

Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and Domestic Abuse Strategy - 2023-26

FOREWORD – to be incorporated prior to finalising Strategy

INTRODUCTION

Domestic abuse is a crime that has devastating effects on individuals, families, children and communities. It causes untold harm and suffering to victims and survivors, not just when domestic abuse occurs as experiences can stay with them for the rest of their lives.

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (March 2022¹) estimated that 5.7% of adults aged 16 to 59 years experienced domestic abuse. Nationally, the Police recorded 909,504 offences flagged as domestic abuse-related in the year ending March 2022. This represented a 7.5% increase over 2021 (845,734 offences) and a 13.9% increase over 2020 (798,607 offences). This increase in police recorded domestic abuse-related offences during the Pandemic may also be in part due to the improvements that the police have made to record these offences, alongside actions to address domestic abuse.

The Domestic Abuse Act was enacted in 2021 and in 2022 the Government launched its strategy to tackle domestic violence. The *Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan*² sets out the Government’s approach “to drive down the prevalence of domestic abuse and domestic homicide and provide victims and survivors with the support they need”.

This strategy sets out the council’s responsibilities and actions in playing its part to reduce the prevalence of Domestic Abuse and, as with national policies, prevention of people becoming perpetrators and victims is at the forefront of this strategy.

Gravesham Borough Council is committed to working collaboratively to meet its statutory duty and requirements as a Tier 2 Local Authority. This strategy evidences how the council is doing that.

ABOUT THIS STRATEGY

This strategy sets out the vision, priorities and commitment of Gravesham Borough Council to prevent and reduce domestic abuse and ensure victims have the right support when required.

Gravesham should be a place where there is zero tolerance to domestic abuse and where victims and survivors of domestic abuse receive support, feel safe and able to rebuild their lives.

Our vision is to ensure appropriate safe accommodation support is available to all victims including their children. We want domestic abuse to be identified earlier and prevented and

¹ [Crime in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

² [Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

as such this Domestic Abuse Strategy complements the Gravesham Community Safety Strategy³ which seeks to reduce crime in Gravesham.

Gravesham Violence Against Women and Girls and Domestic Abuse Strategy 2023-2026 outlines how we will work, together with partners, to prevent and tackle domestic abuse in achieving our strategic priorities of:

- Victim Prevention and Early Intervention
- Working in Partnership to tackle Domestic Abuse and VAWG
- Education, Communication and Campaigning
- Helping to Create Safe Public Environments
- Preventing Offending and Re-offending

DOMESTIC ABUSE

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 defines behaviour as “abusive” if it consists of any of the following:

- Physical or sexual abuse
- Violent or threatening behaviour
- Controlling or coercive behaviour
- Economic abuse – means behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on a person’s ability to use or maintain money or other property or obtain goods or services.
- Psychological, emotional or other abuse; it does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.

Domestic abuse does not only happen in personal relationships between partners; it can occur if the people involved:

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

The definition of domestic abuse now includes a child (anyone under the age of 18 years) who sees, hears, or experiences the effects of, the abuse, and is related to either the victim or perpetrator as a victim of domestic abuse. A child is related to a person if the person is a parent of, or has parental responsibility for, the child, and the child and the person are relatives.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) covers a range of unacceptable and deeply distressing crimes, including rape and other sexual offences, stalking, domestic abuse, ‘honour’-based abuse (including female genital mutilation, forced marriage and ‘honour’ killings), ‘revenge porn’ and ‘upskirting’, as well as many others. These crimes

³ [Community Safety Strategy \(gravesham.gov.uk\)](https://www.gravesham.gov.uk/community-safety-strategy)

disproportionately affect women and girls. However, men and boys can also be victims of violence and abuse.

These crimes and behaviours can affect victims of all ages, abilities, sexualities, and backgrounds. They take place in every locality across the UK and can happen within current or previous relationships, in families, and in communities.

The Government updated its guidance in respect of expectations in respect of the commissioning of services to support victims and survivors of Violence Against Women and Girls in July 2022. The National Statement can be found at [Violence against women and girls national statement of expectations \(accessible\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/106422/vawg-national-statement-of-expectations-accessible.pdf)

LOCAL DUTY

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021⁴ gives police, local authorities, and the courts wider powers and greater accountability concerning protecting domestic abuse victims.

Kent County Council, as a Tier 1 local authority, has the primary duty to provide domestic abuse support to meet the needs of survivors and their children in safe accommodation. Safe accommodation includes refuge, dispersed accommodation, sanctuary schemes (security provision within a survivor's home or move on accommodation).

Tier 1 local authorities also have a statutory duty to establish a local partnership board to coordinate activities to prevent and respond to domestic abuse. This board has responsibility for conducting a needs assessment (forming a gap analysis on safe accommodation support).

Tier 1 authorities are required to undertake commissioning activity in relation to accommodation-based services for adult survivors and their children.

Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act gives Tier 1 authorities statutory requirements linked to support within safe accommodation services, which are defined as refuge (communal and individual placements), sanctuary (security measures within existing homes), and move on accommodation (as people move out of refuge or other safe accommodation into longer term homes). The Act gives Tier 2 authorities the duty to support this work.

Gravesham Borough Council, as a Tier 2 Local Authority, has the duty to collaborate with Kent County Council in fulfilling its responsibilities related to domestic abuse victims and is represented on and is an active member of the Kent & Medway Domestic Abuse Partnership Board. This strategy and the priorities set out in this document evidences how the council is doing that.

In fulfilling its statutory duties as a Tier 1 local authority, Kent County Council has also:

- Assessed the need and demand for accommodation-based support for all victims and their children, including those who require cross-border support.
- Carried out a needs assessment with regards to support in safe accommodation
- Developed and published a [Domestic Abuse Strategy](#) for the provision of support.

⁴ [Domestic Abuse Act 2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/32/section/1)

THE LOCAL PICTURE

Reported Domestic Abuse in Gravesham

Following significant increases in reports of domestic abuse after each of the lockdown periods came to an end during the pandemic, most areas have begun to see a reduction in the number of reports being made (Kent Police figure 1). However, in the year ending 30 September 2022, Gravesham recorded the greatest percentage increase in domestic abuse offences (9.9%) in contrast to an average reduction recorded countywide of 2.2%. The rate of offences per 1,000 population in Gravesham is 37.8 offences and the third highest rate in the county.

Figure 1: Domestic Abuse

Area	Oct 20- Sept 21	Oct 21- Sept 22	% Change	Per 1,000 popn.
Gravesham	3,675	4,038	9.9	37.8

Violent Crime data (Kent Police) shows that stalking and harassment offences have continued to reduce after significant increases early in the pandemic. However, these offences still account for almost a third of all offences within the violence against the person category, notwithstanding that most of this activity is online/cyberstalking.

The number of sexual offences remains small, however, there has been an increase of almost 11.3%. It is possible that this is due to a small number of cases each involving multiple victims/repeat victims and the recording of historical incidents.

Figure 2: Stalking and harassment

Offence category	Oct 20- Sept 21	Oct 21- Sept 22	No. change	% change
Stalking and harassment	1,795	1,630	-165	-9.2

Local Actions to Reduce VAWG and Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse is a major issue in Gravesham affecting many people. However, many incidents of domestic abuse go unreported to Kent Police and people do not seek help as they are too frightened of the consequences or lack awareness of support available to them.

Gravesham has made considerable efforts to reduce Domestic Abuse and to raise awareness of its prevalence, impacts and of the support that is available to victims and survivors:

Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator - appointed to lead on Domestic Abuse, specifically associated housing and safeguarding issues, including working towards membership of the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance. The Co-ordinator is developing this strategy, including policies, communication campaigns and training. This is a 2-year post, supported jointly by Gravesham and Dartford Borough Councils, and funded by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).

Muti-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) – meets regularly to share information on the highest risk Domestic Abuse cases in Gravesham. The MARAC comprises representatives of Kent Police, health, child protection, council community safety and housing officers, Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs), probation and other

specialists from the statutory and voluntary sectors. The Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator is one of the independent Chairs of the Gravesham MARAC.

Domestic Abuse One Stop Shop - a drop-in (no appointment required) session recommenced in September 2022 and is held weekly on Thursdays (09.30am to 12.00pm). Free advice, information and support is available from a range of agencies to help victims of domestic abuse. This person centred approach provides an opportunity to encourage reporting by both victims themselves and concerned third parties and also provide advice and information.

White Ribbon Ambassadors & Champions - Gravesham Borough Council was accredited in 2021. The White Ribbon charity engages men and boys to end violence against women and girls. The aim is to change long established, and harmful attitudes, systems and behaviours around masculinity that perpetuate gender inequality and men's violence against women. <https://www.whiteribbon.org.uk/>. The council's White Ribbon Action Plan complements additional actions supported by the Domestic Abuse Strategy.

Participation in the Kent & Medway 16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence held between 25 November 2022 and 10 December 2022. This awareness raising campaign, via social media posts, posters at Network Rail Stations and webinars directed the public to Domestic Abuse services. Stalking and Domestic Abuse leaflets were also distributed to local businesses, including nail bars, hair salons, library, gyms, supermarkets and faith centres, etc. <https://www.domesticabuseservices.org.uk/latest-news-articles-advice/16-days/>

Community engagement – additional opportunities to encourage reporting by victims and concerned third parties by distributing information at community events and via social media platforms. An increase in reporting in Gravesham may be because of the visible campaigning work that has been carried out in Gravesham in recent years.

Kent High Priority Rehousing (Reciprocal) Scheme – the Kent Housing Group adopted this scheme in September 2021 to provide guidance and procedure for a voluntary reciprocal arrangement between the twelve Kent authorities, excluding Medway. The aim of this scheme is to assist Local Housing Authorities to meet statutory homelessness duties to prevent and relieve homelessness. This scheme is used to assist in rehousing an applicant in another borough/district who is at risk of domestic abuse, violence or serious harm within the borough/district who owe the applicant a homelessness duty.

SAFEGUARDING

The Strategy acknowledges the overriding importance of safeguarding of both adults and children, especially as the impact on children can be extremely damaging. It is therefore important to work closely with other agencies who may lead on support with those with vulnerabilities or disabilities.

Domestic abuse may also co-exist with a range of complex issues such as mental health or substance misuse. As a result, additional support may be required to address such needs and the Domestic Abuse Strategy is an important part of Gravesham's response to safeguarding vulnerable persons.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Gravesham Council's Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and Domestic Abuse Strategy 2023-2026 is constructed around five key priorities. These align with the Government's Domestic Abuse Act and Violence Against Women and Girls strategies.

Priority 1: Victim Prevention and Early Intervention

- Protecting victims from future harm by working with partners to identify secure accommodation and provide victims and their children with support once accommodated
- Providing a Sanctuary Scheme for households at risk of domestic abuse and provide enhanced home security measures to enable victims to remain in their own homes
- Ensuring that individuals accessing Council services who disclose they have been victims of domestic abuse are signposted to available support available and how to access it
- Having robust procedures in place to be followed by staff when victims of domestic abuse approach the Council for support
- Working with Kent Police Schools Officers, education providers and partners working with young people to help children and young people to recognise signs of domestic abuse and VAWG and how to access help and support early on

Priority 2: Working in Partnership to tackle Domestic Abuse and VAWG

- Providing appropriate staffing and work with partner agencies to deliver the One Stop Shop Service enabling victims to receive free advice, information and support from a range of services under one roof [One Stop Shops in Kent in year 2019](#).
- Working in collaboration with the domestic abuse commissioned service providers and voluntary sector agencies in Gravesham to ensure that victims and their children consistently receive the best support available.
- Minimising potential risks to victims by making appropriate referrals to and supporting the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) process
- Attending and having an active role in the multi-agency North Kent Domestic Abuse Forum.
- Working with key partners to deliver an annual conference and social event with a target public audience from Gravesham's communities identified as under-reporting to help reduce stigma and cultural barriers that may be preventing victims of domestic abuse and/or VAWG from seeking help and advice.
- Collaborating with partner agencies working directly with young people to safeguard young women and girls against the risks of exploitation and harm.

- Work toward attaining the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation to improve the housing sector's response to domestic abuse through the introduction and adoption of an established set of standards and an accreditation process.

Priority 3: Education, Communication and Campaigning

- Ensuring that Council staff and Members receive appropriate training to identify domestic abuse and how to support victims.
- Ensuring that all new staff receive domestic abuse and safeguarding training as a standard part of their induction into the workforce.
- Delivering Bystander training to Council staff to enable them to challenge unacceptable and inappropriate behaviour and bring about attitudinal change to reinforce messages defining the boundaries of unacceptable behaviour.
- Continuing to deliver the Council White Ribbon Campaign Action Plan to prevent VAWG including through staff training to challenge behaviour that perpetrates gender inequality and encouraging staff to become White Ribbon Ambassadors and Champions.
- Supporting the annual 16 Days of Action #SeeKnowSpeakOut Campaign between 25 November-10 December with a programme of daily messaging events to promote broader awareness of domestic abuse and VAWG, services available and to encourage reporting both by victims and third parties.
- Using community engagement events as opportunities to raise awareness domestic abuse and VAWG issues and provide information about services available to support anyone experiencing these issues.

Priority 4: Helping to Create Safe Public Environments

- Recognising that both domestic abuse and VAWG can occur outside the home, taking steps to improve personal safety in public spaces through practical improvements including CCTV, enhanced lighting and redesigning public spaces
- Delivering the Safer Streets Project and working with local businesses to provide Safe Spaces within their premises which can be used by anyone finding themselves in a vulnerable situation to access help and support.
- Offering Bystander training to local businesses (particularly the hospitality sector) so that staff feel equipped to safely challenge unacceptable behaviour that they witness
- Working with local businesses, Kent Police and the G-Safe Business Crime Reduction Initiative to deliver the Best Bar None Project to improve standards of personal safety within licensed premises.

Priority 5: Preventing Offending and Re-offending

- Raising awareness of and promoting the uptake of the Kent Perpetrator Programme available to Gravesham residents (victims of domestic abuse and their partners) to help perpetrators who want help and support to change their behaviour
- Working with Kent Police and domestic abuse services to better understand victims' decisions for withdrawing from a prosecution against their perpetrator and identify and address any gaps in support that could be filled to prevent this and the risk of repeat victimisation
- By supporting law enforcement partners in holding identified perpetrators to account to increase the level of successful prosecutions and convictions of offenders of domestic abuse and VAWG.
- Ensure that Council procedures and policies are robust to reflect that domestic abuse and violence against women and girls will not be tolerated and that perpetrators are held to account.

CONSULTATION

The above priorities were reported to the council's Community & Leisure Cabinet Committee on 10 November 2022. They were presented at the *Know, See, Speak Out - Be Domestic Abuse Aware* conference, hosted by the council on 15 November 2022, and attendees and other partners, agencies and parties were asked to formally comment on them during November/December 2022.

No requests to substantially amend these priorities have been received, but the discussions and activity during this period have been invaluable in the development of this strategy.

DOMESTIC ABUSE – FURTHER RESOURCES

Specialist domestic abuse support in Kent is available from Victim Support. Call 0808 168 9111.

Additional resources can be found on the Kent & Medway Domestic Abuse website - [Domestic Abuse \(domesticabuseservices.org.uk\)](http://DomesticAbuse(domesticabuseservices.org.uk))

Report a crime or incident

<https://www.police.uk/pt/contact-the-police/report-a-crime-incident>

Worried about a child

<https://www.kscmp.org.uk/guidance>

Protection against Stalking – if you feel you are being stalked and not in immediate danger

www.protectionagainststalking.org

Clarion Domestic Abuse Service

www.myclarionhousing.com/about-us/contact-us/servicestatus/

galop Supporting LGBT + people who have experienced domestic abuse

www.galop.org.uk

Respect – working with domestic abuse perpetrators, male victims and young people using violence in their close relationships

www.respect.uk.net

Sign Health – working to improve the health and wellbeing of deaf people. Deaf-led service for Deaf people who have or are experiencing domestic abuse

<https://signhealth.org.uk/>

Rethink Sahayak Asian Mental Health Helpline – Offers a culturally sensitive listening and information service for the Asian Community.

<https://www.rethink.org>

Mankind – confidential helpline available for male victims of domestic abuse

<https://www.mankind.org.uk/>

Gravesham Domestic Abuse One Stop Shop Every Thursday 9.30am-12.00pm. Kent Room, Woodville, Gravesham Civic Centre, Windmill Street, Gravesend DA12 1AU Free advice and information, no appointment necessary

Specific questions about the Strategy contact: community.safetyunit@gravesham.gov.uk