending on where they are in their journey to safety and recovery. This is why Priority 3 focusses on support needed when abuse is ongoing, whilst Priority 4 looks at support needed following abuse.

Support for victims also needs to be tailored to their wider needs, accounting for the fact that some aspects of identity can make it even harder for victims to get the help they need. This is why our strategy takes an intersectional approach, considering how systems and services need to be modified to make sure they work for everyone. This is especially relevant when it comes to delivering this strategy's third priority.

There is not one activity or service that will keep victims and survivors safe from abuse. To have a real impact on safety, we need to make sure we are simultaneously delivering the following to a high standard.

Identification: Agencies routinely ask about abuse in sensitive and meaningful ways, responding appropriately to disclosures

Risk assessment: Agencies work together to assess and mitigate the risks posed to victims

Referral pathways: Victims and survivors are supported to access the right service for them, and the referral pathway to that service is clear

Services: There is high-quality support for victims and survivors of all forms of VAWG.

If one area is not working well, this can have a knock-on effect and compromise our ability to safeguard victims.

PRIORITY 3A: AN OVERVIEW OF OBJECTIVE 1

Support Hertfordshire agencies and communities to identify and respond to VAWG through provision of training, tools and links to specialist services

OBJECTIVE 1

If we cannot identify abuse, then we cannot take steps to stop that abuse and keep victims and survivors safe. Many victims and survivors in Hertfordshire have told us that they are subjected to abuse for years before they get the help they need, and this often only comes when they reach a point of crisis. This tells us that victims and survivors of VAWG are not being identified early enough.

Professionals working in Hertfordshire have told us that they need more training to feel confident in identifying VAWG. They have said that this training needs to be consistent across Hertfordshire, covering topics like spotting the signs, asking about abuse, responding to a disclosure, multi-agency processes around VAWG and understanding trauma responses and intersecting needs.

We also know that victims and survivors are more likely to disclose abuse to friends, family and people in their wider community before they talk to a professional. This is why having a network of community champions, alongside the awareness raising activity we will be delivering under Priority 1, is key to increasing identification. Currently, these champions have domestic abuse training. They are not expected to be specialists; rather, they use enhanced knowledge and awareness to promote good practice, raise visibility of VAWG, help others recognise signs of abuse, and respond safely and appropriately, including signposting to specialist support.

PRIORITY 3A: HOW WILL WE ACHIEVE OBJECTIVE 1?

Support Hertfordshire agencies and communities to identify and respond to VAWG through provision of training, tools and links to specialist services

OBJECTIVE 1

We will:

- Develop a consistent VAWG training offer across the partnership, which will cover the needs of different sectors including health and housing, addressing areas such as:
 - Identification within different groups
 - Identifying the primary perpetrator
 - Facilitating disclosure when abuse has been identified
 - Recognising the impact of intersecting needs
 - Understanding different trauma responses
 - The dynamics of post-separation abuse
- Ensure our training offer takes into consideration where victims of different forms of VAWG may be more likely to present (for example, victims of FGM may be more likely to present in a health setting) and tailor it accordingly
- Expand our current domestic abuse champions offer to cover all forms of VAWG, creating a network of community-based and professional VAWG champions who are appropriately trained to identify abuse and know where victims can access support
- Ensure specialist VAWG advocates (discussed in further detail at objective 5) are co-located across the system to support staff training, identification of abuse and risk, and onward referral to appropriate support
- VAWG advocates to be linked in with other front-line services to increase identification of VAWG, where possible

PRIORITY 3A: AN OVERVIEW OF OBJECTIVE 2

Ensure there are robust risk assessment processes for all forms of VAWG

OBJECTIVE 2

Risk assessment

Once abuse has been identified, it is essential to assess the type and level of risk in order to take timely and proportionate action. Effective risk assessment enables agencies to prioritise cases where victims are at highest risk of serious harm or homicide and to put appropriate safeguarding measures in place.

Different forms of VAWG require different risk assessment approaches. This strategy therefore seeks to ensure that all agencies across Hertfordshire use appropriate, consistent tools (where possible) to identify risk, manage it effectively, and reduce the likelihood of further harm.

What will we do to achieve this objective?

We will:

- Identify best practice for assessing risk for different forms of VAWG
- Review the number and type of risk assessments being used across the Partnership
- Develop a Partnership agreement on what risk assessment tools should be used, and when, trying to make this consistent across the Partnership
- Ensure use of risk assessment tools is embedded into our wider training offer on VAWG, offering clear guidance on professional judgement and using trauma informed approaches
- Audit risk assessments annually for consistency, accuracy, and compliance with agreed standards.
- Adapt risk assessment tools to reflect the needs of minoritised groups, LGBTQ+ survivors, disabled people, and those with language barriers

PRIORITY 3A: AN OVERVIEW OF OBJECTIVE 3

Work collaboratively with the Partnership to ensure Hertfordshire has an effective Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) model for victims of domestic abuse

OBJECTIVE 3

For domestic abuse, Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) bring together professionals from different sectors (such as police, health, housing, social services, and specialist domestic abuse services) to share information and create a unified safety plan. This ensures that no single agency works in isolation, reducing gaps in protection.

MARACs specifically address cases where victims are at the highest risk of serious harm or homicide, and by prioritising these cases, MARACs help allocate resources effectively and urgently.

MARACs have been running in Hertfordshire for nearly twenty years, and we are committed to ensure the ongoing success of the MARAC process.

What will we do to achieve this objective?

We will:

- Ensure MARACs continue to operate in line with SafeLives national guidance
- Ensure consistent attendance from all core partners (police, health, housing, social care, probation, domestic abuse advocates)
- Ensure the voice of any children are heard in MARAC, as victims in their own right
- Provide clear guidance for professionals on when and how to refer cases
- Update protocols to ensure timely, secure exchange of data
- Ensure MARAC processes consistently apply best practice principles to identify, support, and safeguard victims from marginalised groups and those affected by harmful practices, improving equity and safety outcomes. This may include embedding cultural competency, monitoring equity through metrics, delivering specialist training and strengthening partnerships with specialist organisations
- Assess the effectiveness of MARAC interventions in reducing repeat victimisation and improving safety outcomes for high-risk victims of domestic abuse. This may include reviewing: data collection, evaluation metrics and qualitative insights from both victims and practitioners
- Use MARAC data and learning to inform the wider VAWG strategy by:
 - Analysing data and themes to identify emerging risks and patterns
 - Feed this learning into delivery plans
 - Identify gaps or pressures in survivor support to inform commissioning and service improvement

PRIORITY 3A: AN OVERVIEW OF OBJECTIVE 4

Develop a clear referral pathway into services so that victims receive appropriate support, as soon as possible, without the need to repeat their experiences

OBJECTIVE 4

Referral pathways

Victims and survivors have told us that it is not clear where to get support, and that support is not consistently of high quality.

Professionals are also facing challenges, with the number of services in Hertfordshire making it difficult for them to know where to refer.

The feedback we have received from victims, survivors and professionals, combined with evidence on best practice, tells us that we need to create a single 'front door' to all VAWG support services. This means creating a single access point where victims can be connected to the right service the first time they are referred.

To ensure the 'one front door' approach is effective, it is essential that professionals understand what it is, how it works and how to access it. This will ensure that no matter who the victim approaches, the professional will know where to refer.

What will we do to achieve this objective?

We will:

- Develop a 'One Front Door' single point of access to commissioned community-based VAWG support, regardless of risk level, complementing existing voluntary and community sector pathways. This will offer one phone number and website, making it easier for victims and professionals to access the right support first time
- Provide clear messaging across Hertfordshire agencies and communities about the one front door, including how and when to access
- Co-produce targeted communications campaigns to groups who may not identify as being a victim of VAWG, or who face additional barriers to seeking support

PRIORITY 3A: AN OVERVIEW OF OBJECTIVE 5

Commission high-quality, accessible, community-based support services for victims of all forms of VAWG, regardless of the level of risk posed to them

OBJECTIVE 5

Services

Having a good referral pathway into services is just the start; those services must be able to meet the needs of all victims and survivors of VAWG. High-quality, community-based support services — including access to specialist VAWG advocates — are essential to keeping victims and survivors safe and supporting their recovery. Once abuse has been identified and immediate risk addressed, survivors need timely, trauma-informed support that is coordinated, inclusive, and responsive to their individual needs.

Victims and survivors in Hertfordshire have told us that support can feel fragmented, difficult to navigate, and inconsistent, particularly for those experiencing multiple forms of VAWG or facing additional barriers linked to identity, disability, immigration status, or culture. This objective focuses on commissioning an integrated support offer that brings together specialist services and advocates to provide trusted, consistent support. Advocates play a critical role in helping victims understand their options, navigate systems, and access the right support at the right time, ensuring that no victim is left to manage risk, recovery, or complex systems alone.

What will we do to achieve this objective?

We will:

- Collaboratively commission, in line with the Victim and Prisoner's Act (2024), a service that supports victims of all forms of VAWG by bringing together relevant specialists and services, including by-and-for and grassroots services.
- Ensure there are a range of specialisms in the service, to make sure the service can support victims who are subject to multiple forms of VAWG and/or whose wider needs may mean the support offer needs to be adapted.
- Expand the support offer for victims of harmful practices

SUMMARY OF PRIORITY 3B: INCREASE SAFETY FOR VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS (IN SAFE ACCOMMODATION)

Our objectives:

1. Commission high-quality, accessible support services for victims of domestic abuse who need support within safe accommodation
2. Implement a Whole Housing Approach across Hertfordshire agencies, ensuring a holistic, survivor-led approach to housing
3. Implement the recommendations of our Women's Rough Sleeping Census, to ensure there is a gender informed approach to homelessness in the county

PRIORITY 3B: WHAT IS SUPPORT IN SAFE ACCOMMODATION AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

For victims of domestic abuse, home often does not feel like a safe place. Victims and survivors have told us that they often have to leave their homes, their network of family and friends and their jobs to escape abuse. As a result, many are left feeling isolated, with limited means to rebuild their lives. Many also face homelessness as a result of abuse.

Victims and survivors have different needs based on factors like the level and type of risk posed to them by their abuser, their type of tenure, their housing preference and financial resource. This means a range of options need to be made available to victims, so that support can be tailored to their needs. This has been recognised in the Domestic Abuse Act (2021), which outlines a range of support and safe accommodation types. The Act makes providing support in safe accommodation a statutory requirement.

Legal requirements for support in safe accommodation under the Domestic Abuse Act (2021)

Under the Domestic Abuse Act (2021), 'Tier 1' local authorities (like county councils) are required to:

- Assess the need for support and prepare a strategy to provide support for survivors of domestic abuse who need to reside in safe accommodation
- Appoint a Multi-Agency Domestic Abuse Partnership Board
- Prepare and publish a strategy for the provision of such support having regard to the needs assessment
- Give effect to the strategy through commissioning and decommissioning decisions
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy
- Report back annually to Central Government

This strategy supports the aim of ensuring all survivors of domestic abuse have access to the right support within safe accommodation when they need it. The Partnership will fulfil the functions of the Multi-Agency Domestic Abuse Partnership Board as required by the Domestic Abuse Act, and this section of the strategy sets out objectives for the provision of support in safe accommodation.

Types of support and safe accommodation

There are different types of safe accommodation for victims of domestic abuse under the Act. These include refuge accommodation, dispersed housing (self-contained accommodation with a similar level of specialist domestic abuse support as provided in a refuge), sanctuary schemes (registered prosperities with enhanced physical security measures) and specialist provision (for those with specific, additional needs) - each designed to meet varying levels of risk and individual needs.

There are also a range of support types listed in the Act, including advocacy support (to help develop safety plans for survivors and make sure they are getting the support they need from other services), support for children (such as play therapy), therapeutic support and housing related support, including help to secure a permanent home.

PRIORITY 3B: AN OVERVIEW OF OBJECTIVE 1

Commission high-quality, accessible support services for victims of domestic abuse who need support within safe accommodation

OBJECTIVE 1

What will we do to achieve this objective?

We will:

- Commission and monitor a service, or services, that provide support in safe accommodation, such as refuge.
- Support by and for providers to develop safe accommodation services in the county
- Increase safe accommodation options for women fleeing domestic abuse and single gender spaces
- Increase adapted and dispersed accommodation, ensuring support is available for those who cannot or do not wish to be in a shared environment. This may include:
 - Men
 - Transgender individuals and those who are gender non-conforming
 - Families with pets
 - Children who have SEND
 - Families with older male children
 - Anyone else
- Work collaboratively with partners to ensure victims who have multiple support needs, including mental health and/or drug and alcohol, have safe and appropriate pathways, with specialist support, into safe accommodation

PRIORITY 3B: AN OVERVIEW OF OBJECTIVE 2

Implement a Whole Housing Approach across Hertfordshire agencies, ensuring a holistic, survivor-led approach to housing

OBJECTIVE 2

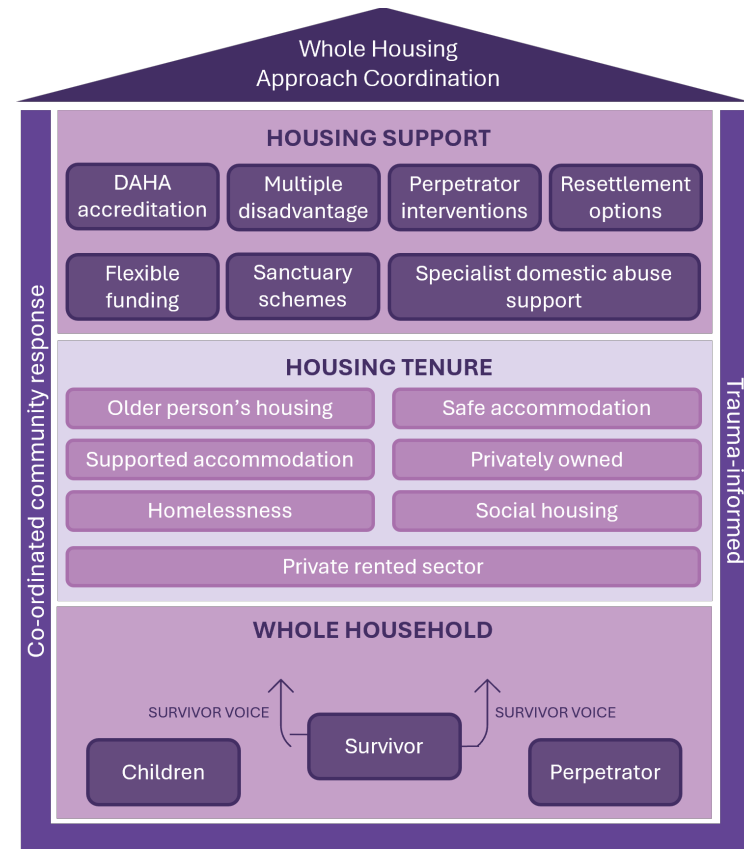
What is the Whole Housing Approach?

The [Whole Housing Approach](#) (WHA) was developed by the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) to address the housing needs of victims and survivors of domestic abuse. It brings together various types of housing and accommodation to give survivors choice and flexibility, in a trauma informed way, ensuring a survivor led approach. At its core is partnership, working with local authorities, housing providers and specialist domestic abuse services.

What will we do to achieve this objective?

We will:

- Work with housing associations to ensure their approaches and policies are survivor focussed, through providing training and our co-production panel providing feedback on policies
- Develop an offer for [Sanctuary Schemes](#) to enable survivors to stay safe in their own home
- Develop a process for [reciprocal moves](#) to enable survivors a seamless process of moving to new accommodation
- Scope options for [perpetrator housing](#) so the perpetrator can be safely removed from the home, allowing the family to stay
- Develop options for move-on accommodation, reducing reliance on hotels and other forms of temporary accommodation
- Continue with our [Flexible Funding](#) pot
- Continue the implementation of a Whole Family approach, which is inclusive of pets, to ensure pets can be supported in safe accommodation



PRIORITY 3B: OVERVIEW OF OBJECTIVE 3

To implement the recommendations of our Women's Rough Sleeping Census, to ensure there is a gender informed approach to homelessness in the county

OBJECTIVE 3

What is the Women's Rough Sleeping Census?

In 2024 Hertfordshire took part in the [Women's Rough Sleeping Census](#) which found that for many of the women who took part, fleeing VAWG and being unable to secure safe accommodation resulted in rough sleeping. Additionally, most women spoken to as part of the census reported being subjected to VAWG whilst sleeping rough. Whilst this highlights the interlinked nature of VAWG and homelessness, their respective systems remain siloed, resulting in women falling through the gaps.

Hertfordshire developed recommendations as part of the census, many of which are focused on bringing together the systems for responding to VAWG and homelessness. To ensure there is continued join-up, we have included an objective on women's homelessness in this strategy.

What will we do to achieve this objective?

We will:

- Ensure homelessness and multiple disadvantage strategies and commissioning of new services are gender-informed, specifically considering the needs and experiences of women
- Collaborate with commissioned service providers and District and Borough Councils to develop a robust, uniform process for identifying and supporting women most at risk of rough sleeping in Hertfordshire, ensuring early intervention and prevention.
- Incorporate indicators around women's homelessness to existing service monitoring
- Support the development of gender-informed homelessness outreach approaches

SUMMARY OF PRIORITY 4: SUPPORT AFTER HARM HAS OCCURRED

Our objectives:

1. Develop and commission a One Stop Shop model across Hertfordshire to work with survivors of VAWG to meet their holistic needs (e.g., therapeutic, legal, economic and housing).
2. Ensure survivors have access to wider peer and community-based support that enables them to rebuild their lives and achieve long term stability.

PRIORITY 4: WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO SUPPORT AFTER HARM HAS OCCURRED

We know that abuse can cause long-lasting trauma, and all victims, including children, need time and support to feel safe and well again. Tertiary prevention is focused on supporting people with the long-lasting impact of harm, to ensure they are still able to live a full and happy life.

How can we support after harm has occurred?

Victims and survivors have told us that they often need a combination of the following types of support to be able to recover from harm:

Counselling and therapeutic

Legal

Economic, including employment

Finding secure and suitable housing

Rebuilding social networks

However, survivors have told us that it is often difficult to find these types of support, either because there is not enough support available or because what is available differs depending on where people live in the county. Survivors have fed back that this support needs to be easily available at a community level.

PRIORITY 4: OVERVIEW OF OBJECTIVE 1

Develop and commission a One Stop Shop model across Hertfordshire to work with survivors of VAWG to meet their holistic needs (e.g., therapeutic, legal, economic and housing)

OBJECTIVE 1

Support for all needs through One Stop Shops

The general aim of a One Stop Shop (OSS), in the context of VAWG, is to bring together a range of specialist interventions in one location, reducing fragmentation and ensuring survivors can access services for their wider needs in the easiest possible way.

Hertfordshire has been working to develop a OSS offer for victims and survivors of domestic abuse, but wants to expand this to support survivors of all forms of VAWG.

What will we do to achieve this objective?

We will:

- Collaborate with local solicitors to ensure family law and immigration legal advice is available for those that need it.
- Scope how to support individuals who do not qualify for legal aid but who cannot afford legal fees, ensuring equitable access to essential legal guidance
- Partner with economic advice specialists to develop and deliver economic advice and support to survivors
- Work with local partners on supporting survivors seeking employment opportunities
- Ensure survivors, including children, have access to specialist trauma-informed mental health support that is tailored to VAWG.
- Provide dedicated housing advocacy, aligned with the Whole Housing Approach under Priority 3, to secure safe and sustainable accommodation for survivors

Further to feedback from survivors and specialist providers, we will also consider whether the OSS core offer could be expanded to include:

- Drug and alcohol support
- Creche facilities
- ESOL (English for Speakers for Other Languages) classes
- Art therapy sessions
- Exercise and wellbeing classes

PRIORITY 4: OVERVIEW OF OBJECTIVE 2

Ensure survivors have access to wider peer and community-based support that enables them to rebuild their lives and achieve long term stability

OBJECTIVE 2

Practical support for survivors

Whilst the One Stop Shop (OSS) is primarily focused on delivering professional, specialist services, survivors also require practical assistance to manage day to day life and reintegrate into their communities.

This type of support is essential for helping survivors regain a sense of normality while still having access to some ongoing help that is less formal and provided on an ad-hoc basis according to the individual's needs.

What will we do to achieve this objective?

We will:

- Provide Flexible Funding, where needed, so that survivors are able to source essential household items (e.g. white goods and furniture) to create a safe and functional home environment.
- Work with schools and education services to support seamless transitions for children who have fled to another area, ensuring no child's learning is interrupted by relocation.
- Expand existing VAWG peer support networks by strengthening connections with survivor led initiatives and by-and-for groups, ensuring victims receive support from individuals with shared experiences.

GOVERNANCE & MONITORING OF THE STRATEGY

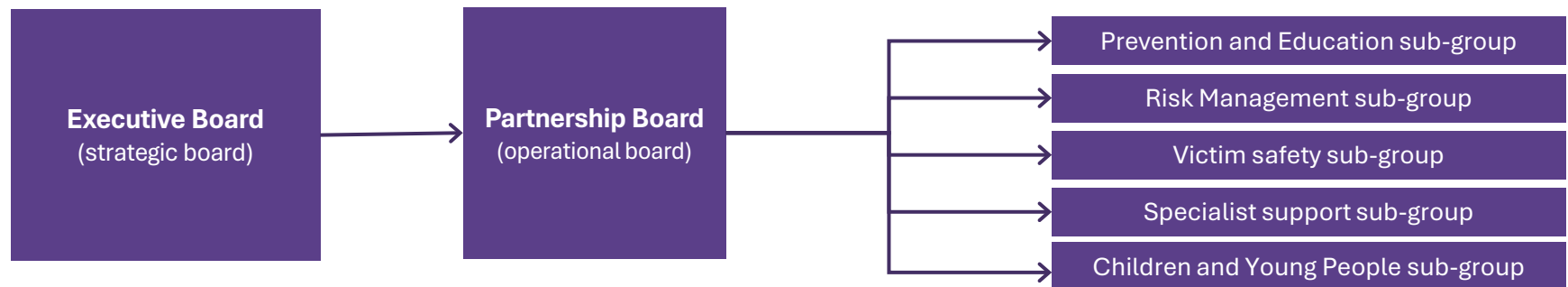
Delivery of the strategy will be overseen through an established multi-agency governance structure, as set out in the diagram below. Each Sub-Group will be responsible for delivering relevant objectives from the strategy through their respective workplans.

A Delivery Plan, currently in development, will sit alongside this strategy and will be approved by the Executive and Partnership Boards. The Delivery Plan will set out specific actions, lead Sub-Groups, and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to enable regular monitoring of progress.

A baseline understanding of women's and girls' safety and confidence has been established through the public survey data gathered during the development of the strategy. This baseline will be used to measure change over time. Further information on the survey can be found on page 64.

All services and interventions commissioned as part of the strategy will be evaluated as standard and monitored through the governance structure to ensure impact and continuous improvement.

Together, these mechanisms ensure the partnership can monitor progress, demonstrate impact, and be held to account for delivery.



FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE VAWG SURVEY

This strategy is informed by a comprehensive Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) on VAWG in Hertfordshire, of which a countywide public survey formed a key component. The Hertfordshire VAWG survey received responses from over 3,000 residents and provided crucial insight into lived experiences, perceptions of safety, and priorities for change. The findings have been integral to shaping the objectives set out in this strategy.

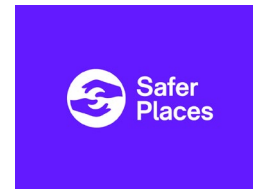
Due to the volume and depth of data generated through the survey, the full results are not reproduced within this document. However, the evidence gathered has directly informed the strategic focus and approach. The full survey results can be accessed [here](#).

When asked what would make them feel safer, respondents identified the following key themes:

- Policing and Enforcement
- Street Lighting and Safety
- Criminal Justice Reform
- Societal Change and Attitudes
- Awareness of VAWG
- Experiences of VAWG
- Victim Support Services
- Reporting Processes

While not all areas of the survey findings are explicitly reflected within this document, they are addressed through the wider JSNA recommendations, ensuring a comprehensive and system-wide response. As the survey formed part of the broader JSNA, the findings and recommendations collectively underpin the partnership's strategic focus and delivery priorities.

WITH THANKS TO OUR PARTNERS IN THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR



FUTURE LIVING



GLOSSARY

MARAC	<p>Multi agency risk assessment conference bring together professionals from different sectors (such as police, health, housing, social services, and specialist domestic abuse services) to share information and create a unified safety plan. They discuss cases where victims are at the highest risk of serious harm or homicide.</p>
By and for	<p>Organisations created by and run for the benefit of a specific community or group, typically one that experiences marginalisation or disadvantage. They are usually characterised as;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Led by members of the community they serve (e.g., disabled people, LGBTQ+ individuals, ethnic minorities). • Culturally competent and deeply informed by lived experience. • Focused on empowerment, advocacy, and tailored support.
MAPPAs	<p>Multi- agency public protection arrangements are designed to protect the public, including previous victims of crime, from serious harm by sexual and violent offenders. They require the local criminal justice agencies and other bodies dealing with offenders to work together in partnership in dealing with these offenders.</p>
MATAC	<p>Multi-agency tasking and co-ordination is a process where the police and partner organisations, such as local authorities and housing services, work together to tackle domestic abuse. They hold regular meetings and share information to identify high-risk domestic abuse perpetrators.</p>
Domestic Violence Protection Order (DVPO)	<p>DVPOs provide protection to victims by enabling the police and magistrates’ courts to put in place protective measures in the immediate aftermath of a domestic violence incident where there is insufficient evidence to charge a perpetrator and provide protection to a victim via bail conditions.</p>
Forced Marriage Protection Order (FMPO)	<p>FMPOs contain legally binding conditions and directions that change the behaviour of a person or persons trying to force someone into marriage. The aim of the order is to protect the person who has been, or is being, forced into marriage.</p>
Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Protection Order	<p>FGM protection orders contain legally binding conditions and directions to protect you or the person at risk of FGM. The court can make an order in an emergency so that protection is in place straightaway. The court can make a FGM protection order to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • protect you or another person at risk of FGM • protect your or another person against whom FGM has been committed