



MK Together
SAFEGUARDING PARTNERSHIP

Domestic Abuse Strategy 2025-2028

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Executive Summary

Milton Keynes is a city where domestic abuse is not tolerated and where everyone can expect healthy and fulfilling relationships. We recognise that domestic abuse is a complex issue that requires a coordinated, compassionate, and community-led response. This strategy sets out the approach of the Milton Keynes Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership Board (DASPB) to tackling domestic abuse over the next three years. It outlines a shared vision, strategic priorities, and commitments to ensure that all individuals affected by domestic abuse receive timely, effective, and inclusive support. This strategy also supports Milton Keynes City Council's statutory duty to have a Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy.

Introduction

Domestic abuse affects thousands of individuals and families across Milton Keynes. It can take many forms, including physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, financial abuse, and has long-lasting impacts on health, wellbeing, and safety.

The Milton Keynes Domestic Abuse Strategy details how the Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership Board will work together to prevent domestic abuse, support survivors, and hold perpetrators to account over the next three years.

This strategy has been developed in partnership with survivors, service providers, and professionals across Milton Keynes. It reflects the voices of those with lived experience and builds on the findings of the 2025 Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment.

The strategy identifies four key priorities, supported by an action plan which will be actioned, monitored and reviewed by the Domestic Abuse Operational Group (DAOG) and overseen by the DASPB.

These priorities are informed by the 2025 Needs Assessment, survivor engagement, and national statutory guidance.

Context

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 introduced a statutory definition of domestic abuse and placed new legal duties on local authorities in England. Under Part 4 of the Act, local authorities must:

- Assess the need for support in safe accommodation for victims and their children.
- Develop and publish a Domestic Abuse Strategy every three years.
- Convene a Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board to oversee delivery.
- Commission and monitor services that provide housing-related support, advocacy, counselling, and specialist provision.

What Our Needs Assessment Told Us

The 2025 Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment (DANA) provides a comprehensive picture of domestic abuse in Milton Keynes. It draws on population and service data, survivor voice, and professional insight to identify where our approach to domestic abuse is working well and where change is needed.

Key findings that have shaped this strategy include:

- **Demographic change:** Milton Keynes has a growing and ageing population, with increasing ethnic diversity. Services must be inclusive, culturally sensitive, and responsive to older survivors and underrepresented communities.
- **High demand for housing support:** 22.4% of households owed a homelessness duty cited domestic abuse, nearly double the national average and higher than statistical neighbours. There is a need for more second-stage accommodation and clearer tenancy management pathways, including options for removing perpetrators from tenancies.
- **Trauma and complex needs:** Trauma is the most prevalent need among refuge residents, often intersecting with mental ill-health, immigration, and financial issues. Services must be trauma-informed and holistic.
- **Underreporting and data gaps:** Fewer than half of all domestic abuse incidents are reported to police. Reporting varies by age, gender and ethnicity, and police data lacks consistency in recording key characteristics. This limits our ability to plan effectively and equitably.
- **Variations in access:** Some demographic groups are overrepresented in refuge use, while others (e.g. Chinese women, LGBTQI+ individuals, older adults) are underrepresented. This suggests barriers to access and the need for targeted outreach.
- **Strong link between deprivation and abuse:** Areas like Bletchley East, and Woughton and Fishermead experience higher rates of domestic abuse. A correlation score of 0.9 between deprivation and domestic abuse confirms the need for place-based responses.
- **Partnership strengths and gaps:** The Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) is well-attended, but referrals from Children's Social Care remain low. The Sanctuary Scheme is valued, but not as widely utilised compared to similar local authorities. Referral pathways and data sharing need strengthening.
- **Survivor voice:** Engagement with survivors highlighted the importance of being believed, supported, and informed. Their experiences have directly shaped this strategy and will continue to guide service development.

These findings underpin the strategy's five priorities:

1. **Prevention and Early Intervention**
2. **Fair Access to Services**
3. **Provision of Safe Accommodation**
4. **Partnerships and Governance**
5. **Strengthening Perpetrator Accountability**

What do we currently do well, and where are our gaps?

Milton Keynes City Council and its partners currently commission a range of specialist domestic abuse services to support individuals and families affected by abuse. These services focus on early intervention, crisis support, recovery pathways, and prevention, with a strong emphasis on multi-agency collaboration and community engagement.

Services include refuge accommodation, crisis intervention, perpetrator programmes, counselling, workforce development, and support for children and families. Specialist domestic abuse practitioners are co-located in Housing, Social Care and Milton Keynes University Hospital. Safe accommodation options include refuge spaces, a Sanctuary Scheme, and dispersed housing.

Specialist services are provided by MK-Act and other partners, with multi-agency coordination through MARAC and the Domestic Abuse Operational Group. These services reflect our ongoing commitment to supporting those affected by domestic abuse and form the foundation of our current provision.

There is strong partnership working between Thames Valley Police, Milton Keynes City Council, and specialist services. Protective measures such as Domestic Violence Protection Notices (DVPNs) and Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs) are used to safeguard survivors in the immediate aftermath of incidents. Frontline officers continue to receive training to improve trauma-informed responses.

However, there are areas where our response to domestic abuse could be strengthened. The IRIS Programme for General Practitioners is not currently in use in our health settings. High levels of domestic abuse are still prevalent in Child in Need Assessments, which is being addressed through Children's Services initiatives.

Lack of sufficient second-stage accommodation creates move-on delays for refuge clients. Processes for removing perpetrators from joint tenancies are complex and often reliant on court intervention. There is a need to ensure housing responses are inclusive and trauma-informed, particularly for older adults, male victims, and those without leave to remain.

Survivors report inconsistent experiences with police responses and delays in investigations. Access to specialist support within the justice system remains limited, particularly for marginalised groups. There is also a need to strengthen data sharing and case tracking across agencies to ensure coordinated and accountable responses.

The commitments within each of the five priority areas aim to build on our strengths and ensure our future response is robust and coordinated.

Priority 1: Prevention and Early Intervention

Why this is important:

The Needs Assessment highlighted underreporting, data gaps, and the strong link between deprivation and domestic abuse. It also highlighted how findings from DHRs (now DARDs) had been used effectively to mitigate against future risks of domestic abuse-related homicides and suicides. Early intervention is critical to reduce escalation and long-term harm. Survivors emphasised the importance of being believed and supported early.

What is working well:

- White Ribbon Accreditation and campaigns engaging men and boys.
- Domestic Abuse Champions and training for frontline staff.
- Multi-agency coordination through the Domestic Abuse Operational Group and an IDVA co-located in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

What else we will put in place:

- Strengthen referral pathways from all partners to ensure a focus on early identification of domestic abuse.
- Develop primary interventions that align with the wider Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) agenda. Interventions will be trauma-informed and culturally sensitive.
- Develop targeted early intervention programmes for children and young people, linked to the Government's Families First Programme.
- Monitor and review targeted Early Help responses, especially for children and young people.

Priority 2: Fair Access to Services

Why this is important:

The Needs Assessment showed disparities in access, with some groups underrepresented in services (eg LGBTQI+, older adults, Chinese women). Trauma and complex needs are prevalent, and demand for housing support is high.

What is working well:

- Delivery of specialist services including MK-Act, Cranstoun (Drive Perpetrator Programme), and SAASS.
- Multi-agency coordination through MARAC, MATAC and MASH.
- Health IDVA co-location at MK University Hospital.

What else we will put in place:

- Recommission specialist domestic abuse services to maximise impact and ensure inclusivity.
- Expand targeted interventions for older individuals and promote them locally.
- Explore implementation of the IRIS initiative to improve GP response to older victims.
- Develop culturally specific outreach and awareness campaigns.
- Improve access and response for older people, LGBTQI+ individuals, and those with neurodiverse needs.
- Increase engagement with underrepresented ethnic groups in refuge use.
- Enhanced training to recognise abuse beyond intimate relationships.
- Assess and improve access to secure and safe accommodation, including second-stage housing.

Priority 3: Provision of Safe Accommodation

Why this is important:

Local authorities have a statutory duty under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 to provide support within safe accommodation, ensuring survivors can access refuge, Sanctuary Schemes, and other housing options tailored to their needs. Fulfilling this duty is essential not only for legal compliance but also for safeguarding survivors, promoting recovery, and enabling long-term stability.

The Needs Assessment identified safe accommodation as a critical lifeline for survivors fleeing domestic abuse. Without secure housing, survivors face heightened risks of returning to abusive environments or experiencing homelessness. Demand for refuge spaces and alternative housing options continues to rise, particularly among families and individuals with complex needs. Ensuring access to safe, trauma-informed accommodation is essential for recovery, stability, and long-term safety.

What is working well:

- Development of a new Domestic Abuse Policy in Housing to support Council tenants at risk of domestic abuse and tenancy management.
- Specialist domestic abuse workers, including a Temporary Accommodation Support Officer and Housing IDVA, in our Housing Solutions Service to prevent people becoming homeless due to domestic abuse.
- The Sanctuary Scheme provides target hardening measures to enable survivors of domestic abuse to remain in their own homes where it is safe for them to do so.
- Our 28-place Refuge provides specialist accommodation and trauma-informed support to survivors fleeing abuse.

What else we will put in place:

- Embed the newly recommissioned Sanctuary Scheme to ensure survivors are able to remain in their own homes.
- Recommission the Refuge contract to continue the provision of specialist safe accommodation for survivors.
- Develop a new refuge to accommodate increases in demand as a result of population growth.

Priority 4: Partnerships and Governance

Why this is important:

The Needs Assessment identified strengths in MARAC but gaps in referrals and data sharing. Survivor voice is essential to shaping services. Effective governance ensures accountability and continuous improvement.

What is working well:

- Oversight by the Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership Board (DASPB).
- Survivor engagement in strategy development.

What else we will put in place:

- Develop a robust data and outcomes framework across all DASPB partners that demonstrates progress against our priorities and commitments.
- Inclusion of Courts in DASPB membership.
- Formal integration of lived experience into service design and commissioning.
- Use Domestic Abuse Champions and training programmes to improve referral pathways between services.

Priority 5: Strengthening Perpetrator Accountability

Why this is important:

The Needs Assessment showed high demand for tenancy management solutions in Housing and the need for behaviour-change programmes. Survivors continue to experience harm while navigating justice systems.

What is working well:

- Delivery of perpetrator programmes (Drive, Fresh Start, Building Choices).
- Collaboration with Probation and criminal justice partners.

What else we will put in place:

- Improve data recording around joint tenancies where domestic abuse has been identified and develop clear guidelines for managing these tenancies, including options for removing perpetrators.
- Ensure availability of a full range of evidence-based perpetrator programmes to support behaviour change, reduce harm, and prevent further abuse.

Achieving our Priorities

The Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership Board (DASPB) is accountable for overseeing the Strategy's implementation and ensuring that all actions are aligned with the priorities identified through the Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment.

To achieve our priorities, an Action Plan has been developed in collaboration with all partners. This Action Plan is directly aligned with our strategic commitments and is endorsed by members of the DASPB. Each action within the plan has a designated lead from the Domestic Abuse Operational Group (DAOG), who is responsible for tracking progress, coordinating delivery, and reporting to the Board using agreed performance measures.

Governance and Oversight

Governance structures are in place to ensure accountability and transparency:

- The DASPB provides quarterly progress reports to relevant governance bodies.
- The Strategy and Action Plan are reviewed quarterly to ensure they remain responsive to emerging needs and national policy developments.
- The DAOG plays a critical role in operational delivery, bringing together multi-agency partners to share learning, identify gaps, and recommend initiatives. The DAOG interfaces with the DASPB to ensure that strategic decisions are informed by frontline experience and service user feedback.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Robust inspection mechanisms are embedded within the Action Plan, including:

- Outcome evaluations to demonstrate the impact of services.
- Continuous contract monitoring to ensure best value and quality.
- Feedback loops from survivors, families, and perpetrators engaged with services to shape service development, commissioning, and monitoring procedures.

We will ensure that the voices of those with lived experience are central to refining and enhancing our provision. Survivors' voices will underpin service design.

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

The successful implementation of these priorities requires commitment from all partners. Together, we will continue to improve the lives of domestic abuse survivors and their families. We are dedicated to delivering meaningful change, enhancing service coordination, incorporating the latest research, and adapting to the evolving needs of our community. We will also continually monitor national policy developments and funding opportunities to ensure our approach reflects the most up-to-date guidance and priorities.

Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

DARDR: Domestic Abuse Related Death Review – a multi-stakeholder case review whose primary purpose is to examine the circumstances surrounding a death and identify how responses could be improved to prevent similar deaths in the future.

DASPB: Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership Board – a multi-agency group overseeing the domestic abuse strategy and delivery.

DAOG: Domestic Abuse Operational Group – a working group that coordinates domestic abuse responses across services.

DHR: Domestic Homicide Review; previous name for DARDR – established as a statutory requirement under Section 9 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004.

IDVA: Independent Domestic Violence Advisor – a specialist who supports victims of domestic abuse.

DAPN: Domestic Abuse Protection Notice – a short-term notice issued by police to protect victims immediately after an incident.

DAPO: Domestic Abuse Protection Order – a longer-term court order that places restrictions on perpetrators to protect victims.

DVPN: Domestic Violence Protection Notice – similar to a DAPN, used to provide immediate protection.

DVPO: Domestic Violence Protection Order – similar to a DAPO, used to provide longer-term protection.

DVDS: Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme – also known as Clare’s Law, allows individuals to ask police if their partner has a history of abuse.

MARAC: Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference – a meeting where agencies share information about high-risk domestic abuse cases.

MATAC: Multi-Agency Tasking and Coordination – a meeting where agencies share information about serial perpetrators.

IRIS: Identification and Referral to Improve Safety – a programme that trains GPs to identify and refer domestic abuse victims.

VAWG: Violence Against Women and Girls – a national strategy to address gender-based violence.

MKCC: Milton Keynes City Council – the local authority responsible for delivering services in Milton Keynes.

SAASSBMK: Support and Advocacy Service for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Abuse in Milton Keynes.

MASH: Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub – a team that brings together professionals to respond to safeguarding concerns.

CIS: Crisis Intervention Service – a service that provides urgent support to domestic abuse victims.

CNWL: Central North West London NHS Foundation Trust – provides health services in Milton Keynes.

RESPECT: A national accreditation for organisations working with perpetrators of domestic abuse.

SafeLives: A UK charity dedicated to ending domestic abuse through research and service improvement.

Draft Strategy for Consultation

