

CABINET

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KENT AND MEDWAY DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY

2024-2029

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Teresa Murray, Deputy Leader of the Council

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Summary

The current Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Partnership Strategy is coming to an end this year and a new strategy for 2024-2029 has been drafted. As a local authority, Medway has a statutory duty under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 to publish a domestic abuse strategy in relation to its responsibilities around safe accommodation. This strategy is inclusive of ambitions in relation to both safe accommodation and community-based support.

1. Recommendations

- 1.1. The Cabinet is asked to agree the joint strategy, as attached at Appendix 1 to the report.
- 1.2. The Cabinet is asked to delegate authority to the Director of Public Health, in consultation with the Deputy Leader of the Council to make any minor changes required prior to publication in December 2023.

2. Suggested reasons for decisions

- 2.1. There is a statutory duty for the local authority to have a domestic abuse strategy in place and published. On average, 1 in 3 women and 1 in 6 men will experience domestic abuse. In 2022 Medway had higher recorded rates of domestic abuse when compared to the national average. Without a strategic response to domestic abuse and allowing for collaborative work and commissioning across the system there would be an increased risk of serious harm or homicide in cases of domestic abuse. A partnership strategy allows for accountability from individual agencies and coordinated multi-agency work. To ensure a cohesive approach across geographical Kent the strategy has been coauthored, consulted and approved with Medway and Kent partner organisations.

3. Budget and policy framework

- 3.1. Domestic abuse can impact all aspects of victims/survivors and their children's lives including physically, psychologically and financially. The policy overlaps with multiple objectives set out as part of the Council's Plan 2023-2024 to reduce homelessness, improve residents' health, reduce inequalities and to create resilient families.

4. Background

- 4.1. The Strategy Writing Group, included key partners across Kent and Medway such as Medway Public Health and Housing, Kent County Council, the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and Kent Police. The drafting of the strategy began via workshops held with statutory and voluntary community sector workers focusing on what is working well, what could improve and gaps in provision.
- 4.2. The workshops identified 3 key areas of focus Early Intervention and Prevention, Immediate Needs and Recovery. A thematic review was conducted, and further subheadings were created which included areas such as preventing the escalation of abusive behaviours, recognising individual needs of victims and supporting children and young people.
- 4.3. Alongside, the work with professionals, consultations with those with lived experience were carried out across Kent and Medway, including a workshop which enabled victims and survivors to provide feedback on the full draft. Age appropriate focus groups with children and young people also took place across schools and colleges in Medway, focusing on 'healthy relationships'.
- 4.4. The strategy has been presented at the following internal governance meetings; Directorate Management Team (DMT), Children and Adults Directorate Management Team (CADMT), Community Safety Partnership Executive, the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse Executive Group (DASAEG) and the Procurement Board. The strategy was also taken to various voluntary and community groups such as Pride groups, specialist services for older people and Medway Voluntary Action.
- 4.5. The full draft strategy, and the executive summary, were also published for public consultation from July through to October, with over 240 responses received. This feedback was then reviewed by the Strategy Writing Group and suggestions were implemented where possible.
- 4.6. A 'you said we did' event was then delivered to provide an update on the feedback collated and the changes made to the document. The updated draft (attached at Appendix 1) is now ready for sign off, with plans for publication in December 2023.

5. Options

- 5.1. **Option 1** – Do nothing. Medway would withdraw from a joint strategy with Kent. This is not recommended as many support services operate across

Kent and Medway and it would cause challenges for both professionals and victims. Medway also has a statutory duty under Part 4 of Domestic Abuse Act 2021 to complete a strategy that covers the Council's plans to implement safe and relevant accommodation as a minimum.

- 5.2. **Option 2** - A strategy is created that solely focuses on the duty around safe accommodation. This was disregarded by partners across Kent and Medway, as community-based support is the most frequently accessed type of support and forms an imperative part of reducing significant harm and homicide to victims and survivors of domestic abuse. Victims who access safe accommodation also often access community-based support so a strategy covering both areas allows for more robust pathways between services.
- 5.3. **Option 3** – A Partnership strategy which includes ambitions across both community-based services and safe accommodation services. To best meet the needs of victims and survivors working as part of a multi-agency and holistic response to domestic abuse is required. People access multiple types of support and different services, and a joint strategy allows for a more collaborative approach to tackling domestic abuse.
- 5.4. **Option 4** – A Medway only Domestic Abuse Strategy. This option is not recommended as victims and survivors access services such as the police and NHS, which operate across Kent and Medway. A Medway only strategy could lead to inconsistencies for victim and survivors trying to navigate the system and organisations working in silos.

6. Advice and analysis

- 6.1. Due to Medway's duty under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, the risk and prevalence of domestic abuse, and the need for a partnership approach to the issue, it is recommended that Option 3 is considered, and a joint strategy is agreed by Cabinet:
 - To ensure sustainability in relation to the work set out in the strategy, relationships with key partnerships have been developed, collaborative working groups have been set up and joint protocols are in place. An action plan will be formed in line with the strategy with actions set out for partners across Kent and Medway. Governance of the action and delivery plan will be overseen by the partnership group Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse Executive Group (DASAEG).
 - A full Diversity Impact Assessment has been completed and is attached at Appendix 2. Women are significantly more likely to experience domestic abuse and be killed by a male partner. However, Domestic abuse can impact anyone regardless of protected characteristics, therefore language included in the strategy is non gender specific. Disabled victims are twice as likely to be victims of domestic abuse and this is recognised within the strategy and the need to ensure services are accessible. Reports suggest that lesbian and gay victims are as likely as those in heterosexual relationships to be victims of domestic abuse. The strategy therefore includes a focus on victims who may face additional barriers when

attempting to access support services and recognises all members of society regardless of their protected characteristics can be victims of domestic abuse. Work to identify older victims where domestic abuse can often go unreported, is also included.

7. Risk management

7.1. Potential risks to the delivery of the strategy are set out in the table below:

| Risk | Description | Action to avoid or mitigate risk | Risk rating |
|----------------------------|---|--|-------------|
| Actions are not completed. | Actions formed from the strategy are not carried out. | A delivery and action plan will be created to ensure accountability in relation to actions. Progress and challenges will be reported via the domestic abuse workstream governance structure, which is overseen by the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse Executive Group. | BII |
| Funding | Sufficient funds are not available to deliver the outcomes set out within the strategy. | Partnership - collaborative bid writing, collectively identifying priorities to focus available funding. Extending access to New Burdens Fund where possible. Review of strategy 2027. | BIII |
| Funding | Funding for multiple core services is withdrawn. | Plans will be implemented to focus support victims and survivors recognised as being at high risk of harm. | CII |

| Likelihood | Impact: |
|---|--|
| A Very likely B Likely C Unlikely D Rare | I Catastrophic II Major III Moderate IV Minor |

8. Consultation

8.1. Consultations with those with lived experience were carried out across Kent and Medway, including a workshop which enabled victims and survivors to provide feedback on the full draft. Age-appropriate focus groups with children and young people also took place across schools and colleges in Medway,

focusing on 'healthy relationships'. The strategy also went through internal governance and feedback was sought at meetings listed earlier in this report in point 4.4.

9. Climate change implications

- 9.1. [The Council declared a climate change emergency in April 2019](#) - item 1038D refers, and has set a target for Medway to become carbon neutral by 2050.
- 9.2. Commissioned services will be required to outline their plans to help reduce their carbon footprint as part of their bid applications and this will be evaluated as part of the commissioning process.

10. Financial implications

- 10.1. Financial implications will stem from the commissioning of services that enable the outcomes set out in the strategy to be met. For the Council, this will include the following: funding for the core community domestic abuse support 5-year contract Medway Domestic Abuse Service - £1,153,500 which is pooled from Public Health, ICB and Children's Social Care and New Burdens Funding of £605,643 for 23/24 and £617,069 for 24/25 which is allocated to Housing, to meet the requirements set out in Part 4 in relation to safe and relevant accommodation.

11. Legal implications

- 11.1 There is a statutory duty for Medway Council to have a domestic abuse strategy and by approving this strategy the Council would be meeting this obligation.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Draft Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy 2024 - 2029

Appendix 2 - Equality Impact Assessment

Background papers

None