

Meeting: Cabinet
Date: 18 September 2023
Classification: Part 1
Key Decision: Yes / No
Title of Report: Domestic Abuse Strategy Update

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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 introduced several changes as part of the Government's ambition to tackle the significant harms that are caused to people because of domestic abuse. These include introducing a broader definition of Domestic Abuse, improvements to the criminal justice processes and a range of new duties (Part iv), for Tier 1 Local Authorities (in this case Southend City Council), requiring the Authority to provide safe accommodation and support services for victims of Domestic Abuse and their families.
- 1.2. Under Part iv of the Act, there were additional duties which included the need for Local Authorities set up a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Partnership Board (DAPB) to oversee the responsibilities under the Act and which it has to consult in relation to various specified functions. These functions include assessment of need for safe accommodation and support, publishing an associated strategy, and commissioning the accommodation and services.
- 1.3. Southend has now established the Southend Domestic Abuse Partnership Board (SDAPB), which is Chaired by the Director of Operation for South Essex Homes, with the CEO of Southend's Association of the Community and Voluntary Sector (SAVS) Anthony Quinn which highlights our ambition for the Board to collaborate as a true multi-agency forum.
- 1.4. The SDAPB collaborates with the Greater Essex footprint through the Southend, Essex and Thurrock Domestic Abuse Board (SETDAB) which is Chaired by the Deputy Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex. In June 2022, SETDAB (including a contribution from SCC) commissioned TONIC to conduct a domestic abuse discovery exercise to explore the domestic abuse landscape across Greater Essex. The final report and learning from this exercise concluded in January 2023 followed by a number of workshops and a system design process has started to explore the future commissioning arrangements across Greater Essex.

- 1.5. Following this initial progress and the SETDAB discovery exercise a refresh of the Southend needs assessment has been undertaken, including a public survey hearing from victims and survivors of domestic abuse in Southend. The learning from the needs assessment has enabled us to develop a new forward strategy to tackle domestic abuse across Southend and develop our longer-term commissioning intentions. This paper sets out Southend's proposed new strategy to tackle domestic abuse across the City.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet:

A) **Agree in principle the proposed strategy** identified for the next Southend Domestic Abuse Strategy (2023 – 2026) to enable the strategy to be finalised.

3. Background

- 3.1. The Act placed several new duties on tier one local authorities including i) to conduct a needs assessment to understand the safe accommodation needs of victims and survivors, **ii) to develop and publish a strategy**, iii) to provide support to victims of domestic abuse, in refuges and other safe accommodation and iiiii) to convene a Local Partnership Board. Southend City Council has responded to each of these duties.
- 3.2. The Act has created, for the first time, 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. The definition of domestic abuse is in two parts. The first part deals with the relationship between the abuser and the abused. The second part defines what constitutes abusive behaviour.
- 3.3. The definition is:

Behaviour of a person ("A") towards another person ("B") is "domestic abuse" if:

- *A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and*
- *the behaviour is abusive.*

Behaviour is "abusive" if it consists of any of the following:

- *physical or sexual abuse;*
- *violent or threatening behaviour;*
- *controlling or coercive behaviour;*
- *economic abuse (see subsection (4));*
- psychological, emotional or other abuse; and it does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.

(4) "Economic abuse" means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on B's ability to:

- *acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or*

- *obtain goods or services.*

For the purposes of this Act A’s behaviour may be behaviour “towards” B despite the fact that it consists of conduct directed at another person (for example, B’s child).

The Act considered two people are “personally connected” to each other if any of the following applies:

- *they are, or have been, married to each other;*
- *they are, or have been, civil partners of each other;*
- *they have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated);*
- *they have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been terminated);*
- *they are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other;*
- *they each have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child*
- *they are relatives.*

3.4. The Act places a duty on Tier 1 Local Authorities to commission support within safe accommodation for victims and their children. The definition of safe accommodation and support under the Act is provided below:

Defining safe accommodation	Defining support
<p>Safe accommodation includes;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refuge accommodation • Specialist safe accommodation • Dispersed accommodation • Sanctuary Schemes • Move-on and / or second stage accommodation • Other forms of domestic abuse emergency accommodation <p>Temporary accommodation such as homelessness hostels, hotels and bed and breakfast accommodation is not considered under this definition.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall management of services within relevant accommodation • Support with the day-to-day running of the service • Advocacy support • Domestic abuse prevention advice • Specialist support for victims • Children’s support • Housing-related support • Advice service • Counselling and therapy

Developing Southend’s Domestic Abuse Strategy

3.5. **Needs assessment:** A needs assessment was completed in 2021 in line with the statutory timeframe. Although the needs assessment was able to adhere to the regulation requirements, the deadline imposed by Central Government created a challenge for local partners to fully engage in the process and the Southend Domestic Abuse Partnership Board (SDAPB) agreed to conduct a more comprehensive needs

assessment ahead of the 2023-2026 strategy development. This needs assessment has been completed.

Key learning from Southend's Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment

- Based on national prevalence rates applied to the population (Census 2021) of Southend we can estimate that there are 146,412 individuals aged 16 or over in Southend of which we can estimate around 25,500 will have experienced domestic abuse over their lifetime. On an annual basis, this equates to 7,690 individuals likely to have experienced domestic abuse (both familial and intimate partner violence).
- Southend in particular sees high levels of domestic abuse, in comparison to the local neighbouring areas as well as comparable areas. There is an underutilisation of preventative measures, such as the DVDS, which can help to enable victims to continue engaging with the criminal justice system. A more successful engagement of victims with Essex Police could help to reduce repeat victimisation, which Southend sees very high levels of.
- The low engagement of victims of domestic abuse with the police is also evidenced by the low levels of victims supporting prosecution. There are many reasons why victims often do not want to pursue a criminal justice route in response to their experience of abuse. It is the role of the police to engage with the victim in a way that gives them confidence in the criminal justice system enabling them to be safe. Feedback from victims in this project as well as the TONIC research shows that there continues to be a disconnect between the police and victims of domestic abuse.
- At present the council is successful at preventing homelessness from DA victims/survivors. It was also identified that cases that have approached as fleeing domestic in abuse in 2022 sometimes withdrew their application or had their application closed due to contact being lost. The data shows that only 4% of homelessness applications were due to domestic abuse in Southend, which is much lower than the national average of 12%. It is difficult to draw conclusions as to why this is taking place but will need to be explored through our future strategy to ensure the right housing options are available for victims.
- There are some learnings in regards to gender and ethnicity from the dataset we analysed from the health sector in Southend. We know that men are underrepresented in domestic abuse services in Southend, and generally less identified by professionals. We found a particularly high proportion of male victims of domestic abuse accessing the Forward Trust, with 42% of the victims identified being male.
- There is also a gap in the identification of victims from minoritised ethnic groups in the substance misuse service. Specialist training should be provided to professionals to help them understand the additional barriers faced by non-White British victims and how to respond in a culturally sensitive way. Local domestic abuse services should also consider the inclusion of Black and Minoritised Ethnic IDVA to provide specialist support to people from those communities as well as engage and raise awareness of the support available in Southend.
- We have also noted the high numbers of victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse experiencing the 'toxic trio' of domestic abuse, mental health and substance misuse. Over four-in-five victims and perpetrators in Southend accessing

substance misuse support also experience mental health issues. Access to services for that cohort is especially difficult, due to substance use services not accepting service users with diagnosed mental health issues, and mental health services not accepting services users with substance misuse issues. This leads to the revolving-door scenario, where the patient is unable to access neither of the services.

- We found a lot of positive responses to domestic abuse when looking at children and family data in Southend. One of the key findings was the increase in referrals into Children Social Care from various sectors since 2019/20, suggesting an improved understanding of domestic abuse and the appropriate response. It suggests that the coordinated community approach is being implemented across the whole Southend system, which should be complemented.

3.6. **Coproduction with victims and survivors:** As part of the needs assessment, we launched an online survey to hear from any residents in Southend with lived experience of domestic abuse. We asked victims about their experiences of abuse, but also what worked well for them in terms of seeking help and what barriers they encountered. Overall we had 97 responses. As part of the survey, we invited victims with the opportunity to work with us to continue to shape our response in Southend through the development of our next strategy. As part of this several victims have joined a coproduction board who are working alongside Council officers and the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board to develop and deliver the proposed strategy.

Key learning from Southend’s Victim and Survivor survey

Theme	What we found	Voices of survivors in Southend
Types of abuse	<p>Based on our online survey of victims in Southend The most commonly experienced forms of non-physical abuse were;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shouting: 97% of the respondents had experienced a perpetrator shouting at them, and it was also the most frequently experienced form of abuse with 90% experiencing this behaviour more than 10 times. • Humiliation: 85% of respondents experienced being humiliated by their perpetrator, with 58% stating this happened more than 10 times. • Keep track of where they went: 83% of respondents stated their perpetrator kept track of where they went or 	<p><i>“I have only recently started to tell people. After 14 years of an abusive marriage I have left. I continue to be abused and controlled”</i></p> <p><i>“The police took the financial abuse seriously enough to arrest my ex husband, but the judge threw the case out because I</i></p>

	<p>how they spent time. This can make seeking support particularly difficult.</p> <p>Many survivors also experienced physical and sexual abuse too with the most common being:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grabbing (86%) • Pushing (84%) <p>In addition to this there was a high prevalence of perpetrators hitting,, punching or slapping victims with 71% experiencing it and 21% frequently experiencing it more than 10 times. Worryingly, almost half the respondents experienced being choked or strangled (both actual and attempted). Strangling is often a significant predictor of future lethal violence.</p>	<p><i>was married and was told it was a matter for the divorce court to deal with”</i></p>
<p>Experiences of help seeking</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 34% of victims in Southend never told any professionals about their experience of abuse. • 51% of victims responding reported the abuse to the police however most did not report all of the incidents. In fact only 6% reported all of the incidents. • Survivors told us the three most common organisations they might disclose to were; GPs (28%), Children’s social care (22%) and/or their employer (20%). • Victims in Southend were most likely to seek help within the community, with the majority telling a friend about the abuse they were experiencing (63%). They also sought support from family members (45%). Almost as many sought support from a colleague (18%). 	<p><i>“My GP offered to help me run away to a hostel but I was too afraid to leave”</i></p> <p><i>“My school was able to leave a picture of my ex-partner in the office so if they were to ever turn up on site staff members would know what they look like”.</i></p> <p><i>“I didn’t feel many of them took it seriously, I felt they judged me for telling them, like somehow I was responsible for what had happened to me, or that I caused it”</i></p>

Needs of victims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The most common factors that were important to victims in Southend from a support service were; confidentiality (98%), a flexible service (79%) and/or a 24 hour service (66%). The most common support need by a considerable margin was the need for mental health related support with 80% stating this was what they needed. Aside from this the next most common needs were; support for their children’s wellbeing (49%), legal support/advice (47%) and/or something to help them to be physically safe within their own home such as target hardening (43%) 	<p><i>“Good support would be flexible as in phone calls, home visits and also availability at the weekends and after school hours”.</i></p> <p><i>“Not having to wait. Getting immediate advice”.</i></p> <p><i>“Unfortunately, opportunities to escape in these types of relationships only arise by chance. Having a point of contact with someone who you know will answer no matter the time, is extremely imperative”.</i></p>
Gaps and barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The three biggest barriers victims and survivors in Southend experienced in seeking support were; fear of what the perpetrator would do if they found out (45%), feeling too embarrassed or ashamed (43%) and/or fearing they would not be believed (40%). 	<p><i>“Police were unsupportive, didn’t believe me when I called stating he was breaking restraining order”.</i></p>

3.7. **Consultation on the draft strategy:** The Domestic Abuse Partnership Board has worked together to develop the initial draft strategy. This strategy has been consulted on via an online survey which was a follow up to the initial learning survey. The survey is open to both the public as well as stakeholder across Southend.

Proposal for the domestic abuse strategy priorities

- 3.8. As noted in previous sections, the next Southend Domestic Abuse Strategy must go further than delivering the minimum expectations of the Act which only relate to those within safe accommodation. We would like our next strategy to transform the lives of residents and strengthen our whole system response to domestic abuse to ensure all residents can live free from harm and abuse. As such we would like to develop a whole system strategy to launch on International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (IDEVAW) on 25th November 2023.
- 3.9. We have identified key priorities we would like to build the strategy around. Following approval of these priorities in principle, a strategy will be drafted alongside and equality impact assessment and full consultation process. Underpinning our strategic priorities we have developed a set of values and principles which articulate the way we will work.

Our proposed values and principles

Prevention is better than cure

Together we will address the balance from a crisis-based response to incorporate preventative measures and a whole-family approach. We will also ensure that perpetrators are identified, pursued, challenged, held to account and supported to change.

A gender-based approach

The strategy recognises that domestic abuse disproportionately affects females and that our holistic approach will respond to this fact while not excluding male victims. The strategy will support Southend's Community Safety Partnership's Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) priority.

A needs led, intersectional approach

We also commit to not just view domestic abuse on its own, as all too often there are other factors present which may have the potential to increase vulnerability to abuse and further isolate victims. We recognise that victims and survivors don't live single issue lives and may experience multiple forms of violence, abuse and other forms of oppression. We will recognise that protected characteristics and marginalised groups may experience domestic abuse in different ways and the way services and structures operate must enable them to be accessible to all residents, recognising their experiences. A truly holistic approach will take into consideration how substance misuse, mental health, homelessness, coercion and control (as well as other factors) may need addressing at the same time. We will focus on how our strategy can help and support victims and survivors where there may be unmet need.

Collaborate across all agencies

To do this we will co-operate with partners signed up to this strategy who recognise their role in tackling these issues holistically and create a system whereby people can at any point seek help safely and without fear, shame or judgement. Every organisation in Southend has a role to play, and we want to be clear that working together means working collaboratively and creatively. As part of this we will aspire to deliver a coordinated community response in line with the In Search of Excellence (2021) guidance from Standing Together.

3.10. The four strategic priorities we propose are the focus of the next strategy are:

Proposed strategic priorities

Priority 1: Coproduction: Empowering people with lived experience to shape and inspire our response, keeping them at the heart of everything we do.

Priority 2: Prevention and partnership: Galvanise all people and communities to prevent domestic abuse by changing cultures that condone or are conducive to abuse.

Priority 3: Victims and children: Collaborate across all agencies to ensure those experiencing abuse can access the right support, at the right time.

Priority 4: Perpetrators: Hold those using harmful behaviour accountable for changing their behaviour.

3.11. The Domestic Abuse Strategy 2023-2026 will have an accompanying action plan which will articulate specific actions for partners to deliver in line with the objectives. The strategy and action plans will be monitored by the SDAPB and reported in to the CSP. The action plans will be updated annually and a full evaluation of the impact of the strategy will be conducted and finalised in 2026 in preparation for the next strategy.

4. Reasons for Decisions

4.1. Our current interim strategy requires an update. Although the interim strategy satisfied our statutory duties, it is far from providing a robust, whole system response to domestic abuse. The proposed priorities will enable us to strengthen our response substantially.

5. Other Options

5.1. There are wider options in terms of the proposed strategic priorities in this paper. However, we believe that these priorities best reflect the local need in Southend, whilst also enabling us to align to the national policy frameworks and Greater Essex SETDAB strategy.

6. Financial Implications

6.1. To deliver the next domestic abuse strategy, there must be continued support for the resource required internally within SCC as well as ongoing discussions with wider partners to ensure a multi-agency budget.

6.2. Overall, the total annual resource Southend City Council contribute to delivery of the domestic abuse strategy is £853,610 which includes internal departmental budgets, central Government grants and contributions from partner agencies.

6.3. Internal funding from departmental budgets

6.4. This section provides an overview of Southend City Council departmental contributions to the domestic abuse response.

Department	Annual funding	Description	Funding end date
Public Health	£25,000	Contribution to Essex-wide IDVA service.	Initial contract end date of March 2024 with the option to extend by 2x 1-year increments up to end-March 2026.
Communities (via Supporting People)	£255,078.00	Safe Steps core contract including: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Refuge 2. Floating support and outreach 3. Children and Young People Support 	No end date. The current commissioned contract ends 31 st March 2025 however the budget will remain to contribute towards recommissioning.
Children Services	£120,863	MARAT including: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. MARAC social worker post 2. 2 MARAT administrator posts (jointly funded with PFCC) 3. MARAT manager post (jointly funded with PFCC and ICB) 	Continuous rolling funding with an MOU which is reviewed annually.
Total domestic abuse resource	£400,941		

6.5 External resource into Southend City Council

6.6 This section provides an overview of the funding Southend City Council receive from external sources into our domestic abuse response.

Source	Annual funding	Description	Funding end date
Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)	£380,583 (variable ¹)	An annual allocation to support Local Authorities to meet our duties under the DA Act (2021) around <i>support within safe accommodation only</i> in line with the Act's definitions. This can include administrative costs to deliver the functions of the Act including commissioning, needs assessments and strategy development. We have used our funding for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic abuse consultancy support 	From 2025 onwards this funding will no longer be in grant form but rather form part of the Local Government settlement. Discussion will be required to ringfence an allocation from this settlement for Southend City Council to deliver our statutory

¹ This annual fund has been varied (although a similar amount) year on year since we started to receive it in 2021/22. This is our 2023/24 allocation; our 2024/5 allocation increases slightly to £387,764.

Source	Annual funding	Description	Funding end date
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing capacity within Safe Steps (therapeutic service and additional posts) Housing navigator pilot service Increased capacity of DA support within South Essex Homes Discovery research project 	duties under the DA Act (2021).
Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)	£55,000	<p>This was a lump sum that every Local Authority across the country received in 2021 to prepare for the Domestic Abuse Act. It was not ringfenced and Local Authorities were able to use this in any way they saw fit. In Southend we allocated this funding to our reserves to use as a flexible fund where required. To date this has been allocated to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safe Steps children and young people IDVA 3 month top up (£16,318.08) Essex wide perpetrator pilot (£18,000 per annum for 2 years) 	This was a one-off grant.
Mid and South Essex Integrated Care Board	£22,983	Funding towards the Southend MARAT manager post.	Continuous rolling funding with an MOU which is reviewed annually.
Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex	£49,103	Funding towards the Southend MARAT manager and 2 administrator posts.	Continuous rolling funding with an MOU which is reviewed annually.
Total		£452,669	

6.7 In addition to our annual funding, we have a rolling underspend from our annual DLUHC grants which has been agreed to contribute towards our recommissioning budget for provision from April 2025 onwards. This underspend is forecast to be £444,699.11 however it is notable that additional pilots in line with the whole housing approach are currently being scoped (such as the flexible funding model) so the actual underspend is likely to be less than this by March 2025. Due to the source of this funding it is notable that it can be spent on our support within safe accommodation and whole housing approach only and not wider community based services.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1. Southend City Council is required to meet its new specified duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. This means we must at all times have a published strategy we are working towards, and must have commissioned appropriate support within safe accommodation. The proposals within this report will satisfy these legal duties.

8. Policy Context

- 8.1 Central Government have increasingly recognised that domestic abuse is a pressing social and public health concern. The alarming prevalence of domestic abuse has prompted the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) to come in to force and placed a requirement for all Local Authorities to develop relevant strategies to respond to victims including children within safe accommodation.

9. Carbon Impact

- 9.1. Not applicable.

10. Equalities

- 10.1. Domestic abuse is a widespread issue which can impact any individual or family across Southend. Although it is recognised that domestic abuse disproportionately affects women and girls, Southend's strategy and response will be inclusive of any individual.
- 10.2. A full equality impact assessment will be undertaken following the drafting of the strategy to ensure it is inclusive of all protective characteristic groups.

11. Consultation

- 11.1. Following approval in principle of the proposed approach and strategic priorities, a draft strategy will be drafted and will go through extensive consultation through the SDAPB. This will include an online public consultation.

12. Appendices

12.1. **Appendix 1: Southend's Interim Domestic Abuse Strategy**



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Council Domestic Abu

12.2. **Appendix 2: Southend's Proposed Domestic Abuse Strategy**



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12.3. **Appendix 3: Southend Domestic Abus Needs Assessment**



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