

Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy

2021–2026



**Lewisham
Safeguarding
Children Partnership**

Lewisham
Safeguarding Adults Board
A working partnership to prevent abuse



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Foreword



This new Domestic Abuse and Violence against Women and Girls Strategy sets out our action plan for the next five years to tackle violence against women and girls (VAWG), renewing the Council's commitment to make our communities safer.

Recent events, including the tragic murders of Sarah Everard and Sabina Nessa, have brought VAWG into sharp focus and sparked calls for more targeted action to end violence against women and girls. While the timing of the publishing of this strategy could not be more apt, it has been in development for more than 18 months with a series of stages of in-depth engagement to shape our approach.

Lewisham has one of the highest rates of domestic abuse crime in London, so protecting individuals and supporting victims and survivors of these crimes is a key focus for the Council, at the same time as enhancing our early intervention approach to prevent these crimes occurring in the first place.

We recognise that an overwhelming proportion of gender-based violence is perpetrated by men against women and girls. Many of the actions in this strategy seek to address this; focused awareness raising and behaviour change amongst men and boys will be an intrinsic part of our preventative work. The Council also recognises that the term 'violence against women and girls' can be seen as exclusionary to men and boys. Our work and support services for victims and survivors of VAWG is inclusive of all protected characteristics and we are committed to ending all forms of violence, no matter their gender, race, sexuality or disability.

Combating sexual violence and domestic abuse requires a co-ordinated and effective multi-agency approach, including the police, schools, health, housing, and voluntary sector practitioners. In Lewisham we are privileged to have strong partnerships with key stakeholders and organisations across the borough with whom we can work to bring an end to VAWG.

Our new five-year strategy will build on these partnerships to provide a more co-ordinated and strategic response to tackling violence and abuse. We will develop our experience of what works in tackling domestic abuse and VAWG, and we will continue to ensure that our work is evidence-based and meaningful, centred on the voices and experiences of victims and survivors.

The strategy has been shaped through interviews, workshops and consultations with domestic abuse survivors living in Lewisham, local professionals and residents. This has led us to create five priority areas to combat VAWG:

Prevent: Preventing violence and abuse through early intervention and education

Protect: Providing support that keeps individuals and their families safe from harm

Recover: Providing long-term support to enable recovery following abuse

Pursue: Holding perpetrators to account whilst providing opportunity for change and support

Partnership: Working in partnership across agencies and with the community to ensure our response to abuse is integrated, innovative and inclusive

This strategy by no means sets out everything that we – and our partners – are doing, but it brings together the tangible actions that we are taking that will allow us to measure our performance in this critical area of work.

As a Council we will do everything we can to make sure women and girls feel safe – and are safe – in Lewisham. We are determined to see an end to VAWG and this strategy will bring partners together to drive real, lasting change.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B Dacres', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Councillor Brenda Dacres

Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Safer Communities

1. Introduction

This strategy sets out our five-year partnership approach to ending domestic abuse and Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) in Lewisham. The strategy aims to ensure that everyone living and working in Lewisham is able to contribute to making the borough a safer place for victims and survivors of abuse, whether this is through supporting victims and their families, or through empowering victims to seek support themselves. The strategy builds on our existing partnerships to provide a more co-ordinated and strategic response to tackling violence and abuse, with clear priorities that can be embedded into strategic plans across partner agencies.

We recognise that the causes and consequences of domestic abuse and VAWG are complex and multi-faceted, and can only be tackled through a strong multi-agency response, and in partnership with the local community. The priorities of the strategy have been developed in partnership with a wider range of statutory, community and voluntary organisations across Lewisham. We have undertaken a number of consultation exercises engaging with local survivors of domestic abuse and professionals working in local services. We have built on our experience of what works in tackling domestic abuse and VAWG in Lewisham, and will continue to ensure our work is evidence-based and meaningful.

This strategy recognises that domestic abuse and VAWG can affect anyone, although women and children carry by far the highest burden. It highlights that a number of groups face additional barriers to accessing help, and also may be at increased risk of certain types of abuse, and takes account of these intersecting needs. This includes older people, LGBTQ+ people, Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, refugees, and adults with care and support needs. We are committed to ensuring that our services are inclusive and accessible to all.

2. Our priorities

Our strategic priorities for domestic abuse and VAWG for 2021-26 are:

PREVENT

Preventing violence and abuse through early intervention and education

PROTECT

Providing support that keeps individuals and their families safe from harm

RECOVER

Providing longer-term support to enable recovery following abuse

PURSUE

Holding perpetrators to account whilst providing opportunity for change and support

PARTNERSHIP

Working in partnership across agencies and with the community, to ensure our response to abuse is integrated, innovative and inclusive

Priority 1: PREVENT

Preventing violence and abuse through early intervention and education

We want to ensure that everyone living and working in Lewisham knows where to go get help if they are experiencing violence and abuse, at the earliest opportunity. Our aim is that family, friends and the wider community are able to recognise abuse in all its forms, and know how to support victims. This should include a widespread awareness and understanding of coercive control and its impact on survivors and children.

We are committed to preventing violence and abuse happening in the first place. We recognise the influence that early relationships and attachment have on the risk of future violence and abuse, and want to ensure that children and young people in Lewisham are educated around safe and healthy relationships, and understand that violence and abuse is not normalised behaviour.

Priority 2: PROTECT

Providing support that keeps individuals and their families safe from harm

We will continue to ensure that all victims of violence and abuse have access to a high quality integrated VAWG service, including safe accommodation. We are committed to improving the co-ordination of our multi-agency response to victims. This includes agencies working together to protect those at highest risk, as well as intervening early in cases of violence and abuse to prevent escalation.

We aim to ensure that all agencies across Lewisham use routine screening and enquiry for VAWG, and provide an appropriate and safe response following disclosure, ensuring opportunities for victims to easily access safe help in their day to day lives.

Priority 3: RECOVER

Providing longer-term support to enable recovery following abuse

We recognise the long-term harm caused by VAWG and understand the lasting impacts experienced by individuals beyond the incident of abuse. We will aim for agencies across Lewisham to be trauma-informed in their response to violence and abuse, particularly for survivors with multiple vulnerabilities. We will ensure that survivors and their families have access to support to enable recovery from abuse, to prevent repeat incidents and re-victimisation.

Priority 4: PURSUE

Holding perpetrators to account whilst providing opportunity for change and support

We want to ensure that perpetrators of VAWG, not victims, are held accountable for their actions, whilst building capacity to change. We will have a zero-tolerance approach to abuse, and are also committed to being trauma-informed in our response to perpetrators where this is appropriate.

We recognise the challenges that come with working with perpetrators of abuse, and will ensure that professionals in Lewisham have the confidence, skills and support to safely respond to perpetrators of abuse that come into contact with their services. We will support and develop aspirational approaches to masculinity and fatherhood.

Priority 5: PARTNERSHIP

Working in partnership across agencies and with the community, to ensure our response to abuse is integrated, innovative and inclusive

We will lead a coordinated response to domestic abuse and VAWG, creating opportunities for better partnership working and support, encouraging continuous learning and innovation and sharing accountability reducing the impact of violence and abuse. We use our relationships and network to proactively build consensus and a shared understanding of how and why we work.

We will ensure that the voice of survivors informs all of our decision making, and within this priority we recognise that many professionals working in Lewisham will be personally affected by domestic abuse, and so support should be welcoming and accessible to them too.

A more unified response to families affected by domestic abuse

We also wish to address the differences in approach adopted by agencies when working with families affected by domestic abuse. We know that, whilst all agencies are committed to reducing the prevalence and impact of abuse, organisational priorities, duties and processes can mean that there is sometimes conflict between how these issues are approached.

There are a number of circumstances in which these differences can become evident, and this can ultimately impact on the experience and effectiveness of services for victims and survivors of abuse. There is no easy solution to this, but there are a number of actions that we will take as part of this strategy to support multi-agency professionals to work together with greater compassion and openness, and with shared understanding and accountability.

As an example, we are currently piloting a new multi-agency team of staff that will work within Children's Social Care to support families affected by domestic abuse. This team consists of a Social Worker, Independent Gender Violence Advocate and Father's Worker, all of whom bring their different perspectives, but will share their skills and knowledge to best support families.

3. Scope of the strategy

This strategy encompasses all forms of Violence against Women and Girls. However we wish to recognise that, of all forms of VAWG, domestic abuse is the most prevalent crime impacting on Lewisham residents, and so should be the primary focus of our resources. For this reason we have taken the decision to develop a 'Domestic Abuse and Violence against Women and Girls' strategy for Lewisham.

The strategy will cover the following types of abuse:

- **Domestic abuse**

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 defines domestic abuse as 'abusive behaviour between two people that are both aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, including physical or sexual abuse, violent or threatening behaviour, coercive or controlling behaviour, economic abuse, psychological or emotional abuse.' Children are classified as victims of domestic abuse where 'they see, hear or experience the effects of the abuse'.

Within the definition of domestic abuse, the government specifically define controlling behaviour as 'a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour'. Coercive behaviour is defined as 'an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.'¹ It is recognised that there is an increasing prevalence of technology being used to facilitate this abuse.

- **Sexual violence**

Sexual violence can be defined as any behaviour perceived to be of a sexual nature which is unwanted and takes place without consent or understanding. Rape is defined as 'when a person uses their penis without consent to penetrate the vagina, mouth, or anus of another person. Legally, a person without a penis cannot commit rape, but a female may be guilty of rape if they assist a male perpetrator in an attack'. Sexual assault is defined as 'when a person is coerced or physically forced to engage against their will, or when a person, male or female, touches another person sexually without their consent.'²

- **Harmful cultural practices**

Harmful cultural practices are forms of violence which have been committed, primarily against women and girls, in certain communities and societies for so long that they are considered, or presented by perpetrators, as part of accepted cultural practice. The most common forms of harmful cultural practice are female genital mutilation, honour-based violence, and forced marriage, however it can take many other forms.³

¹ UK Home Office (2013)

² Crown Prosecution Service (2021)

Female genital mutilation (FGM) comprises all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. So called 'honour' based violence (HBV) is a crime or incident which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of the family and/or community members. Women, especially young women, are the most common targets, often where they have acted outside community boundaries of perceived acceptable feminine/sexual behaviour. A forced marriage is where one or both people do not (or in cases of people with learning disabilities or reduced capacity, cannot) consent to the marriage but they are pressurised, or forced to do so.⁴

- ***Sexual harassment***

Sexual harassment is unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature which has the effect of violating dignity, creating a hostile or offensive environment, and causing intimidation, degradation or humiliation. It can take place anywhere, including the workplace, schools, streets, public transport and social situations. It includes flashing, obscene and threatening calls, and online harassment.⁵

- ***Stalking***

Stalking is repeated (i.e. on at least two occasions) harassment causing fear, alarm or distress. It can include threatening phone calls, texts or letters; damaging property; spying on and following the victim.⁶

- ***Trafficking***

Trafficking involves the recruitment, transportation and exploitation of women and children for the purposes of prostitution and domestic servitude across international borders and within countries ('internal trafficking').⁷

Other forms of violence

In developing this strategy we acknowledge that not all violence experienced in relationships is the same, both in terms of its causes or its intentions. It is important to distinguish between domestic abuse, as defined by patterns of controlling and coercive behaviour perpetrated by one party onto another, and violence that occurs in relationships due to conflict caused by a specific situation, such as a stressful life event. This is commonly known as 'situational couple violence'.

Given the known prevalence of situational couple violence within households in Lewisham, and the huge detrimental impact that this has on individuals and their families⁸, we feel it is important to also include this within the scope of this strategy. Led by Children's Services, we will to explore the

⁴ Mayor of London Tackling Violence against Women and Girls Strategy 2018-2021

⁵ Mayor of London Tackling Violence against Women and Girls Strategy 2018-2021

⁶ Mayor of London Tackling Violence against Women and Girls Strategy 2018-2021

⁷ Mayor of London Tackling Violence against Women and Girls Strategy 2018-2021

⁸ 'What works to enhance inter-parental relationships and improve outcomes for children?', Early Intervention Foundation (2016) <https://www.eif.org.uk/report/what-works-to-enhance-interparental-relationships-and-improve-outcomes-for-children>

evidence base and solutions to situational couple violence, focusing specifically on reducing parental conflict and promoting healthy relationships.

4. Local and national context

The national picture

In developing this strategy we are clear that women and children make up the majority of victims of domestic abuse and VAWG. However, we wish to recognise that men can also be victims of these crimes, and that they are likely to be under-represented in statistics and in access to services.

Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse affects millions of people in the UK every year. An estimated 7.3% of women (1.6 million) and 3.6% of men (757,000) experienced domestic abuse in the year April 2019 to March 2020⁹. We expect this to be an underestimate, as domestic abuse and VAWG are often referred to as ‘hidden crimes’, as they are not always reported to the Police.

Statistics consistently illustrate the gendered nature of domestic abuse; that victims are disproportionately female and perpetrators are disproportionately male. In the year ending March 2020, the victim was female in 74% of domestic abuse-related crimes¹⁰. It is estimated that one in four women will become a victim of domestic abuse in their lifetime¹¹ and two women in the UK will be killed each week by an intimate partner¹².

Data shows that domestic abuse is most prevalent amongst young women. In the year ending March 2020, women aged 16 to 19 years old were the age group most likely to be victims of domestic abuse, with 14% being a victim at least once¹³. Through this prevalence decreases with age, there is still a significant prevalence within the older age groups. For 60-74 year-olds, 4.4% of women and 1.9% of men had been a victim of domestic abuse. It is accepted that there is likely to be high levels of under-reporting within the older age group. Within this strategy we wish to recognise that the experience of domestic abuse can vary massively depending on age, for example data shows that victims aged 61+ are much more likely to experience abuse from an adult family member than those aged 60 and under, are less likely to attempt to leave their perpetrator, and are more likely to have a disability.

Overall, people from a ‘mixed’ ethnic background are more likely to experience domestic abuse. For the year ending March 2020, those in the ‘mixed’ ethnic group were significantly more likely to experience domestic abuse (7.6%) than those of White (5.7%), Black (3.7%) or Asian (3.6%) background¹⁴.

There is limited national data on the number of people that identify as LGBTQ+ affected by domestic abuse. We know that those who identify as LGBTQ+ face additional barriers to accessing support, and evidence suggests that LGBT+ victims and survivors are not accessing services at the same rate

⁹ Crime Survey for England and Wales (2020)

¹⁰ Crime Survey for England and Wales (2020)

¹¹ Office for National Statistics (2018)

¹² Femicide Census (2017)

¹³ Crime Survey for England and Wales (2020)

¹⁴ Crime Survey for England and Wales (2020)

as others in the population¹⁵. It is likely therefore that many LGBT+ victims and survivors remain hidden from services.

Domestic abuse costs the UK economy £66 billion annually, making the cost for a single victim of abuse, £34,015. These figures illustrate the extent of domestic abuse and the impact and cost felt across society.

Sexual violence

For the year ending March 2020, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) showed that an estimated 773,000 adults aged 16 to 74 years experienced sexual assault (including attempts) in the last year. This equates to a prevalence rate of approximately 2 in 100 adults. In terms of the types of abuse experienced, unwanted sexual touching was the most common type of sexual assault experienced by adults (1.4%). Rape or assault by penetration (including attempts) was experienced by (0.5%) of adults.

Of sexual offences recorded by the police in the year ending March 2020, the victim was female in 84% of cases. In terms of age, both men and women aged 16 to 19 years (2.9% and 12.9% respectively) and 20 to 24 years (2.6% and 10.5% respectively) were significantly more likely to be victims of sexual assault in the last year than any other age group.

Data shows that women from Black or Black British and Mixed ethnic backgrounds were significantly more likely than those in the White, Asian or Other ethnic groups to experience sexual assault. Additionally, women with a disability were more likely to have experienced sexual assault in the last year than women without a disability (5.0% and 2.8% respectively).

Harmful cultural practices

Data on harmful cultural practices in the UK is limited, and many of these practice go unreported to statutory services.

The latest data from health services shows that 5,395 individual women and girls sought medical help in relation to FGM in the year April 2020 to March 2021.¹⁶ This only captures those seen by NHS services, and is likely to be a significant under-reporting of the prevalence in the UK. FGM Protection Orders can be applied for through the Family Court. The number of applications and orders made is very small, and nationally there have been 699 orders made up to end of March 2021, since their introduction in July 2015.¹⁷

On average the government Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) gives advice or support in 1,359 cases related to a possible forced marriage per year (based on 2011-2019 data). Of the cases that the FMU provided advice or support to in 2020, 26% involved victims below 18 years of age, 37% involved victims aged 18-25, and 9% involved victims with mental capacity concerns. 79% involved female victims and 21% involved male victims.¹⁸

¹⁵ Strengthening advocacy for LGBT+ survivors of domestic abuse, Safelives (2019)

¹⁶ NHS Digital Female Genital Mutilation Statistics (2021)

¹⁷ Ministry of Justice Family Court Statistics (2021)

¹⁸ Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office Forced Marriage Statistics (2020)

In 2019/20, there were 1,810 offences involving so called 'honour-based' violence recorded by the police in England and Wales. Most commonly these offences included assault with or without injury, threats to kill and kidnapping.

The Lewisham picture

There are challenges in capturing an accurate picture of the levels of VAWG in Lewisham due to under-reporting by victims, inconsistencies in approach to data collection across services, the hidden nature of this type of abuse and the associated stigma.

In 2019-20, Lewisham recorded the second highest levels of domestic abuse related crime in London, and this appears to be increasing. During the 12 months between June 2019 and May 2020, there were over 9,500 incidents and offences of domestic abuse reported to the Police in Lewisham. Data from the National Domestic Abuse Helpline shows that in 2020-21, there were 1730 calls from Lewisham residents, 79% of which were from residents currently experiencing abuse. This was the second highest number of calls across all London boroughs.

Lewisham Council commissioned the Athena service to provide confidential, non-judgmental support to those living in Lewisham who are experiencing any form of gender-based violence. The Athena service, run by Refuge, provides outreach programmes, independent advocacy, group support, a specialist service for young women, and refuge accommodation.

In 2019/20, the Athena service received 1,448 referrals for Lewisham residents experiencing domestic abuse or other forms of VAWG. Of these, 702 engaged with and received support from the service, 583 going on to receive long-term support. 85% of these clients were experiencing violence from an intimate partner, 8% were experiencing abuse from a family member and 7% were victims of harmful cultural practices. 97% of these were female victims, and 1% were male. The most common forms of abuse seen were psychological abuse or coercive control (experienced by 75% of clients), (experienced by 60% of clients), financial abuse (experienced by 39% of victims), sexual violence (experienced by 26% of victims) and stalking by an intimate partner (experienced by 15% of victims). The majority of victims supported were aged between 31-40 years old (38%) followed by those aged 21-30 (25%) and 41-50 (19%).

The Domestic Abuse Act

The Domestic Abuse Act received Royal Assent in April 2021. This Act will for the first time create a cross-Government statutory definition of domestic abuse, to ensure that domestic abuse is properly understood, considered unacceptable, and actively challenged, across statutory agencies and in public attitudes.

In Lewisham we welcome the measures brought in by the Act, many of which align with the work that has already been underway locally for a number of years. However the Act further increases the need for co-operation across public services, particularly when it comes to meeting the new duties placed on the local authority. Responding to the implications of the Domestic Abuse Act is a key part of this strategy, and will be a priority for the first year of the Strategic Action Plan.

5. Engagement with survivors of abuse

In writing this strategy we undertook in-depth interviews with survivors of domestic abuse in Lewisham. The page below sets out the common themes that arose through this process. We have used this process to inform the values and priorities of this strategy.

Theme 1: Lack of understanding of coercive control and emotional abuse - how this exhibits and its impact

All of the survivors felt that overall there was a lack of understanding of the dynamics of coercive control and psychological abuse, and the impact that this had on them and their families. Though there were a few good examples of individual professionals identifying and responding to this form of abuse, coercive control was not given the precedence that physical abuse was, and this caused issues in all areas of the survivors' experience, including; them recognising themselves as being abused, professionals ability to identify this as abuse, and systems and services being set up to recognise and respond to this form of abuse appropriately.

“Perpetrators never need to punch you... It’s too convenient for everyone to say that it might not be real, or that it is less serious, if there aren’t broken bones”

Theme 2: Lack of understanding in the community about what abuse looks like, and how to get support

Many of the survivors spoke of not recognising themselves as being victims of abuse, particularly where this abuse didn't involve physical violence. When they had reached a point where they were ready to seek help, it was clear that none of them had a good awareness of the support that exists for people in their situation. Most survivors commented that better understanding of abuse and awareness of support, may have helped them to leave their abusive relationships at an earlier stage.

“If there was more information about what abuse really looks like in a relationship, maybe I would have identified it quicker”

“Because you don't know what support is available you don't know how to ask for it”

Theme 3: A gap in support with recovery from abuse

It was clear from speaking to survivors that recovery from abuse is a long and difficult journey, both emotionally and practically. Following the initial crisis response, where agencies like the Police, crisis intervention and social services were involved, the survivors had found very little support available for them, and some felt that this left them vulnerable when they inevitably experienced setbacks. They spoke of the need for support to recover from trauma from peers and professionals, and also practical support to rebuild their lives.

“You need support afterwards, not just in the immediate aftermath of the relationship breakdown... anything can happen and trigger and then you're in pieces again”

“Things got so much worse after left relationship. I kept thinking ‘what have I done?’ and ‘why didn’t I just stay with him?’”

Theme 4: The importance of professional curiosity

On all occasions the survivors found the initial disclosure of the abuse very difficult, because of the lack of trust, shame, and fear that had been engrained in them by the perpetrators or by previous negative experience of disclosure. So when a professional identified that something was not right, or recognised the abuse in the smallest way, this was a huge step forwards for them. In some cases this was a turning point that led to them disclosing, or even just recognising, the abuse for the first time. There were some really good examples of this happening, particularly by the Police and in schools, but also examples of where opportunities for identifying and responding to abuse were missed.

“They looked at the house and looked at me and knew something wasn’t right”

“They opened my eyes to the abuse”

Theme 5: The impact of the relationship with professionals

The attitude of professionals, either positive or negative, was very impactful on the survivors, and this impact was heightened by the shame, distrust and fear that had been engrained in them throughout their abuse. Survivors placed most value on empathy, compassion and respect, and it was clear that these behaviours were valued even when the professional was unable to intervene any further. The survivors also really valued having a consistent professional working with them that they could trust, and that reduced the number of times they had to repeat their story, which was clearly a very traumatic experience for them.

“I always had a fear of being judged by professionals, which made me reluctant to talk”

“She made me feel like a human rather than a tick box”

6. Engagement with stakeholders

To help us to develop this strategy we held seven co-production workshops with professionals across organisations in Lewisham. Each workshop looked in-depth at a different aspect of the response to VAWG in Lewisham, namely housing, children’s social care, adult social care, education, criminal justice, health and voluntary and community sector.

The purpose of the workshops was to review the current response to VAWG; to understand what is working well and where there is a need for improvement, and start to generate a set of solutions to form the Strategic Action Plan. We also tested the PREVENT-PROTECT-RECOVER-PURSUE-PARTNERSHIP strategic framework as a way of describing our collective response to VAWG.

83 different professionals attended across the seven workshops. Professionals in attendance represented the wide partnership of services responding to VAWG in Lewisham, including the Met Police, community safety, adult and children’s social care, health services, schools and colleges, and voluntary and community sector providers. A full list is included in Appendix 1.

There were a number of areas for improvement that emerged through these workshops, which are highlighted below.

PREVENT

1. A need to build the skills, capacity and understanding of practitioners through training.

PROTECT

There was concern and lack of confidence from professionals about how to recognise and respond to abuse, and the risk and responsibility that comes with supporting residents affected by VAWG.

PARTNER
SHIP

Professionals called for a multi-level training programme across Lewisham agencies to build a shared understanding of what we perceive as VAWG and our local response to this. This should include basic-level training that is standardised and delivers our key messages, plus a range of bespoke training programmes that are tailored to the role of each agency or professional.

PREVENT

2. A need to raise awareness at a community level

PROTECT

There was a feeling that there is still a lack of awareness and understanding of VAWG within the community, which then impacts on the ability and willingness of residents to identify and report incidents.

PARTNER
SHIP

Professionals felt that public awareness raising should focus on understanding of coercive control, and that community education should be embedded from an early age. Any public campaigns should use everyday language that is relatable, and be culturally aware.

PROTECT

3. A need for support to enable multi-agency working

PURSUE

There were a number of ideas put forward about how we establish the structures and support to facilitate multi-agency working in response to VAWG. Professionals felt that this was particularly needed at an earlier stage where abuse is first

identified, so that there is a timely response for victims, particularly where there is no further action from statutory services.

PURSUE

4. A need to strengthen our response to perpetrators of abuse

It was clear that there is a lack of confidence amongst professionals in working with perpetrators of abuse. There was agreement that greater accountability and responsibility for change should be held by perpetrators, rather than victims and survivors.

Professionals called for specialist training and support around working with perpetrators as service users. Professionals called for a suite of options for perpetrators, which includes the approach and intervention from support staff, programmes that they can be referred to, and the criminal justice response from the police. Police colleagues emphasised their ambition to increase the use of enforcement and other powers to hold perpetrators to account and limit their space for action.

RECOVER

5. A recognition of the long-term impact of abuse

Professionals were unsure of the support available for survivors of abuse following the initial crisis response. There was agreement that agencies should aim to provide step-down support through advice, guidance and signposting, and that there is a need for more capacity in existing therapeutic and recovery interventions.

7. Our values

Through our engagement with service users and stakeholders, it was clear that **how** we work responding to domestic abuse and VAWG is of critical importance, and that there are key behaviours, values and attitudes that we need to adopt as a partnership, in order to deliver an effective response.

From this we have developed a set of values and guiding principles that set out how we will work over the next five years:

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>COMPASSION</p> <p>We will value, respect and be compassionate with every professional, adult, child and family. We will seek to intervene and support individuals and families no matter their behaviours, and be trauma-informed in our approach.</p> | <p>CURIOSITY</p> <p>We will listen to survivors and their families with genuine curiosity to enable trust to be built. We will have the curiosity to understand the problem, and the courage and integrity to do all we can to achieve the best solution.</p> |
| <p>FLEXIBILITY</p> <p>We will work in a way that is informative, reflective, and adaptive to the needs of children, adults, whole families and whole communities.</p> | <p>SAFETY</p> <p>We will be innovative in our approach and interventions, but keep the wellbeing and safety of victims, survivors and children as our priority.</p> |

8. Strategic Action Plan

Under each of the five priority areas, there are a number of outcomes that we are seeking to achieve through this strategy. The Strategic Action Plan below sets out these outcomes, and the actions that we will take to achieve these over the next five years.

Priority 1: PREVENT

Preventing violence and abuse through early intervention and education

| Outcomes | Actions |
|--|---|
| Lewisham residents know where to go to get help if they are experiencing violence and abuse, at the earliest opportunity | 1.1 Deliver a programme of public-facing campaigns and culturally-relevant communications, which raise awareness of abuse in all its forms and educate on how to get support from local and national services. Ensure this is driven by data to focus on specific locations and populations. This should prioritise posters in public spaces and online content, as survivors told us this is the most effective way of sharing such information. |
| Family, friends and the wider community are able to recognise abuse in all its forms, and know how to support victims | |
| There is a widespread awareness and understanding of coercive control and its impact on survivors and children, amongst people living and working in Lewisham | 1.2 Deliver a specific campaign focused on coercive control, designed in partnership with survivors, that highlights our zero-tolerance approach to this form of abuse |
| Children and young people in Lewisham are educated around safe and healthy relationships and understand that violence and abuse is not normalised behaviour | 1.3 Develop a toolkit for primary and secondary schools to strengthen their delivery of healthy relationships education as part of the RSE curriculum, including to give them the confidence and skills to discuss issues of VAWG and domestic abuse. |
| Practitioners working in services across Lewisham are able to identify the signs of abuse, and have the confidence and skills to respond safely. This includes recognising abuse in colleagues as well as service users | 1.4 Design and deliver a package of VAWG awareness training with bespoke programmes tailored to individual services, enabling professionals to spot the signs of abuse and respond safely, regardless of their working environment. |
| | 1.5 Ensure that a consistent approach to VAWG training is introduced and rolled out across the entire council, including via induction processes. This should be corporately funded and supported so as to ensure it reaches all the services that need this. |
| | 1.6 Work in partnership with community organisations and representatives to design training that |

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| | | recognises cultural differences in how VAWG presents and how professionals should respond |
| | 1.7 | Continue to work with local and national organisations to deliver training on culturally harmful practice, including Female Genital Mutilation, Honor-Based Violence and Forced Marriage |
| We have a deeper understanding of the prevalence and impact of situational couple violence and parental conflict in Lewisham, and how best to respond to this | 1.8 | Explore the evidence base and solutions to situational couple violence, focusing on parental conflict at key life stages. Consider delivery of programmes of couple and relationship education at key life stages, such as pregnancy and early parenthood. |

Priority 2: PROTECT

Providing support that keeps individuals and their families safe from harm

| Outcomes | Actions | |
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| Victims have access to integrated VAWG services that fully meet their needs, and provide support to all victims of VAWG and their families, regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, race, religion and care and support needs. | 2.1 | Continue to commission a community-based specialist VAWG service. Support will be provided across all strands of VAWG, to all victims regardless of their gender and whether or not they have children |
| | 2.2 | Continue to commission refuge provision for victims of VAWG and their families |
| | 2.3 | Undertake monitoring to ensure all commissioned services are meeting needs of residents from diverse groups, and delivering an impactful and high quality service |
| | 2.4 | Work in partnership across health and community services to ensure that survivors facing additional barriers to accessing help, such as those identifying as LGBTQ+, are able to get the support they need |
| Agencies work together to protect those at highest risk and prevent repeat incidents | 2.4 | Continue to co-ordinate and deliver a gold standard Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference process |

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| | 2.5 | Evaluate the impact of the PREVENT-PROTECT-REPAIR programme on Children's Social Care capacity and outcomes, and consider longer-term implementation |
| | 2.6 | Enact the changes within the Domestic Abuse Act, ensuring that eligible homeless victims of domestic abuse automatically have priority need for homelessness assistance, and are provided with support when living in safe accommodation. |
| Intervene early in cases of violence and abuse to prevent escalation | 2.7 | Work with the Children's and Adult MASH, to establish a process for multi-agency reviews of cases that do not reach MARAC thresholds |
| | 2.8 | Ensure that domestic abuse is a priority area of focus for the new Family Thrive Targeted Family Support Team, including identifying Domestic Abuse Champions within each neighbourhood unit and training staff to directly deliver support |
| Professionals working in agencies across Lewisham have a shared understanding of thresholds, provision and processes in relation to VAWG | 2.8 | Create and regularly update a handbook for professionals which sets out service offers, including eligibility and exclusion criteria, limitations and other points to consider when making onwards referrals |
| Services are accessible and welcoming to victims and respond in a timely manner to reports of VAWG | 2.10 | Ensure implementation of Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) Accreditation within Lewisham Housing and Lewisham Homes |
| Data and evaluation is used intelligently to identify trends, needs and gaps across services, and inform service commissioning and delivery | 2.11 | Use the multi-agency VAWG dashboard to measure impact of the strategy on a quarterly basis |
| | 2.12 | Fully evaluate the impact of existing services and programmes, to inform future commissioning |
| Agencies across Lewisham use routine screening and enquiry for VAWG, and provide an appropriate and safe response following disclosure, ensuring opportunities for victims and survivors to easily access safe help in their day to day lives | 2.13 | Develop an auditing framework, in partnership with service users, to assess the use of routine enquiry into VAWG and effectiveness of response to disclosures, and support agencies across Lewisham to deliver this annually |

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| | 2.14 | Create a template for a school VAWG policy, which details how they will respond to children, parents and staff affected by VAWG, and ensure every school in Lewisham implements this |
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Priority 3: RECOVER

Providing longer-term support to enable recovery following abuse

| Outcomes | Actions | |
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| Professionals in Lewisham recognise the long-term harm caused by VAWG and understand the lasting impacts experienced by individuals beyond the incident of abuse. Trauma-informed approaches are embedded across agencies in Lewisham working with individuals and families affected by abuse. | 3.1 | Deliver and evaluate the impact of trauma-informed training to professionals across the partnership as part of the PREVENT-PROTECT-REPAIR programme |
| | 3.2 | Identify lead staff within each partner agency that will facilitate support forums for professionals, providing a space for peer supervision and reflection, and enabling them to embed learning within their practice |
| Survivors have access to evidence-based programmes to support recovery following abuse, including for children who witness or are victims of VAWG. This includes survivors with multiple vulnerabilities having access to the right therapeutic and recovery support, to help address the vulnerabilities that lead to re-victimisation. | 3.3 | Maintain provision of evidence-based recovery programmes for children and their families |
| | 3.4 | Ensure that enquiry into previous experience of abuse is included in assessments determining access to psychological interventions |
| | 3.5 | Ensure that staff working in services for vulnerable adults (such as substance misuse and homelessness services) have the skills and understanding to support survivors of VAWG. |
| | 3.6 | Evaluate the effectiveness of existing short-term initiatives focused on children, including the Children Affected by Domestic Abuse and PREVENT-PROTECT-REPAIR programmes. |
| Services supporting victims and their families in a crisis provide step-down support ahead of case closure to create stability and provide additional safeguarding. | 3.7 | Develop a practical tool to be used by agencies when ending their involvement with survivors of abuse, to enable access to follow-up support and safeguarding |

Priority 4: PURSUE

Holding perpetrators to account whilst providing opportunity for change and support

| Outcomes | Actions |
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| <p>Perpetrators of VAWG, not victims, are held accountable for their actions and responsible for making changes, by all Lewisham agencies, using whatever measures are available</p> | <p>4.1 Where appropriate and safe to do so, continue the use of tenancy enforcement tools, such as injunctions, breaches and orders, to remove the perpetrator from the victim's home, and create safety using the Sanctuary Scheme</p> |
| | <p>4.2 Where appropriate and safe to do so, ensure perpetrators of intimate partner violence who are parents, are considered within child safeguarding processes and decision-making</p> |
| | <p>4.3 Review and increase the use of protection orders, including Domestic Violence Protection Orders, FGM Protection Orders and Forced Marriage Protection Orders, as an effective tool for limiting a perpetrators space for action</p> |
| | <p>4.4 Continue to monitor Operation Dauntless</p> |
| | <p>4.5 Use intelligence to cross reference domestic abuse offences with other violent offences, to increase prosecution of VAWG perpetrators</p> |
| <p>Professionals in Lewisham have the confidence and skills to safely respond to perpetrators of abuse that come into contact with their services</p> | <p>4.6 Establish an advisory hub for staff to discuss their cases with specialist practitioners to provide them with the skills and confidence to work with perpetrators</p> |
| | <p>4.7 Develop a toolkit for non-specialist staff focusing on engaging and working with fathers and partners, including in substance misuse and homelessness services</p> |
| <p>Perpetrators are offered help to address their behaviour at the earliest opportunity, to prevent ongoing violence</p> | <p>4.8 Work in partnership with CRC and Probation to support their work with perpetrators of abuse, based on the principles of rehabilitation</p> |

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| | 4.9 | Seek external funding to commission holistic support programmes for perpetrators of abuse in Lewisham |
| | | justice action |

Priority 5: PARTNERSHIP

Working in partnership across agencies and with the community, to ensure our response to abuse is integrated, innovative and inclusive

| Outcomes | Actions | |
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| Multi-agency professionals work together with openness and compassion, sharing accountability for protecting victims of abuse and their families, whilst recognising service limitations | 5.1 | Review governance and communication across the VAWG partnership, establishing focused multi-agency task and finish groups to make improvements in areas where this is most needed |
| There are regular opportunities for professionals to share good practice, encourage innovation and learning, and reflect on their experiences of supporting victims and perpetrators | 5.2 | Review membership of the VAWG Forum, and ensure this is a space for professionals to share best practice tools and techniques and reflect on the experience of supporting victims and perpetrators |
| | | Seek opportunities to work in partnership with neighbouring boroughs to share learning and deliver services. |
| Non-specialist staff are able to access advice and expertise from specialist professionals as needed, to support their own capacity to respond to VAWG | 5.3 | Evaluate the impact of the Domestic Abuse Advisory Hub pilot within Children's Social Care, and aim for long-term delivery |
| The voice and experience of victims, survivors and their families will inform our commissioning and service delivery | 5.4 | Establish a Survivor Advisory Group responsible for providing scrutiny of the strategy, feedback on services, and co-production of campaigns, training and tools |
| | 5.5 | Routinely collect feedback from service users on programmes and service delivery, and act on any concerns in a timely manner |
| | 5.6 | Ensure that we use tools and processes to capture the voice of children and young people affected by VAWG when evaluating services and programmes. |

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| There is a commitment to reducing VAWG from senior leadership across the partnership of services in Lewisham | 5.6 | Ensure that the multi-agency Domestic Abuse and VAWG Strategic Board continues to have good representation from across agencies, and meets the requirements of the Domestic Abuse Act. |
| | 5.7 | Ensure that recommendations from Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHR), Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPR) and Safeguarding Adults Reviews (SAR), are routinely considered by senior leaders as part of the Domestic Abuse and VAWG Strategic Board, so they can be used as an evidence base to inform service delivery |
| It is recognised that many professionals working in Lewisham will be personally affected by VAWG, and appropriate support is provided | 5.8 | Ensure that Lewisham Council and other key partner agencies have a Domestic Abuse Policy for staff that outlines how managers will raise concerns, respond to disclosures and provide onwards support |

9. Measuring success

We are committed to improving the way we measure and analyse data on all forms of VAWG in the borough. One of our initial aims is to bring together and analyse data from multiple sources to establish a richer understanding of patterns and profiles of abuse in Lewisham, helping us to target resources where they will be most impactful.

The Key Performance Indicators in Appendix 2 will form a new VAWG Partnership Dashboard. This will be monitored regularly throughout the life of the strategy, and used to assess the impact of the Strategic Action Plan on improving our response to domestic abuse and VAWG in Lewisham. This will overlay data from a wide range of sources across the partnership, including incorporating data from relevant regional and national provisions.

The Key Performance Indicators under Priority 1: 'Prevent', are separated into years 1-3 and 4-5. As the core aim of this strategy is to increase awareness and understanding of domestic abuse and VAWG, we expect reporting, referrals and access to services for related issues to increase over years 1-3. We then expect to see these numbers decrease in years 4-5 as the prevalence of domestic abuse and VAWG decreases, in response to the actions put in place through this strategy.

10. Governance

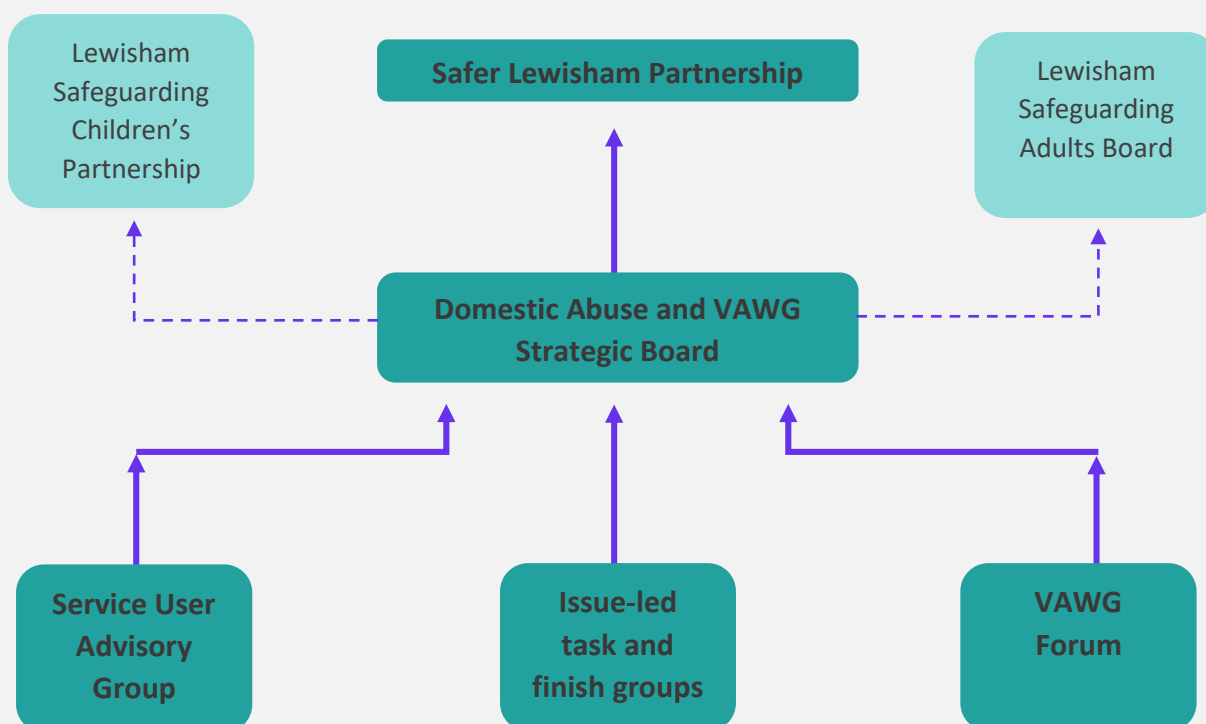
The Domestic Abuse and VAWG Strategic Board will be responsible for monitoring our progress against the Strategic Action Plan. As well as this, the aim of the Board is to continue to secure high-level commitment to the strategy across multiple agencies, and ensure that domestic abuse and VAWG is included in wider policy and strategy developments across Lewisham.

Underneath this, we will form a small number of task and finish groups to drive forward change in specific areas of the strategy. These will be short-term and focused groups of multi-agency professionals, formed to address a particular issue, need or challenge as it arises. The focus and membership of these groups will be decided by the Domestic Abuse and VAWG Strategic Board.

We will establish a Service User Advisory Group that will be responsible for providing scrutiny of the strategy, feedback on services, and co-production of campaigns, training and tools.

We will continue to deliver the successful VAWG Forum. This is an opportunity for professionals across Lewisham agencies to share best practice and reflect on the experience of supporting victims, survivors and perpetrators.

The Domestic Abuse and VAWG Strategic Board will be accountable to the Safer Lewisham Partnership. It will also report to the Lewisham Safeguarding Children's Partnership and Adults Board.



11. Appendices

Appendix 1: List of stakeholders

Thank you to the following organisations and services that took part in the coproduction workshops to develop this strategy.

Athena Gender-Based Violence Service, Refuge
Lewisham Housing Services
Lewisham No Recourse to Public Funds Team
Lewisham Homes
L&Q Housing
Phoenix Housing
Lewisham Primary Care Recovery Service, Humankind
Citizens Advice Lewisham
St. Mungos Supported Housing
Age UK Lewisham
Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation
Lewisham Local
Voluntary Services Lewisham
Africa Advocacy Foundation
Lewisham Refugee and Migrants Network
Latin American Women's Rights Service
Change Grow Live
Lewisham MASH
Met Police
National Probation Service
Solace Women's Aid
Lewisham Family Support and Safeguarding Service
Lewisham Referral and Assessment Service
Future Men
Family Nurse Partnership, Lewisham and Greenwich Trust
The Positive Parenting Company
Corporate Safeguarding, Lewisham and Greenwich Trust
Health Visiting Service, Lewisham and Greenwich Trust
Maternity Service, Lewisham and Greenwich Trust
South East London Clinical Commissioning Group
Amersham Vale GP Practice
South London and Maudsley NHS Trust
Watergate School
Kennington Park School
Elfrida School
Lewisham College
Addey and Stanhope School
Lewisham Safeguarding Children Partnership
Kender School
Lewisham Adult Social Care
Lewisham Adult Safeguarding Board

Appendix 2: VAWG Partnership Dashboard

| Priority 1: PREVENT | | |
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| | Short-term indicators (years 1-3) | |
| | Increase in number of self-referrals or referrals from family and friends to the integrated VAWG service | Due a lower prevalence of VAWG in Lewisham: |
| 1.2 | Increase in number of domestic abuse incidents reported to the Police | |
| 1.3 | Increase in number of referrals to MARAC | Reduction in number of incidents of domestic abuse crime responded to by the Police |
| 1.4 | Increase in number of MARAC referrals where coercive control or psychological abuse is identified | |
| | Increase in number of domestic abuse incidents reported to the Police where coercive control is identified | Reduction in the number of MARAC referrals reaching 'high risk' threshold |
| | Increase in number of referrals to Athena where coercive control or psychological abuse is the primary concern | |
| 1.6 | Increase in the number of primary and secondary schools delivering healthy relationships education | Reduction in the number of homeless victims of abuse presenting to Lewisham Housing Options |
| | Increase in number of referrals to integrated VAWG service from professionals | |
| 1.8 | Increase in number of professionals attending training culturally harmful practices | Reduction in the number of Strategy Discussions and Child and Family Assessments completed where domestic abuse is a concern |
| | | Reduction in the number of Adult Safeguarding Concerns being submitted to, and Section 42 Enquiries being concluded by the Local Authority, where domestic abuse is the source of the Concern |
| Priority 2: PROTECT | | |
| 2.1 | Increase in the percentage of VAWG service users reporting an end to all types of abuse and controlling behaviours | |
| 2.2 | Increase in positive safety, health, economic and social outcomes after accessing community VAWG or refuge services. | |
| 2.3 | Increase in the percentage of referrals to the integrated VAWG service for victims of familial abuse | |
| 2.4 | Increase in the percentage of VAWG service users reporting they feel safer, less frightened, have improved quality of life and ability access help | |
| 2.5 | Increase in the percentage of referrals to the integrated VAWG service for victims that are male, LGBTQ+, from a BAME background, are aged 60+, and/or have a long term health condition (including substance misuse), and/or a physical, mental, sensory, learning or cognitive illness or disability. | |
| 2.6 | Increase in number of MARAC referrals where familial abuse is identified | |
| 2.7 | Decrease in number of repeat cases discussed at MARAC | |
| 2.8 | Decrease in number of repeat victims (Police data) | |

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| 2.9 | Increase in percentage of referrals to MARAC for victims that are male, LGBTQ+, from a BAME background, are aged 60+, and/or have a long term health condition (including substance misuse), and/or a physical, mental, sensory, learning or cognitive illness or disability. |
| 2.10 | Decrease in the number of CIN and CP reviews where domestic abuse is a concern |
| 2.11 | Decrease in the number of LAC reviews where domestic abuse is a concern |
| 2.12 | Increase in the number of children referred for domestic abuse support following presentation at A&E |
| 2.13 | Decrease in the number of presentations at A&E with injuries related to domestic abuse |
| 2.14 | Number of households prevented or relieved where the reason for homelessness was fleeing domestic abuse |
| 2.15 | Number of households accepted as emergency housing move on cases by EHP where domestic abuse is the reason for their referral |
| 2.16 | Number of victims of domestic that are fleeing a social tenancy to access alternative social accommodation on the same basis |
| 2.17 | Increase in the number of notifications to schools as part of Operation Encompass |
| 2.18 | Decrease in repeat presentations to Lewisham Housing for victims of domestic abuse |
| 2.19 | Increase in the number of Strategy Discussions and Child and Family Assessments completed where domestic abuse is a concern |
| 2.20 | Increase in the number of Adult Safeguarding Concerns being submitted to the Local Authority where domestic abuse is the source of concern |
| 2.21 | Increase in the number of Section 42 Enquiries concluded by the Local Authority where domestic abuse is the source of the concern |
| 2.22 | Decrease in repeat referrals to CSC and ASC of individuals where domestic abuse is a concern |
| 2.23 | Increase in the number of families referred to and supported by the Family Thrive Team, where domestic abuse is a concern |
| 2.24 | Increase in the number of agencies using routine screening and enquiry into VAWG |

Priority 3: RECOVER

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| 3.1 | Increase in number of survivors and children attending recovery programmes for domestic abuse |
| 3.2 | Increase in number of survivors accessing peer support |

Priority 4: PURSUE

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| 4.1 | Increase in use of Domestic Violence Protection Orders, FGM Protection Orders and Forced Marriage Protection Orders |
| 4.2 | Decrease in number of repeat offences of domestic abuse, including decrease in offences by Persistent Prolific Offenders |
| 4.3 | Increase in the percentage of domestic abuse incidents where the perpetrator is charged |

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| 4.4 | Increase in the number of perpetrators discussed as part of an 'advisory hub' |
| 4.5 | Decrease in percentage of domestic abuse allegations withdrawn |

