

From: Serine Annan-Veitch – Policy Adviser – Domestic Abuse, Strategy, Policy, Relationships & Corporate Assurance, Kent County Council

To: Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse Executive Group

Subject: Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Executive Group

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary:

This report gives an update on the consultation on the addendum to the current Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy, focusing on safe accommodation. The consultation closed on the 27th September. This report gives an update on the consultation and asks for the Executives approval to make the suggested changes.

The Executive are asked:

- to discuss the proposed changes made to the addendum given responses to the consultation,
- to consider whether partners would like any further changes to the document,
- for the Executive to sign off the revised addendum pending agreed updates.

1. Background

In April 2021 the long-awaited Domestic Abuse Act was passed. Part 4 of the 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.

Part 4 of the Act does not cover people who receive domestic abuse support whilst residing in the community (unless their home security is strengthened via sanctuary provision).

Tier 1, with support from Tier 2 authorities have the statutory requirement to;

- a) create a Local Partnership Board with responsibility for conducting a needs assessment (forming a gap analysis on safe accommodation support),
- b) complete a Domestic Abuse Strategy on safe accommodation, regulations have recently been revised, the draft must now be published by the 26th October and finalised by the 5th Jan¹.
- c) undertake commissioning activity in relation to accommodation-based services for both adult survivors and their children informed by the need's assessment,
- d) monitor delivery against the strategy.

This paper focuses on the development of the safe accommodation addendum to the existing Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy.

2. The Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy (March 2020):

The original Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy was launched in March 2020 and is a partnership document, authored in collaboration with Medway Council, Districts, Kent Fire and Rescue, Kent Police, the Police and Crime Commissioners Office, KCC, the NHS and the National Probation Service.

During drafting a consultation was completed which ran from 8th July until the 30th September 2019, with 43 responses which informed the final document, and the consultation report was presented and approved by the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group.

The Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse strategy runs from 2020 until 2023 and aims to support a holistic response to domestic abuse. Priorities for development include support in both community-based and safe accommodation settings (the priorities are illustrated within the diagram in Appendix A); however the current document does not give enough specific focus to commitments under the new Domestic Abuse Act or meet the requirements under the draft statutory guidelines.

As the original Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse strategy was signed off through the Executive Group we are using the same governance route to sign off the addendum.

3. The safe accommodation addendum

The statutory guidance linked to part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act is still in draft, but guidance available requires that Tier 1 local authorities prepare and publish a strategy (reviewed every three years) which includes;

- current available provision of safe accommodation,

¹ We have met this requirement as the draft was published on the 18th Aug 21.

- details of a gap analysis in safe accommodation, including how current provision meets the needs of different demographic groups,
- steps which will be taken to address need across demographic characteristics,
- how we will address barriers faced by victims in accessing services,
- how support needs for children will be met,
- a clear approach to how victims crossing local authority boundaries will be accommodated,
- information on the level of funding committed,
- how authorities will raise awareness of domestic abuse support.

In order to fulfil these requirements an addendum to the existing Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy has been drafted. This also takes into account the updated needs assessment findings. This document was published for a 6 week consultation and has also been made available in an easy read format.

The Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been updated and [published](#). As the strategy seeks to increase access to services across all protected groups through identifying need, and bridging gaps in provision the EqIA shows a positive impact across all protected groups.

4. The consultation response

We had 92 submissions to the consultation.

- 66 people responded as an individual, 14 as a professional and 9 on behalf of an organisation. Organisations represented through responses include Kent Police, Medway Safeguarding Children's Partnership, Oasis, The PCC, KCC, One Big Family, Porchlight, Chalk Hill Farm Youth Activities, DAVSS, Langley House Trust, Medway Council, Thanet District Council, KCHFT, Enhance Living, ManKind, Gravesham Borough Council and West Kent Housing Association.
- Of those willing to give information about themselves, 19 respondents were male, 33 were female and one was non-binary. 14 people responding were under 50, and 40 were over 50 years old. 19 people responding considered themselves to be disabled (10 physical, 1 sensory 10 long standing illness, 10 mental health disability, 2 with a learning disability) and 12 were carers.
- 78 people who responded had been affected by domestic abuse.

In relation to the document the majority (72) felt that the strategy addendum gave the information they needed about the Domestic Abuse Act, another 12 felt that this was achieved in part. The majority felt the document gave the information they required on safe accommodation in Kent (69 and 14 in part) and Medway (65 and 14 in part).

Areas identified for improvement

In Kent the areas identified for improvement by the strategy include;

- developing an equitable sanctuary offer,
- investigating and working to overcome barriers between substance misuse, domestic abuse and mental health services,
- strengthening support to increase access to settled or move on accommodation so that people can move out of refuge and other safe accommodation when they are ready to do so,
- consistently funding support for children in safe accommodation, both for children from Kent and those who are from other local authority areas,
- enhancing specialist support where barriers exist to access, including for men, LGBTQ+ and for those over 50 years old,
- piloting support in safe accommodation for male survivors,
- increasing awareness within our workforce of barriers to access,
- strengthening awareness of available safe accommodation services, and how this can meet need across demographics.

69 people agreed with these identified areas, 3 did not, 16 agreed with some but not all and 4 were not sure.

In Medway areas for improvement identified by the strategy include improved support for;

- male survivors
- survivors with multiple needs (such as those with mental health support requirements or people affected by drug or alcohol abuse)
- survivors with disabilities
- strengthen available support for children in safe accommodation
- increasing safe accommodation options for Medway residence
- developing dispersed accommodation services to support those who may not be able to access refuge
- enhancing support for those fleeing with animals.

58 people agreed with these identified areas, 3 did not, 14 agreed with some but not all, 17 were not sure. It should be noted that the majority of responses came from Kent.

Changes made in response to feedback

Appendix B includes the draft 'you said, we did' which details the changes we are proposing to make in response to the consultation. Responses provided many thoughts and viewpoints which we have tried to use to shape the strategy addendum.

Key themes include:

- Housing – concern around the availability of housing and how this can make it difficult for people to access accommodation. Also ensuring that housing teams have the right expertise to support victims and survivors.
- More focus on a whole family approach – more emphasis that all members of a family are victims and survivors of abuse.
- Accommodation must be flexible to the needs of families in all their forms including those with teenaged/older boys.
- Support for staying close by and increasing options for this, recognising the importance of formal and informal support networks.
- More should be done to tackle abusive behaviours and people should not be forced to flee.
- Having more information around how we will support those with mental health support needs and substance misuse support, also ensuring staff are truly trauma informed.

Appendix B details the suggested changes to the addendum for the Executive Group’s agreement. A version of the current addendum is available [here](#).

5. Conclusion

The domestic abuse act creates a statutory duty for tier 1 authorities with support from tier 2 authorities to create a domestic abuse safe accommodation strategy. In Kent and Medway this has been done as an addendum to the existing Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy. This has been informed by the findings of the needs assessment.

We have consulted for a 6 week period on the addendum and this consultation has had a good response. While many agree with the priority areas identified, some respondents also highlighted areas where the addendum could be improved. Changes have been suggested to the document for the Executive’s approval.

The consultation response will also be presented to Joint Kent Chiefs (5th October) and Kent Leaders (13th October) for endorsement.

The Executive Group is asked to;

- to discuss the proposed changes made to the addendum given responses to the consultation,
- to consider whether partners would like any further changes to the document,
- for the Executive to sign off the revised addendum pending agreed updates

Serine Annan-Veitch Policy Serine.annan-	Iona Hunter-Whitehouse Policy	Chibuogu Nyananyo Policy Chibuogu.nyananyo@k	Stephanie Bechelet Strategic Commissioning
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veitch@kent.gov.uk	Iona.Hunter-Whitehouse@kent.gov.uk	ent.gov.uk	stephanie.bechelet@kent.gov.uk
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Appendix A



Appendix B DRAFT 'You Said, We Did'

Kent & Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy Addendum: Safe Accommodation 2020 – 2023

Consultation report

Why do we need an updated domestic abuse strategy?

The Domestic Abuse Act was published in 2021 and gave Kent County Council and Medway Council new legal duties around safe accommodation services. To reflect this a new section was added to Priority 3 of the existing strategy – 'Provision of Services'. This new section has a specific focus on support in safe accommodation whilst the full strategy covers both community and safe accommodation provision.

Although our consultation focussed on the new section about safe accommodation services, some of the feedback you gave us fed into the wider strategy. All your feedback has been taken into account, so there have also been some changes to the full strategy.

How have you made a difference?

We asked for your views on the new section added to our Domestic Abuse Strategy to see if you felt we were focusing on the right areas to support people affected by abuse. Your suggestions have helped us to make our commitments clearer, providing additional focus on trauma informed services, a whole family approach. We have also worked to make the document easier to read.

You have had a direct influence – as a result of what you said we have revised some of the actions. This includes making sure that everyone can access support to stay close by, making our commitment to providing the right accommodation for anyone fleeing abuse clearer and promoting the use of legal orders to remove those being abusive where possible.

You also helped to identify more detailed areas for action that will be taken forward in the action plan that supports this strategy.

Your responses:

There were 92 responses to the consultation on the new section of the Domestic Abuse Strategy from individuals and organisations across Kent and Medway – we're grateful to all those who have helped us to develop this strategy.

Key Themes:

Housing:

You said	We did
<p>You support the focus on 'Housing Options - flexibility and access' but had concerns around the availability of housing and how that could make it difficult for people wanting to move but not access refuge or for those that were leaving refuge to find more settled accommodation.</p>	<p>We understand the pressure on social housing and privately accessed housing in Kent and have added greater emphasis to working with social and private landlords to increase understanding of domestic abuse and provide additional options for settled accommodation – these commitments will be supported within the action plan. (1.1)</p>
<p>You wanted to make sure that housing teams had the right expertise to support victims and survivors of domestic abuse.</p>	<p>We have increased emphasis on the need for the right training and staff mix within housing teams that will enable us to take a 'Whole Housing Approach'. (2.3 and 4.3)</p>
<p>You wanted to make sure that the right safe accommodation was available to everyone who needed it.</p>	<p>We have added detail in commitment 5 – Access of Services to All, to make clearer our commitment to providing the right accommodation for anyone fleeing abuse - whether they are male, female or nonbinary, able bodied or disabled, experiencing abuse from a partner or family member and whatever their sexual orientation. (5.3)</p>

Staying Close by:

You said	We did
<p>You supported the flexibility that staying close by with additional security and support provided and wanted to make sure that everyone could access this.</p>	<p>We have made this commitment clearer by saying</p> <p><i>“We will increase the availability of Sanctuary to ensure that anyone that needs it has access to this provision, and that equivalent access is offered irrespective of location” (2.3)</i></p>
<p>You wanted to emphasise that staying close by can also be beneficial for children who can stay closer to their support networks.</p>	<p>We agree, and we have made this clearer in 2.2 by including children within the narrative.</p>
<p>You felt we needed to be more specific in offering support to stay close by.</p>	<p>We have added additional commitments</p> <p><i>‘Housing Authorities will work with specialist organisations to support victims and survivors in their local communities as far as is practicable’ (2.3)</i></p> <p>And</p> <p><i>‘Ensure that anyone who wants help can access a comprehensive service that is equitable across community and safe accommodation services’ (3.4)</i></p>

Who abuse effects:

You said	We did
<p>You recognised that domestic abuse could affect anyone, and that services need to be accessible to people with different needs and identities experiencing abuse.</p>	<p>We have added more detail about accessible rooms in current refuge provision.</p> <p>We have added a new commitment in 5 – Access to Services for All</p> <p><i>We are committed to having the right safe accommodation options, and specialist support, that meets the needs of anyone experiencing abuse - whether they are male, female or non-binary, able bodied or disabled, families with older children, experiencing abuse from a partner or family member and whatever their sexual orientation (5.3)</i></p>
<p>You wanted more recognition that abuse happens within adult family relationships and in the form of ‘honour’-based violence.</p>	<p>In Priority 4 of the full strategy – ‘Minimising Harm’ we have added</p> <p><i>‘We will work to increase understanding of abuse that happens in family relationships so that victims & survivors of adult family violence and ‘honour’ based violence are identified and supported’.</i></p> <p>More information about Equality and Diversity is available within the <u>Needs Assessment</u> and the <u>Equality Impact</u></p>

	<u>Assessment.</u>
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Whole Family Approach:

You said	We did
<p>You wanted us to emphasise that all members of the family are victims and survivors of the abuse, that they experience trauma as a result and need family support.</p>	<p>We added recognising the importance of 'recovery for' wider family networks and blended family groups in 6.5</p>
<p>You felt that safe accommodation needed to be flexible enough to house families with multiple dependants and older boys</p>	<p>We made it clearer that providing the right mix of accommodation for anyone fleeing abuse should include families with multiple children and older boys. (5.3)</p>
<p>You wanted us to work with our partners where unhealthy behaviours and abusive behaviour was being used by children.</p>	<p>Whilst the definition of domestic abuse within the Domestic Abuse Act defines domestic abuse as happening between people over the age of 16, we have added a commitment in Prevention & Early Intervention (full strategy).</p> <p><i>This is to 'work with our partners to promote safety for people where children are displaying harmful behaviours, understanding that this behaviour is often routed in trauma.'</i> This will link with work taking place within Children's Social Work</p>

	Teams and Early Help Services.
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Trauma, Mental Health and Coping Mechanisms:

You said	We did
You said you wanted us to be more specific about the mental health and substance misuse support offered to victims and survivors of abuse.	The Needs Assessment shows a requirement to improve access of support to those with multiple needs. This is an area of work we will be developing within the action plan.
You wanted there to be increased training on the effect of trauma to ensure that responses to domestic abuse are truly trauma informed	We agree, and in action 5, access of services to all we have added, <i>We recognise trauma informed practice can reduce barriers to support, getting people to safety and recovery quicker. We will work to improve the trauma informed response to victims and survivors of abuse. (5.5)</i>

Working to disrupt and support people using abusive behaviour:

You said	We did
You felt more should be done to tackle those being abusive, and that people should not be placed in a position where they are forced to flee.	Priority 5 of the full strategy, 'Justice, recovery and ongoing protection' will be amended to include a new commitment to ensure accessible information about protection measures is shared widely and

	<p>that perpetrators of abuse are removed from the victim's home where this is possible –</p> <p><i>Where possible legal orders (now DVPN&O later to become DAPN/Os) should be sought and enforced to remove the person perpetrating abusive behaviours from the home. Partners should work collaboratively, exploring options to remove those showing harmful behaviours from the home to disrupt abusive behaviour and make victims and survivors safer.</i></p> <p><i>Accessible information about protection orders, disclosure schemes and what people who have experienced abuse can expect from the criminal justice system should be created and promoted to encourage confidence and their use.</i></p>
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Access & Awareness:

You said	We did
<p>You said you wanted us to make it clearer for victims, survivors and professionals to find the right support service.</p>	<p>In 5, Access to services to all we have added a commitment to –</p> <p><i>“Make sure that referral and signposting is clear for victims and survivors, and professionals working to support them.” (5.6)</i></p> <p>We have also developed our commitment around increasing awareness of services which now reads</p>

	<p><i>“We will increase awareness of available support options through strong social media and communications making sure we use messages and images that reflect diversity of experience.” (5.5)</i></p>
<p>You said that we should engage with and upskill communities, businesses and employers so that people affected by abuse have a network of support</p>	<p>We agree, this will be supported in the awareness raising work that we do (5.5) and the creation of a Domestic Abuse Champions network. We have added detail in Priority 3 of the main document.</p>

Easy Read:

You said	We did
<p>You said you wanted us to make the strategy easier to read, removing words like ‘<i>addendum</i>’ and ‘<i>holistic</i>’.</p>	<p>The strategy has been reviewed to remove unnecessarily complicated words. We have replaced the word ‘<i>holistic</i>’ with ‘<i>comprehensive</i>’ and ‘<i>addendum</i>’ with ‘<i>section</i>’.</p> <p>There is an Easy Read format of the full strategy here: https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/strategies-and-policies/community-safety-and-crime-policies/domestic-abuse-strategy</p> <p>And the Safe Accommodation Section can be found at the same link.</p>

What will happen now?

Your feedback and the changes we've made to the strategy as a result will be presented to the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group for approval, and Joint Kent Chiefs and Leaders for endorsement. Once this happens the Strategy will be published.

The commitments made in this strategy will be supported by a detailed action plan for the partnerships. Accountability for this strategy sits with the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group and linked governance structures.

How can I find out more?

- You can read the published Domestic Abuse Strategy online [here](#).
- You can find out more about the changes we have made as a result of what you said in our [County Council Report](#)
- You can find out if we are on track to achieve our vision and deliver better outcomes in an annual report to our County Council. We will ask for your views on whether you feel we are making a difference.
- If you would like to share your views in the future, you can register with our [Consultation Directory](#). Tell us the issues you are interested in, and we will send you an e-mail notifying you when relevant consultations are launched.