

## KENT AND MEDWAY DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY – CONSULTATION RESPONSE

### 1. Background

- 1.1. The Domestic Abuse Strategy is a partnership document managed by the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive<sup>1</sup>. The Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy is a strategic document aimed at helping partners across public services agree a shared vision and ambition which is linked to a strategic assessment (bringing together our commissioning data) and joint action plan.

### 2. Campaign

- 2.1. The consultation was launched for the Strategy on 8 July 2019 and closed on 20 September 2019. Due to the proposed audience and the purpose of the Strategy the consultation process was aimed at partners and providers but was also open to the public.
- 2.2. The consultation was hosted on Kent County Council's consultation portal; as a partnership document the consultation was also advertised on the Kent Police and Medway Council's site.

In order to raise awareness, we:

- distributed the consultation information across our partners
- distributed the consultation information to our providers
- worked through the Domestic Abuse Forums to increase awareness through their contacts
- worked with Safeguarding Boards to distribute information
- attended the Kent Community Safety Partnership Board asking representatives to disseminate information
- issued a press release
- raised awareness internally with our staff
- posted information on our social media platforms
- directly emailed key stakeholders

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<sup>1</sup> representation from Kent County Council, Kent Police, Kent Police and Crime Commissioner's Office, Medway Council, Kent Fire and Rescue Service, the National Probation Service, Kent and Medway CCGs and District Councils

### 3. Consultation responses

- 3.1. There were 43 responses to the consultation. 15 responses were from professionals working in services which support people affected by domestic abuse, 19 people responded as individuals and 5 listed responding on behalf of an organisation. Many people responding to the consultation were survivors of domestic abuse or had a family member or friend who had been affected by domestic abuse (22).

### 4. General feedback on the Strategy

- 4.1. The overwhelming majority of respondents were very positive about this Strategy, with many choosing 'agree strongly' for the suggested priorities and commitments. Positive feedback included:

*'Positive that there is recognition of the gendered nature of domestic abuse, and that people with different protected characteristics may experience domestic abuse differently'*

*'I feel that acknowledgement and research into best approaches taken with different communities/individuals is really important'*

*'This Strategy has been long awaited and needs to be implemented thoroughly and embedded into working practice for all areas of Kent life'*

*'I can read that a real effort is being made to combat this crime, which ruins whole families and is so often inherited by children, either, as an abuser or a victim;*

*'As a whole the feedback for the Strategy is positive, the context information about prevalence of DA in Kent and Medway population is helpful. Within the Strategy the clear articulation of the five key aims and vision emphasising joint partnership working provides a foundation for coordinated approach by partner agencies. We particularly liked the layout and graphics which made it easy to read.'*

- 4.2. We also received general comments around areas of improvement. Responses are listed below.

1. 'Recognise that a lot of work is done by volunteers – language should not just be about staff'

We have reviewed the language within the Strategy to ensure that we highlight the invaluable contribution which volunteers make in supporting services.

2. 'I feel that there is a lack of attention paid specifically to male victims – the Strategy doesn't highlight the deficit in specific services availability or awareness'

Based on consultation feedback we have added additional information around support services aimed at men.

3. *'[the definition of domestic abuse used] is harmful, dangerous and discriminatory to females who face the majority of coercive and exploitative behaviours and the large majority of sexually coercive and exploitative behaviours due to reasons based in reality which you consistently ignore'.*

This Strategy uses the definition of domestic abuse within the Government's draft Domestic Abuse Bill.

We have worked in this Strategy to highlight the large amount of under reporting which exists across the population in relation to domestic abuse, therefore the statistics which we have will not truly reflect experience but is the best information we have to work from.

We look more closely at the statistics in the Equalities Impact Assessment linked to this Strategy, this clearly highlights the gendered nature of domestic abuse, and that women are more likely to experience abuse.

However, this Strategy is not one aimed at one group of people or one type of abuse but looks at strengthening support for all survivors, and their families. It also seeks a robust response to perpetrators across social groups.

4. *'There needs to be significant improvements in support available to children and young people, and better cohesion between organisations.'*

We completely agree with this point. Better cohesion between organisations is a central purpose of the Strategy. We have worked to ensure that the Strategy uses a whole family approach, which emphasises the harmful effects of witnessing or being part of a household where domestic abuse is taking place. We will continue to maintain this focus in the development of the action plan.

## 5. Feedback on the aim of the Strategy

### 5.1. When we went out to consultation the aim of the Strategy was:

*'to prevent and reduce domestic abuse across communities and ensure that when people experience abuse, they can access the help and the services they need'.*

10 out of 43 or 23% of respondents felt that the aim could be improved. Concerns included feeling that the words to 'prevent' and to 'reduce' were too similar, and that the importance of a timely response, linked to justice was missing.

In response we have changed our aim:

*'to reduce the prevalence of domestic abuse and ensure that where domestic abuse takes place that all those affected by it get the right support, quickly.'*

This aim gives greater prominence to the importance of receiving the right services when they are needed.

## 6. Feedback on priorities

### 6.1. Priority 1: Driving Change Together

13 out of 43 (30%) of people felt that this priority could be improved, however very few people strongly disagreed with any suggested commitments. Our commitment to an annual Strategic Assessment received the greatest number of 'slightly agree/don't know' suggesting that the role of the Strategic Assessment may not be clear.

In response to this feedback we have add information about what the Strategic Assessment is, and does, linking this to the provision of services.

### 6.2. Priority 2: Prevention and Early Intervention

9 out of 43 (21%) of people felt that this priority could be improved. There was strong agreement across responses for support for children and adults at risk, support for increased education in schools with more information in education around coercive intent.

In response to this feedback we have included further information around support happening in learning environments and look through our action plan to seek opportunities to work together (including in relation to gaining funding) to further this work.

### 6.3. Priority 3: Provision of Services

9 out of 43 (21%) of people felt that this priority could be improved. Most people strongly agreed with building on trauma informed approaches to improve outcomes and that services must be person centred. They also sought recognition for the importance of longer term, trauma informed interventions which build on trust and relationships. Most also agreed with making sure that staff understand thresholds to services including housing. There was widespread agreement that having a clear map of locally available services would be beneficial.

Linked to this feedback we have included more narrative around agency of those affected and will pull this through the development of the action plan, increasing the focus on housing related support.

#### 6.4. Priority 4: Minimising harm

7 out of 43 (16%) of people felt that this priority could improve, with strong support for commitments linked to protecting children and adults at risk and longer-term support mechanisms.

The importance of holistic support including employment was raised, and that services may be needed which are not directly linked to DA provision.

In response we have added further information around holistic support services.

#### 6.5. Priority 5: Justice, recovery and ongoing protection

6 out of 43 (14%) of people felt that this priority could be improved. Recognition of the PATHways programme was seen as positive and linked to this the importance of early intervention.

It was felt that it is important to recognise that many families moving through justice processes may be continuing to experience domestic abuse. This has been included within the final version of the Strategy.

### 7. Challenges to Implementing the Strategy

7.1. While there was broad agreement with the Strategy, as detailed above, many responders cited funding as a barrier to implementation. Waiting lists for domestic abuse services, housing availability, mental health support service provision, limited provision for perpetrators and the affordability of legal support were all cited as restricting implementation.

7.2. With the Domestic Abuse Bill moving through parliament there may be opportunities (including funding options) which become available. Barriers listed to implementation will be highlighted within the action plan, and Partners will work collectively to support positive developments.

7.3. We also asked responders if they recognised any issues linked to meeting the diverse needs of individuals. Responses included the need for greater education of carers, more training required around the needs of different communities, easier (and free) access to interpreters and making sure that when we talk about the 'voice of the survivor' this includes those from minority communities. This feedback will be fed through to the Strategic Assessment and joint action plan.

7.4. Feedback on the equalities impact assessment asked for further information on the impacts of domestic abuse on those of mixed race and those who are bisexual, this has been added.

## 8. Consultation

- 8.1. Through the consultation process we have gained insightful and useful feedback which strengthens this Strategy and has hence resulted in many areas of the Strategy being updated, or additions included. We would like to thank everyone who has taken the time to be part of this consultation process.