



North
Northamptonshire
Council



West
Northamptonshire
Council

Northamptonshire Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-25

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Foreword

Reducing domestic abuse and sexual violence is everyone's business.

Our ambition for North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire is that everyone, regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, race, religion or belief or any other personal characteristic can live safely and experience healthy relationships without the threat of domestic abuse or sexual violence. We recognise that every person is a unique individual with their own needs and that many people face barriers to accessing support.

Utilising external funding and maximising opportunities whilst working with our wider voluntary organisations will be essential. Using an informed approach to commissioning services and being intelligence-led will ensure that the needs of the local area are met. A key part of this will be data collection and analysis alongside evaluation to determine if this strategy is delivering its objectives.

This strategy reflects what we have learnt from our needs assessment and the review of the domestic abuse accommodation and support pathways in Northamptonshire conducted on our behalf by Red Quadrant.

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Introduction

Domestic abuse is any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can include but is not limited to the following types of abuse:

- physical
- emotional
- psychological
- sexual
- financial

This definition includes honour-based abuse and forced marriage and is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group.

On 29 April 2021, a key piece of legislation relating to domestic abuse, the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, received Royal Assent. The Act has placed some statutory duties on Local Authorities which include setting up a Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board, completing a Needs Assessment to identify gaps in support, especially for those who are in specialist domestic abuse accommodation having left an abusive relationship.

The introduction of the new statutory duties comes at an ideal time for Northamptonshire to make significant improvements in how organisations can work together to prevent and respond to domestic abuse. On 1 April 2021 the two-tier system of local government in the county was replaced by two new unitary councils: North Northamptonshire Council and West Northamptonshire Council. These new arrangements provide opportunities for strengthening governance, strategic commissioning and more joined up working across historical district/borough and county council services. Alongside the transition to the unitary councils, the increasing integration across the NHS and local government presents further potential to improve our response.

The statutory duties have provided North Northamptonshire Council and West Northamptonshire Council with the opportunity to review our existing strategy and work in collaboration with our partners, the Local Partnership Board and take on board the voices of survivors of domestic abuse to bring together our next strategic plan.

Both West Northamptonshire and North Northamptonshire have Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnerships within their Community Safety Partnership structures. These are partnerships between Northamptonshire Police, North Northamptonshire Council, West Northamptonshire Council, NHS Clinical Commissioning Group, Northamptonshire Childrens Trust, Office of the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, Housing Providers and a number of Community and Voluntary Sector organisations.

The group works together to meet our shared priorities, defined through this strategy, on preventing and responding to domestic abuse and sexual violence.

Alongside the strategy sits the Domestic Abuse Strategic Need Assessment (completed on a countywide basis) and Action Plans will be developed for West Northamptonshire and North Northamptonshire to drive the operational delivery of our commitments.

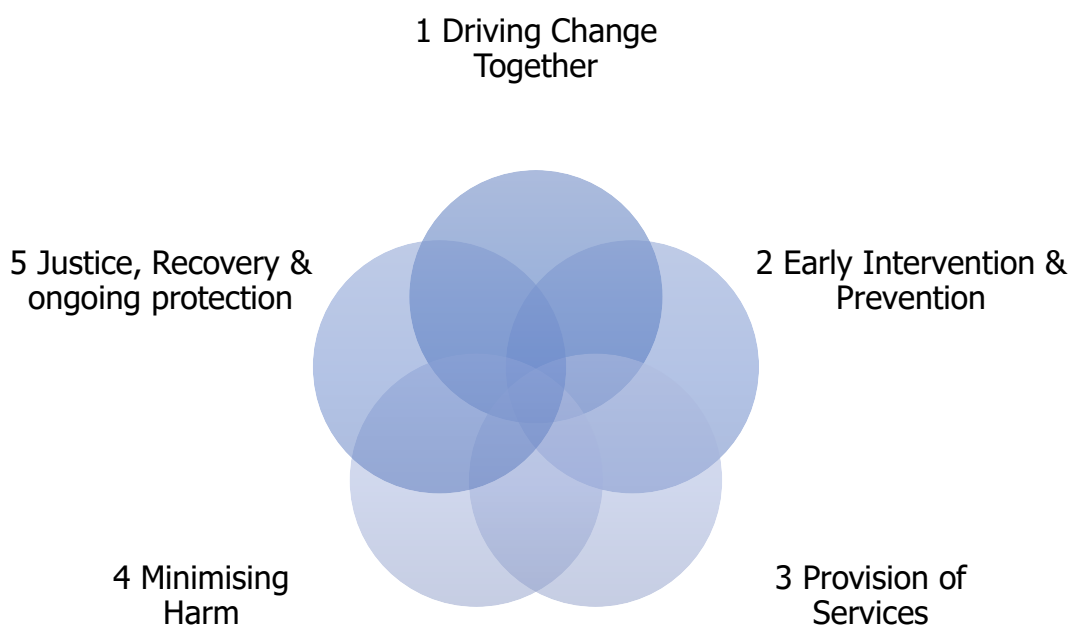
The strategic assessment brings our data together in one place and helps us understand what is working well in North and West Northamptonshire and what needs to be improved. The strategic assessment will be updated annually to a rolling timetable and will be used to inform our commissioning and action planning.

The action plans will bring together the identified commitments and actions which need to be completed to implement this strategy and will be overseen by the respective Partnership Boards who have the responsibility of ensuring progress. The strategy and action plans are intended to be 'live' documents that will evolve over time. Accordingly, each year the objectives will be evaluated and documents will be updated.

Commitment to change

Our aim is to reduce domestic abuse, and to ensure that where domestic abuse takes place, all those affected get the right support, quickly.

We have identified 5 priorities which are detailed further in this document.



Our strategic priorities

This strategy is constructed around five key priorities which are designed to contribute to the overall vision of the North Northamptonshire Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership Group and West Northamptonshire Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership Group. These priorities and commitments will form our key areas of work as we move forward over the next three years.

Priority One – Driving Change Together

This priority focuses on strengthening our governance processes and improving the way that we work together.

Working together with professionals from voluntary and statutory agencies to ensure an individual's or family's needs are met with effective support and shared goals and outcomes achieved.

We acknowledge that more can be done to promote integrated working across all sectors.

What did the strategic needs assessment tell us?

Varying prioritisation, accountability and practice creates inconsistency, duplication of effort and gaps in delivery. Commissioning is not strategic or coordinated. Funding for providers is fragmented, inconsistent and uncertain. Target outcomes are not consistently monitored.

The overall level of economic and social costs due to domestic abuse in Northamptonshire is estimated at £1,081m per year. £91m of these costs falls on public sector and voluntary and community sector organisations. The average costs are £37k per victim-survivor per year, of which public services incur around £4.3k.

As outlined earlier, the new unitary authorities provide opportunities to improve delivery mechanisms for integrated services and greater strategic oversight. Continuation of the Northamptonshire Against Domestic and Sexual Abuse (NADASA) Forum will be reviewed once the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership boards are established.

Our commitment is:

- All agencies will reaffirm their commitment to working together to provide co-leadership, pool resources, take a more strategic and effective response to domestic abuse, and actively engage in meeting our collective aims and objectives, working through governance structures at an appropriate level.
- Partners will work collectively to bring together comparable, accurate and consistent data on areas such as commissioning, provision, and gap analysis in a Strategic Assessment. This information-sharing will work to strengthen our understanding around under-reporting and ensuring we learn lessons and draw out the right narratives from the evidence. Where possible we will commission research where gaps in knowledge exist.
- All agencies will ensure they participate in the Domestic Homicide Review process, and that learning from this, Serious Case Reviews and Safeguarding Practice Reviews are proactively shared with the wider workforce.

Priority Two – Early Intervention & Prevention

This priority aims to increase the focus on early intervention and prevention.

This will be achieved through promoting better knowledge and understanding of violence and abuse, promoting healthy relationships, and early intervention for those at risk of harm.

We will encourage staff and volunteers to have professional curiosity to explore and understand what is happening more widely within a family, think about whether other services should be involved, or connections made, and not necessarily take things at face value.

We will ensure that staff and where possible, volunteers have appropriate training and supervision and are supported in their work.

We will provide effective support which will make the links to targeting wider vulnerabilities such as child exploitation, mental health, honour-based abuse and violence, gangs and substance misuse.

What did the strategic needs assessment tell us?

There is no universal understanding of the wider aspects of domestic abuse, particularly coercive control. There is a lack of confidence amongst many frontline professionals, in being able to respond appropriately to domestic abuse.

There is a need for a co-ordinated, mandated and accredited training programme for staff, professionals, commissioners and decision makers, to be embedded within all relevant agencies.

Our commitment is:

- Deliver a programme of public-facing campaigns and culturally relevant communications, which raise awareness of abuse in all its forms, how it is everyone's business and educate on how to get support from local and national services. This will be driven by data to focus on specific locations and populations.
- We want anyone affected by domestic abuse and sexual violence to know that it is ok to talk about it and where to access support - we will listen, we will give you choices, we will support you to be in control.
- Enable friends, family, and neighbours to be aware of what domestic abuse and sexual violence is and are confident to reach out to those experiencing it safely and know what services are available locally.
- We want to increase numbers of people disclosing domestic abuse to services (including demographics we believe are most underrepresented). Professionals need to be aware of services available and referral pathways to support quicker access to help that is needed.
- Ensure a wide range of support is available at the earliest opportunity which can be tailored to individual needs. This will also include during and post-abuse support offers to help rebuild lives through multi agency working.
- Working proactively with schools as prevention starts with changing attitudes. We will develop a toolkit for primary and secondary schools and deliver targeted work with children from a young age to raise their awareness, understand healthy relationships and to not tolerate unhealthy behaviour.
- Develop a comprehensive service map to maintain a clear overview of service provision, to ensure that the development of provision meets changing needs within the community and that we can quickly identify any gaps.
- We will remind employers of their duty of care and a legal responsibility to provide a safe and effective work environment. Preventing and tackling domestic abuse is an integral part of this. We will work with businesses to ensure that they have access employer toolkits and information on how to support staff members who may disclose abuse. All partner organisations on the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Board will be 'best in class' as an exemplar employer helping lead the way and ensuring upskilling all of the workforce.

Priority Three – Provision of Services

This priority focuses on preventing further abuse of those survivors and families who have or are experiencing abuse or are at risk.

All agencies should work together to build more responsive services which meet needs quickly.

Services will range from victim support, perpetrator programmes, child-centred approaches, couple and whole family interventions, safe accommodation options and criminal justice interventions.

Family members and co-workers, professionals, volunteers, community workers and faith leaders should all be able to recognise signs and symptoms and be able to access information and advice to assist individuals in accessing appropriate services.

When services are working with survivors, they will address both the physical and mental health needs of the individual and their family.

What did the strategic needs assessment tell us?

Total refuge provision within the county can accommodate 48 adult victim survivors and 56 children. There is minimal space for anyone with any form of mobility issue and none within the specialist refuge. None of the provision can accommodate someone with more than four children. There is limited provision for teenage boys to be accommodated with a parent in refuge. There is limited capacity for language and communication support within all specialist services. Two people who have No Recourse to Public Funds can be supported within refuge at any one time. Refuge provision within Northamptonshire is 36% below recommended capacity. 7% of households presenting as homeless do so for reasons of domestic abuse and most are housed in temporary accommodation rather than refuge. There is limited capacity for specialist outreach to support those housed outside of refuge.

Most victim-survivors prefer to remain safe in their own homes. However, arrangements to ensure this are inconsistent across landlords and target-hardening budgets are often underspent.

There are variations in approach and support for refuge residents seeking to move on. Complications result in long stays and exacerbate shortages taking up spaces which are no longer needed. Support for resettlement is patchy and not strategically commissioned.

Our commitment is:

- The commissioning and provision of services will be informed by the views of those who have been affected by domestic abuse or are at significant risk of it.
- To map the investment in services to accommodate and support those affected by domestic abuse across the public sector and explore the potential for pooled budgets across organisations.
- Commission across the partnership to meet the diversity and emerging needs of client groups, and ensure clear signposting and referral mechanisms, particularly for addressing minority or complex needs and supporting those with multiple vulnerabilities.

- All partners will work together to ensure staff and volunteers understand the landscape of domestic abuse provision, using and referring to services effectively. This includes understanding the thresholds for referring to Children's and Adults' Services are well understood and applied and when it may be appropriate to refer to other service provision.
- Understand the needs of those who need access to safe accommodation and ensure a wide range of safe accommodation options are available for victims, survivors, and their children, both those within North & West Northamptonshire and whose original residence was located out of county. MHCLG define Relevant and Safe Accommodation as:
 - Refuge accommodation
 - Specialist safe accommodation for BAME, LGBTQ+, and disabled victims and their children
 - Dispersed Accommodation
 - Sanctuary Schemes
 - Move-on and second stage accommodation
 - Other forms of domestic abuse emergency accommodation

Priority Four – Minimising Harm

Minimising harm is about making sure that services are accessible and meet the needs of everyone and recognising the barriers to reporting. We will learn from past experiences and improve services.

This priority is also about the support which may be needed to come to terms with what has happened and to manage the longer-term consequences of domestic abuse. Support comes in many forms and can include educational support services, housing support, outreach and advocacy services and improving access to more specialist psychological interventions.

When services are working with survivors, they will address both the physical and mental health needs of the individual and their family.

What did the strategic needs assessment tell us?

The five Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) are viewed positively. However, cases can take too long to be referred (three months compared to a benchmark of two weeks) and MARAC case numbers are relatively high. With 40% of MARAC cases being repeat, this is the upper limit recommended by SafeLives and far higher than the national average of 33% of cases being repeats.

The Multi Agency Daily Risk Assessment (MADRA) process is in place to strengthen child safeguarding. However, pre-school aged children are less visible than school age children due to the closure of Children's Centres. There is no similar process for adults, particularly those without children, creating a risk for those who do not meet the MARAC threshold.

During 2020-21 of almost 9,000 social care assessments completed, 40% had 'Domestic Violence' recorded as a factor of concern.

The Youth Offending Service assessed that 44% of young people had evidence of family behavioural or situation concerns, which can include domestic abuse. Of these, 23% also had gang associations identified. Of those without assessed concerns, only 10% had gang associations identified.

There is some individual support to children within refuge and in the community, but it is not available consistently across the county. During 2020-21, 31 children were supported while in refuge and 40 within the community. Over recent years not all providers have been funded to offer children's programmes but some will start these again in early 2022.

Our commitment is:

- We will work with the community to strengthen community capacity to support those who have experienced domestic abuse.
- We recognise that domestic abuse may impact in the longer term. We will continue to develop longer term support mechanisms using the voice of those affected to shape provision.
- All agencies will consider transitional safeguarding issues for adolescents and young people who are exposed to, or are perpetrating, domestic abuse, to ensure there is no disconnect between services for children and adults.
- All agencies will review service provision and support to survivors from minority groups, focusing on understanding and reducing barriers to reporting, how best to reach and engage with minority groups and ensure that support meets need.
- Local Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences will be used effectively to reduce repeat victimisation. Partners, children, and family members will be supported and included in these programmes and their voices will be heard.
- We will continue to develop and deliver practices and interventions, based on the latest research and best practice, to effectively address harmful, violent, and abusive behaviour within different contexts.

Priority Five – Justice, Recovery, and Ongoing Protection

This priority focuses on reducing the impact of domestic abuse and reducing the likelihood of future incidents, whether through pursuing perpetrators through the criminal justice system, via civil outcomes, through working with families to change behaviour or through rehabilitation.

All agencies should recognise that the harmful and violent behaviour of perpetrators needs to be addressed.

All agencies must recognise that approaches to domestic abuse are changing and be open to innovation and new ways of working.

What did the strategic needs assessment tell us?

Fifty domestic crimes and incidents were reported to the Police in Northamptonshire daily during 2020-21. For 2019-20 Police data recorded an average of 32% cases as 'Repeat Victims'. 40% of cases heard at Northants MARAC were repeat cases. This is the upper limit recommended by the national domestic abuse organisation SafeLives and far higher than the national average of 33% of cases being repeats.

Big Lottery funding has enabled the delivery of the Evolve programme for perpetrators to work on behavioural change. There is no alternative provision for addressing perpetrator behaviour.

Further investigation is needed in relation to the available legal tools and powers to monitor awareness of access to and appropriate use.

Our commitment is:

- Focused protection, support, and information
- will be available for all survivors throughout the Criminal Justice System process. All agencies should ensure that the survivors' voice is heard throughout these processes and used to improve and enhance service provision.
- All agencies will work together to ensure that there is a robust approach to perpetrators. This will include understanding the behaviour of the perpetrator, supporting interventions.
- We will support individuals and families through a whole system, criminal justice journey from arrest through to prosecution and beyond to ensure the timely, meaningful delivery of justice and work to reduce further harm and provide sustainable outcomes.
- Ensure staff and volunteers understand the legal tools available, and how they can be put in place quickly and effectively.

Performance Framework

Priority One - Driving Change Together

- Develop and review Domestic Abuse action plan on a quarterly basis
- Develop and review Domestic Abuse performance framework on a quarterly basis
- Achieve 80% attendance from partners at Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence Board
- Reduce the number of repeat cases in line with the national average

Priority Two - Early Intervention & Prevention

- Increase traffic to domestic abuse website
- Increase the number of self-referrals into domestic abuse service
- Increase the confidence of professionals to respond appropriately to domestic abuse
- Increase the number of professionals completing the domestic abuse training

Priority Three - Provision of Service

- Complete a needs led assessment every 12 months
- % of victims who report feeling safer as a result of the support they have received
- % of victims who report having increased levels of wellbeing as a result of the support they have received

Priority Four - Minimising Harm

- Increase victim satisfaction with agency responses to domestic abuse
- To reduce repeat rates of domestic abuse
- To increase seldom seen, seldom heard communities access domestic abuse services

Priority Five - Justice, Recovery & ongoing protection

- Increase the number of domestic abuse perpetrators engaged with, and completed, behaviour change interventions
- Reduction in repeat offending intervention
- Increase % of arrests in successful prosecution
- Improve victim satisfaction with the Criminal Justice System

Achieving our priorities – How will we deliver?

This strategy is intended to be an overarching document setting out a common understanding and commitment from key partners to address domestic abuse and sexual violence across Northamptonshire. Accountability for this strategy sits with the West Northamptonshire and North Northamptonshire Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Boards.

This strategy will be supported by a place based joint action plan agreed to and championed by each partner within the North Northamptonshire Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership and West Northamptonshire Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership and signed off by these Partnerships. Actions developed will be directly linked to our identified outcomes and commitments.

Below this each partner will choose whether to develop bespoke individual action plans to capture the actions that they, as an organisation will have responsibility for. Each agency will ensure that they have effective inspection mechanisms in place.

Feedback from those who use interventions and services will form a vital part of service development, our commissioning, and our monitoring procedures. We will work to ensure that the voice of survivors, of families affected by domestic abuse and of perpetrators who have interacted with our services informs and continually improves our provision.

The Partnership Group will provide annual monitoring reports to the North Northamptonshire Community Safety Partnership, West Northamptonshire Community Safety Partnership and safeguarding boards across Northamptonshire children's and adults services, setting out progress against our outcomes and identified commitments.

The strategy, strategic assessment and joint action plan will be regularly reviewed by the West Northamptonshire and North Northamptonshire Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership Groups.