

**Classification:** Public

**Key Decision:** No

## **Gravesham Borough Council**

**Report to:** Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee  
**Date:** 20 January 2022  
**Reporting officer:** Strategic Manager (Community Safety Unit)  
**Subject:** Tackling Domestic Abuse – Current Position and Progress

### **Purpose and summary of the report:**

This report provides members of the Scrutiny Committee with an up-to-date picture of recorded domestic abuse occurring in the Borough together with the likely impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. It also considers how Gravesham's experience compares to that seen in other parts of Kent and joint work being carried out by the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) to support victims and their families.

### **Recommendations:**

The Committee is asked to:

- i) Note the content of the report and offer any comments as appropriate.

## **1. Introduction**

1.1 Rises in the reporting of domestic abuse over the last 18 months have been significantly influenced as a consequence of Covid-19. Extended periods of being at home for those in already difficult relationships, financial pressures and family demands, greater awareness of behaviours defined as abusive and an increase in third party reporting, have all contributed. Domestic abuse is an offence category that has for many years suffered from under-reporting. The fact that more victims are coming forward than ever before is to be welcomed as a sign of progress in breaking down barriers that may previously have prevented victims from taking action. A level of reporting that is above the average can also be an indicator of the degree of support and assistance provided to victims i.e., if service responses to victims are positive, this itself increases confidence and encourages more victims to seek help.

## **2. Police recorded domestic abuse crimes**

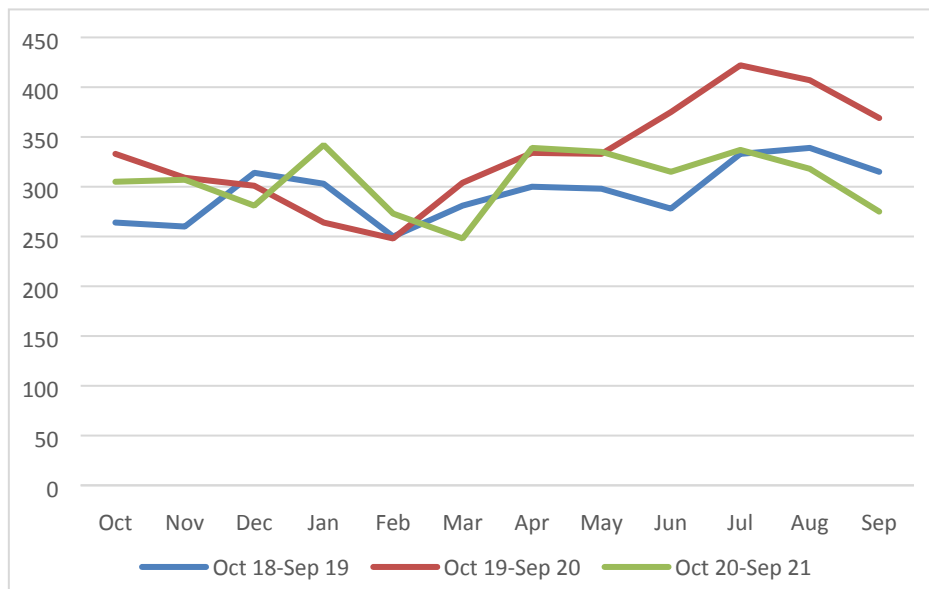
2.1 Domestic abuse accounts for approximately a third (32.7%) of all crime locally and is also a feature of many other offences. Historically, Gravesham has recorded higher than average levels of domestic abuse than most other Kent Districts and this continues to be the case despite having secured the greatest percentage reduction in recorded DA crimes in the most recent 12 months (-8.1%). This runs counter to the average increase of 0.8% seen countywide. However, it should be noted that when Kent recorded a 9.2% increase in the previous year, Gravesham's increase at that time was 13.1% therefore, the current decrease may represent in part a 'levelling off'. Gravesham's rate of domestic abuse crimes per 1,000 population at 34.4 offences is now the 4<sup>th</sup> highest in the county compared to having ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> highest at the time of last year's Strategic Assessment completed for our Gravesham CSP.

**Police recorded domestic abuse crimes**

Area	Oct 19- Sept 20	Oct 20- Sept 21	% +/-	Per 1,000 popn.
Ashford	3,473	3,314	-4.6	25.3
Canterbury	4,312	4,645	7.7	27.8
Dartford	3,455	3,376	-2.3	29.6
Dover	3,695	3,815	3.2	32.2
Folkestone and Hythe	3,520	3,456	-1.8	30.5
<b>Gravesham</b>	<b>3,999</b>	<b>3,675</b>	<b>-8.1</b>	<b>34.4</b>
Maidstone	4,632	4,830	4.3	27.9
Medway	11,081	11,294	1.9	40.5
Sevenoaks	2,408	2,474	2.7	20.4
Swale	5,246	5,363	2.2	35.5
Thanet	6,355	6,266	-1.4	44.3
Tonbridge and Malling	2,965	2,886	-2.7	21.8
Tunbridge Wells	2,318	2,507	8.2	21.1
<b>Kent</b>	<b>57,459</b>	<b>57,901</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>31.0</b>

2.2 The chart below presents the monthly pattern of domestic abuse crimes being recorded over 3 years. This clearly illustrates the peak period of reporting having occurred in July and August 2020 and throughout the most recent 12 months, a return to being closer to pre-pandemic levels. During the first lockdown period there was a national surge in contacts being made by victims to helplines and on-line services to seek some professional advice and support when reporting directly to the Police would have been very difficult indeed. The patterns suggest that once the lockdown restrictions were eased/had been lifted, victims felt better able or safe enough to contact Police.

**Domestic abuse crimes – monthly pattern (Gravesham)**



2.3 Types of domestic abuse crimes Data includes a breakdown of some of the types of domestic abuse crimes recorded. There were 529 offences of stalking or harassment and 298 were offences involving coercion and control amounting to 41.0% of all offences falling within the violence against the person category. Domestic abuse offences of violence against the person have reduced slightly by 6.0% (128 fewer offences) although the largest increase is in offences

of coercion and control (by 25.7% or 61 more offences). The publicity given to domestic abuse and violence against women and girls during the pandemic and to new legislation has given considerable focus to non-physical domestic abuse and it is likely the reporting of coercion and control will continue to increase for some time before stabilising.

- 2.4 Non-crime domestic incidents have fallen by 14.6%; these incidents will include third party reporting e.g., a neighbour reporting a domestic disturbance which they have become aware of due to noise/overhearing an argument. These types of incidents saw some increase during the pandemic whilst more people were working from home, some reduction may be a natural consequence of the easing of lockdown restrictions both in terms of victim experience and less opportunity for a third party to be aware of a domestic abuse situation taking place.

#### **Domestic abuse crimes by offence type – Gravesham**

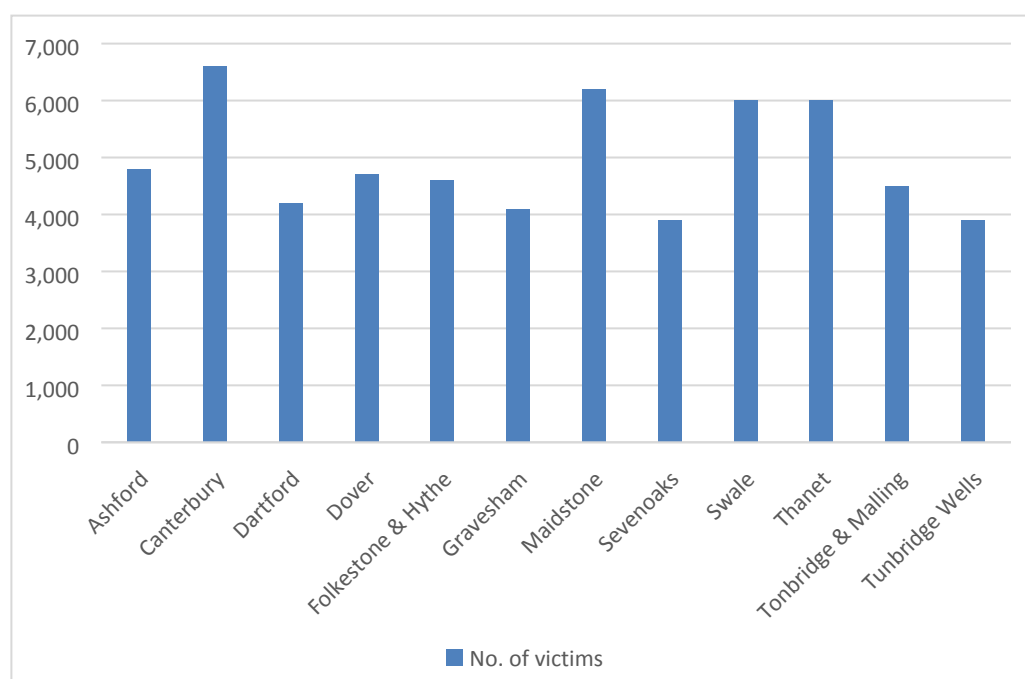
<b>Offence category</b>	<b>Oct 19- Sept 20</b>	<b>Oct 20- Sept 21</b>	<b>No. change</b>	<b>% +/-</b>
<b>Violence against the person</b>	<b>2,142</b>	<b>2,014</b>	<b>-128</b>	<b>-6.0</b>
• <i>Stalking/harassment</i>	543	529	-14	-2.6
• <i>Coercion and control</i>	237	298	61	25.7
<b>Sexual offences</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>-1.3</b>
• <i>Rape</i>	48	48	0	0.0
<b>Other crimes</b>	<b>437</b>	<b>438</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.2</b>
<b>Total notifiable offences</b>	<b>2,656</b>	<b>2,528</b>	<b>-128</b>	<b>-4.8</b>
Non-crime incidents	1,343	1,147	-196	-14.6
<b>Total domestic abuse offences or incidents</b>	<b>3,999</b>	<b>3,675</b>	<b>-324</b>	<b>-8.1</b>

### **3. Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment 2021**

- 3.1 s.4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 requires Local Authorities to assess the need for support for victims of domestic abuse and their children who may need to access safe accommodation. This includes those that require highly specialist support as well as cross-border support. The Kent Public Health Observatory have produced an updated Needs Assessment (November 2021) using ONS and Crime Survey for England and Wales data (covering those aged between 16-74 years) with some features of note:

- The estimated number of people experiencing domestic abuse at District level based on Crime Survey responses rather than Police recorded domestic abuse crimes is significantly higher in most areas across Kent but only slightly higher in Gravesham;
- Those with a household income of less than £30,000 p.a. are more than twice as likely to experience domestic abuse than those with a household income of £52,000/+;
- It is estimated that just over half (53.0%) of domestic abuse victims in Kent live in rented housing;
- Possibly higher than would be expected, around 30.0% of domestic abuse victims reporting to Kent Police each year are male;
- Nationally, most domestic homicide victims between 2017 and 2019 were female (77.0% or 274 victims) and most of the suspects were male (96.0% or 263 of 274 suspects). Of the 83 male domestic homicide victims, the suspect was female in 46.0% or 39 cases and male in 54.0% or 44 cases;

**Estimated number of people experiencing domestic abuse at District  
(Kent Public Health Observatory Needs Assessment – November 2021)**



- The prevalence of domestic abuse is highest amongst younger adults (with peaks ages being between 26 and 30 years) and lower amongst adults aged 60/+;
- It is estimated that 7,600 adults with a disability in Kent experienced domestic abuse (almost 13.0% of the total) and approximately 1 in 10 refuge clients in 2020-21 (across Districts) had a disability;
- Refuge services nationally have reported that in 2019-20, 48.9% of service users experienced what is known as the ‘toxic trio’: mental health *and/or* drug or alcohol support needs as well as experiencing domestic abuse;
- Data in respect of victims’ ethnicity is very limited and therefore no reliable conclusions or estimations can be drawn.

#### **4. Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs)**

- 4.1 Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) take place to allow partner agencies to share information and develop tailored action plans to support victims and families assessed at high risk of significant harm or homicide. Referrals are predominantly made into this process by Kent Police (92 referrals in Gravesham or just over 60.0% in the year ending 30 September 2021). The table below indicates that the rate of referrals per 1,000 population in Gravesham is close to the county average rate although the percentage of cases that involve repeat victims is just slightly higher than the average.
- 4.2 The 152 high risk cases in Gravesham involved 230 children within the affected households. In 36 cases the victims were from BME backgrounds (this appears to be directly proportionate to the demographic/population make-up of the Borough). Only 6 victims were male (approximately 4.0%) suggesting that most domestic abuse cases being handled and considered to be high risk with a specific threat of significant harm or homicide involve female victims. In terms of age, only 2 victims were under 18 years of age and no perpetrators were under 18. 3 victims were registered disabled (a factor that will potentially have increased their risk of harm).

## MARAC cases – District and Medway comparison – 1 October 2020-30 September 2021

Area	No. of cases	No. of repeat cases	% of repeat cases	1,000 popn.
Ashford	128	39	30.0	1.0
Canterbury	192	56	29.0	1.1
Dartford	135	44	33.0	1.2
Dover	151	67	44.0	1.3
Folkestone and Hythe	106	34	32.0	0.9
<b>Gravesham</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>35.0</b>	<b>1.4</b>
Maidstone	246	55	22.0	1.4
Medway	674	214	32.0	2.4
Sevenoaks	166	44	27.0	1.4
Swale	230	64	28.0	1.5
Thanet	255	138	54.0	1.8
Tonbridge and Malling	185	35	19.0	1.4
Tunbridge Wells	173	57	33.0	1.4
<b>Kent</b>	<b>2,793</b>	<b>900</b>	<b>32.2</b>	<b>1.5</b>

### 5. Community Safety Partnership activity to tackle domestic abuse

- 5.1 Tackling domestic abuse and VAWG has been a key priority for the Gravesham CSP for many years and the Scrutiny Committee has previously received reports on a range of externally funded projects (supported by successful applications to the Home Office and MHCLG) that have helped to raise awareness as well as improve services for victims and their families and fill gaps in service provision. The Partnership's current Community Safety Strategy aims to develop this work further, particularly focussing on improving the availability and access to services for victims who are under-represented and whose personal situations or characteristics make accessing services more challenging. The following sections provide Members with an update of current and planned activity.
- 5.2 Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Partnership Board
- 5.2.1 As part of new legislative requirements introduced by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, Kent County Council has led in establishing a Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Partnership Board. District Local Authorities are required by the legislation to cooperate and work with the Board in developing and delivering support to victims. Since the Board's creation last year, Gravesham BC has been represented on the Board by officers from both the Community Safety Unit and from Housing Services.
- 5.2.2 The membership is very broad and several sub-groups have been established to develop particular areas of work. Participation has been very helpful to the work we have been carrying out locally as it enables different Districts to effectively share their good practice and ideas, avoid duplication of effort and being to work collaboratively across areas e.g. the work carried out in Gravesham as part of the '16 Days of Action' in the lead up to Christmas 2021 (detailed below) was made possible because of the joint work undertaken between GBC officers and members of the Board's DA Media Group which provided us with a range of materials and resources that we were able to use to help raise awareness and encourage reporting.
- 5.3 Domestic Abuse Coordinator Post
- 5.3.1 Kent County Council, as the Tier 1 Authority in our area, has primary responsibility under the new legislation for ensuring that the county's commissioned DA services meet victims' needs and legal requirements and has therefore, received the necessary funding from Government to deliver this work. District Councils have received considerably smaller (yet still helpful) amounts of funding in recognition of additional burdens that the new legislation creates for us, including

the requirement to work in collaboration with the new DA Partnership Board and to help with administrative/other costs in providing support (not housing costs) to victims who are already in safe accommodation. Dartford and Gravesham have each been allocated c. £30,000 and the two Authorities agreed that it would be beneficial to pool our funds to create a Domestic Abuse Coordinator post to operate across our area. This is a very valuable resource that neither Councils have had before. As a specialist, full-time Coordinator, the postholder will be someone fully experienced in supporting victims directly and in multi-agency working, able to advise colleagues across Departments having contact with victims on the practical services available to them. They will also be expected to produce and help deliver, with partners, a domestic abuse strategy that will address how we can fill some gaps in services that we have previously identified and discussed in this Committee, including the provision of training for both staff and Members. The post is currently out to advert with interviews expected to take place at the end of January. The postholder will work across both Boroughs, spending half of their time in each, reporting through the Community Safety Unit in Gravesham.

5.3.3 Whilst the post has been advertised as a 12-month fixed term contract, our hope is that Government will confirm the level of future annual funding allocations early this year. The expectation is that the annual funding that we will receive in future will be sufficient to enable us to consider making this a permanent position.

#### 5.4 16 Days of Action

5.4.1 The Christmas and New Year period have historically been seen as times when victims of domestic abuse feel more at risk and less able to access help and advice. This year, Gravesham fully embraced the opportunity to take part in the '16 Days of Action' to raise awareness and help everyone recognise the signs of domestic abuse and what steps to take. Working closely with colleagues at Kent County Council, the following were all delivered between 25 November (International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls) and 10 December:

- Posters and leaflets have been put on display/made available across Council offices including any public access area informing how anyone directly affected or who is concerned about someone they know being abused, can get help and advice;
- Information cards and leaflets were provided to hairdressers, barbers and nail bars in the town centre where they could be discretely picked up by or given to clients.
- The 16 Days of Action Campaign's headline message of 'Know, See, Speak Out' was flagged on the Council's website front page with links to more information. All staff were encouraged to attach the image below to email signatures throughout the 16 days;



- On each day of the Campaign all Council staff were sent an email with a link to either a short clip or text-based information on the different types of domestic abuse that might be experienced and services available.
- CSU officers ran an information stall in Gravesend Town Centre as an opportunity to engage with the public and provide information leaflets and advice;

- Digital display boards at Gravesend Railway Station were made available for the full 16 days free of charge to display 2 different posters aimed at raising awareness and encouraging reporting.

## 5.5 White Ribbon Ambassador Scheme

5.5.1 Some CSP partners, including Kent Police, have had accreditation to the White Ribbon Campaign for several years and this year, Gravesham Borough Council has also received its accreditation, which was publicly announced on 25 November to coincide with International Day for the Elimination of VAWG. Very good publicity was given to this just before Christmas which again provided an opportunity to raise awareness more generally and generate some discussion on various kinds of VAWG, which may/or may not involve behaviour defined as 'domestic abuse'. As an accredited member, the Council has agreed to create a Steering Group that will develop and oversee the delivery of a 3-year Action Plan that aims to help address VAWG and contribute to the objectives of the Campaign. A cross-departmental Steering Group has already been established and is meeting for the first time later this month. This work, whilst a corporate initiative for the Council, will include several very practical partnership projects to promote awareness of VAWG, encourage reporting, help challenge unacceptable behaviour and help to improve feelings of safety in the town centre NTE (not just for women and girls but for the wider public and anyone who might be feeling more vulnerable).

## 5.6. Public engagement

5.6.1 In December, the CSP partner agencies supported Gravesham CSU in hosting the annual Community Safety Shop in a vacant shop unit in St. George's Centre, Gravesend for one week (Monday-Saturday). This was a very good opportunity to provide usual seasonal crime prevention advice appropriate at this time of year but also was a very good base in which we were able to make best use of the information materials and resources that we had acquired as part of the 16 Days of Action and through our White Ribbon accreditation. We were able to distribute items to improve personal safety e.g., personal alarms and purse chains as well as speak to members of the public who might not have experienced domestic abuse personally but were concerned for the safety of someone they knew, providing information so that they could report as a third party and have information that they could use to signpost their colleague, friend or relative to support services.

## 5.7 One Stop Shop Services

5.7.1 Domestic Abuse One Stop Shops (OSS) are a multi-agency endeavour to providing access to impartial advice, information and support under one roof. OSS support is free of charge, typically available for 2-3 hours per week and accessible without pre-arranged appointments. In Gravesham the service has historically been based at the Civic Centre but now operates from Gravesend Methodist Church. Data below relates to the periods up to the end of February 2020 as OOS were not fully operational from March 2020 due to Covid-19. During the pandemic the delivery of the service had to adapt and provide a telephone-based service to still support victims whilst face-to-face contact was not possible.

3.7.2 As all OOS closed in March 2020 due to lockdown, data is comparable to previous years but for only covers 11 months in 2019-20 until the end of February. The table below demonstrates that although Gravesham experienced a sharp dip in attendance at the OSS in 2017-18 (primarily due to the unavailability of legal support) attendance has remained stable with only seen a very small decrease in the last year of available data whilst virtually all other areas across the county have seen substantial reductions. This is an indication of the value of the service locally.

3.7.3 The vast majority of OOS visitors live within the Local Authority area in which they access the service (94.5% of all visitors in 2019-20 and approximately the same figure in the previous four years) indicating that this is a service used by the local community. The most common services accessed are a domestic abuse specialist service (62.4% of visitors), legal advice (39.9%), Police (28.4%) and housing advice (15.0%). In Gravesham, approximately a quarter of visitors

visited the OSS on more than one occasion. This may reflect the availability of agencies at the time of attendance but another significant reason for returning is that the initial contact allows the visitor to better understand their options and the support that will be available to them. Once confident about making a commitment to taking the next step e.g., moving into a refuge or agreeing to another referral being made, they may need a second visit.

### Number of visitors to One Stop Shops by District

District	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	No. +/- (previous Year)	% +/- (previous year)
Ashford	362	443	472	500	324	-176	-35.2
Canterbury	491	585	568	570	293	-277	-48.6
Dartford	138	149	143	134	100	-34	-25.4
Dover	188	208	166	173	76	-97	-56.1
Folkestone and Hythe	260	295	325	326	209	-155	-35.9
<b>Gravesham</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>-6</b>	<b>-5.3</b>
Maidstone	222	205	240	272	171	-101	-37.1
Medway	638	657	609	630	421	-209	-33.2
Sevenoaks	13	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Swale	375	305	237	64	55	-9	-14.1
Thanet	281	214	203	301	158	-143	-47.5
Tonbridge and Malling	70	66	63	104	41	-63	-60.6
Tunbridge Wells	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,173</b>	<b>3,242</b>	<b>3,084</b>	<b>3,188</b>	<b>1,956</b>	<b>-1,270</b>	<b>-38.6</b>

#### 3.7.4 Gender, ethnicity, age and disabled status of visitors

- Male victims are still disproportionately low (in 2019-20, 6.0% of visitors were male) but operating hours may affect more male victims who may be working;
- Most visitors are White (over 85%);
- The proportion of visitors in the 40-59 age groups has increased by 28.6% in the last 5 years whilst the proportion of younger visitors aged between 18-25 years has reduced by 12.8% but 26-39 year olds still make up almost half of all visitors;
- 19.2% of visitors in 2019-20 were disabled compared to only 9.7% five years ago;
- In 2019-20, there were 2,705 children in households of visitors and of these 36.2% were aged 0-4 years and 63.8% were aged 5-18 years.

#### 3.8 North Kent Domestic Abuse Forum

3.8.1 A considerable number of CSP partner agencies as well as voluntary sector and charities working with families experiencing domestic abuse are represented on the North Kent Domestic Abuse Forum. The Forum meets on a bi-monthly basis and allows professionals to share good practice as well as work collaboratively across the Dartford and Gravesham area. It has provided numerous opportunities over many years when we have been able to jointly fund smaller projects e.g., providing a small emergency fund for use by agencies working directly with victims for small items that cannot be covered by other means but that can make all the difference in a crisis and that would otherwise not have been possible.

## 4. Conclusion

4.1 All the above hopefully provides Members with a good picture of the scale of domestic abuse in the Borough and most importantly, demonstrates the commitment of the CSP and other partners to continue to address this key priority. Whilst it has been a particularly challenging



18 months, the coming into force of the Domestic Abuse Act, the impact of the pandemic on victims and the coverage of several tragic cases in recent times, have all served to bring domestic abuse into the public spotlight. The improvement of accessibility to information and support, education to increase awareness of behaviours that need to be challenged and the acceptance that issues such as domestic abuse need to be spoken about without attaching stigma, are all positive steps to be welcomed. The development of a domestic abuse strategy for our area will be the next core objective in ensuring that support for victims and their children locally continues to improve and that those victims who remain under-represented receive the assistance they need to have the confidence to report and reduce their risks of further harm.

<b>IMPLICATIONS</b>	
<b>Legal</b>	The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 places a statutory duty on 'responsible authorities' to work in partnership to reduce crime and disorder. Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) are made up of representatives from the following responsible authorities: police; local authorities; fire and rescue authorities, probation/community rehabilitation services; health authorities (clinical commissioning groups).
<b>Finance and Value for Money</b>	None.
<b>Risk assessment</b>	Failure to work together to address domestic abuse through our CSP could negatively impact the level of protection offered to victims of domestic abuse and would run counter to the evidence gathered through the CSP's Strategic Assessment process.
<b>Data Protection Impact Assessment</b>	<i>A data protection impact assessment (OPIA) should be carried out at the start of any major project involving the use of personal data or if you are making a significant change to an existing process.</i>
	a. Does the project/change being recommended through this paper involve the processing of <u>personal data</u> or <u>special category data</u> or <u>criminal offence data</u> ? No.
	b. If yes to question a., have you completed and attached a DPIA including Data Protection Officer advice? N/a
	c. If no to question b., please seek advice from your nominated DPIA assessor or the Information Governance Team at <a href="mailto:gdpr@medway.gov.uk">gdpr@medway.gov.uk</a>
<b>Equality Impact Assessment</b>	a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community? N/a.
	b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality? N/a
	<i>In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above</i>
<b>Corporate Business Plan</b>	CSP activity to address domestic abuse makes a direct contribution to improving public safety and public protection linked to People and Place in the Corporate Plan.
<b>Crime and Disorder</b>	Tackling violence and domestic abuse through the CSP Community Safety Strategy will supplement programmes of work to improve community safety in the Borough and particularly, strengthen work to protect vulnerable people from harm.
<b>Climate Change</b>	None.
<b>Digital/website website implications</b>	None.
<b>Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults</b>	The safeguarding of vulnerable young people and adults is a high priority for the Council and all partner agencies embodied in the Council's Safeguarding Policy. Improving access to services and the quality of support available to victims of domestic abuse makes a valuable contribution towards the Safeguarding agenda.