

Somerset Domestic Abuse Strategy

2026-29

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Version control

Date	Name	Detail of update
December 2025	Somerset Council Community Safety Team	Creation
August 2026	Somerset Council Community Safety Team	Publication of the approved Strategy

Accessing support

If you are concerned for yourself or someone else, you can get in touch and get help. Somersets local, confidential helpline will provide advice to anyone seeking help with domestic abuse. This includes relatives, friends and work colleagues as well as those who are causing harm.

Call: **0800 69 49 999**

Email: domesticabuseservice@somerset.gov.uk

Visit our [Contact us](#) page for more ways to contact including access to the webchat

If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, please contact the police: call 999. You can press 55 if you are unable to speak so that the operator knows you need help.

Section 1:

Commitment Statement/Foreword by Chairs of Safer Somerset Partnership and Somerset's Domestic Abuse Partnership Board

As Chairs of the Somerset Domestic Abuse Board and Safer Somerset Partnership, we are delighted to launch our new Domestic Abuse Strategy revised for 2026-2029 which we feel is more ambitious than ever before. Since the Domestic Abuse Act came into force in 2021, there is more clarity around domestic abuse with a statutory definition, plus new emphasis on children as victims. This has provided us with opportunities to improve how we respond and support victims, families, children, and those who cause harm across Somerset.

Our Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment tells us that domestic abuse continues to be prevalent within the county. We need to make sure our services and partner agencies are geared up to be flexible, supporting anyone in need and also targeting key messages and services to encourage people to come forward.

This strategy sets out several priorities which all require significant change. To achieve this, local agencies must work better together, taking equal responsibility and we must work to effectively allocate all available resources to deliver against each priority area. This will involve creating, through the partnership, more early intervention tactics, aiming to prevent domestic abuse whilst investing in a more robust support model for those who require our help to keep them safe and recover effectively.



Cllr Heather Shearer

Chair of the Safer Somerset Partnership



Lucy Macready

Chair of the Somerset Domestic Abuse Board

Section 2: Introduction

This is the local authority 'Section 57 strategy' for Somerset which is a requirement of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 provided a statutory definition of domestic abuse, so that "Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, threatening behaviour, violence, or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are personally connected to each other" constitutes domestic abuse.

The Act also, for the first time, recognises children who are related to the abused or abuser, and who see, hear, or experience the effects of the abuse, as victims in their own right. This places a series of statutory duties on local authorities and partnerships.

One of the statutory duties for Somerset Council is to assess the need for accommodation-based domestic abuse support in our area for all victims and their children who reside in relevant safe accommodationⁱ, including those who come from outside of their area.

In 2024, Somerset Council commissioned this Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment jointly, with three other tier 1 local authorities across Avon and Somerset (Bath and North East Somerset, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire). This Assessment was conducted in line with national guidance but was also enhanced to consider the needs of all survivors, including those who receive support in the community, as well as data relating to other elements of the domestic abuse system, including Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC), Social Care, Housing, Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHR's) and criminal justice.

This comprehensive Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment is used to form the evidence base that lays the foundation for this Strategy which is another obligation set out in the legislation.

This is our second strategy written in accordance with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. Our previous Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-24 had several recommendations which in being acted upon, has led to improvements in tackling domestic abuse. Despite this progress there is still much more work to be done. Evidence both locally and nationally shows that domestic abuse continues to be a significant issue affecting people of all ages. Due to the complexity of domestic abuse, many survivors often reach out for help at crisis point, resulting in demand for many public sector services.

To make a difference to people's lives and stop domestic abuse taking place in the first place, a new approach needs to be taken. Increasing public awareness and shifting attitudes so that domestic abuse is not seen as acceptable, no matter how 'low level'. By tackling domestic abuse at an earlier point, then we can stop domestic abuse escalating causing serious physical, emotional and psychological harm to men, women and children.



Regarding language, the terms “victim” and “survivor” are often both used by agencies and society and both are included within this strategy. However, when working with those experiencing domestic abuse, it is important to ask them how they would like to be addressed/ referred to.



Section 3: Principles and scope of the strategy

Principles

The principles identified in the first statutory domestic abuse strategy (2021-24) continue to be relevant for Somerset's response to domestic abuse and are taken forward for this next strategic timeframe. **These are:**

- ✓ Take a public health approach, with a focus on prevention
- ✓ Domestic abuse doesn't discriminate, services and options for safe accommodation must be accessible for all who need it
- ✓ Children are victims in their own right; the system must be able to respond to identify young victims and provide them with the right support
- ✓ We will work together as agencies and with communities to make Somerset a safe place for victims and families

Scope

This strategy responds to:

- People aged 16 years and over who are victims of domestic abuse. Whilst evidence suggests women are more likely to be victims of domestic abuse, this strategy acknowledges that men are also victims and require access to support.¹
- Children (under the age of 18 years) who are victims of domestic abuse.
- People aged 16 years and over (predominantly men) who are perpetrating domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse can be perpetrated by intimate partners, ex-partners, and family members. This strategy recognises that a wide range of people can perpetrate domestic abuse, including men and women, adults and children, wider family members, and that all perpetrators must be held to account for their actions. Being accountable may not solely be through criminal justice measures, but also through changing societal attitudes that any type of domestic abuse is not acceptable.

It should be noted that the UK Government deems where a child aged under 16 years behaves in a way that could constitute domestic abuse, this is a child protection issue². This is whether they are behaving this way to their parent or to a partner or relative. In instances where Children's Social Care or another relevant agency request support in developing safety plans for an adult experiencing violence

¹ [Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](#)

² [How does the definition of domestic abuse apply to under 16s?](#)

and abuse from a child, then the local specialist domestic abuse service should assist with this.

Both Somerset Council (as tier one authority who are required to prepare and publish this strategy³) and the Somerset Domestic Abuse Board note that the current UK government has committed to halve violence against women and girls within a decade as part of its 'mission' to make streets safer.

In December 2025 the UK Government published the new VAWG Strategy⁴ which sets out their vision and actions for meeting its ambition to halve violence against women and girls in a decade. As section 5 details there are a number of intersecting strategies and plans that need to be cognisant of each other including any VAWG activity. At the time of writing this strategy, the partners in Somerset and across the broader region are still awaiting direction from central government for how we implement the strategy locally. This includes opportunities for funding; therefore, this strategy focuses only on domestic abuse as work for VAWG implementation progresses. This strategy will be refreshed as appropriate and/or necessary.

Equality in our response to domestic abuse

We know that domestic abuse can happen to anyone, from any background, in any intimate or familial relationship. The majority of domestic abuse is perpetrated by men against womenⁱⁱ, with violence perpetrated by males accounting for the vast majority of serious harm and deaths through domestic abuse.

According to the Office of National Statisticsⁱⁱⁱ Homicide Index data show that 65.4% of the victims of domestic homicide were female, (March 2021 to March 2023). This contrasts with non-domestic homicides where the majority of victims over the same time period were male (87.7%). This evidences that domestic abuse is a gendered issue.

Domestic abuse is the systematic abuse of power and control and is fundamentally linked to the inequality of women and girls under the patriarchal system. Inequality between men and women not only increases the opportunity for the abuse of power; society's handling of the issues makes it harder for women to live free from violence.

However, it is also important to note that domestic abuse does occur where the victim and perpetrator are of the same sex, and this strategy applies equally to all domestic abuse scenarios.

It is clear that effectively responding to domestic abuse requires actions that take account of broader gender inequalities.

This does not discount the responsibilities instilled by the Public Sector Duty (s149) of the Equalities Act 2010 to have due regard for the need to eliminate unlawful

³ Section B4 Domestic Abuse Act [Delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse in domestic abuse safe accommodation services - GOV.UK](#)

⁴ VAWG Strategy [Freedom from violence and abuse: a cross-government strategy - GOV.UK](#)

discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between people from different groups.

As such, this strategy also takes account of and responds to the needs of population groups sharing the following protected characteristics:

- age
- disability
- gender identity
- marriage or civil partnership status
- pregnancy or maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

To reflect this, hereafter, this strategy will use the language of 'women', 'children', and 'groups sharing protected characteristics'.



Section 4: Understanding domestic abuse

Scale and impact of domestic abuse - what do we know, the national picture

Domestic abuse is widespread and significantly under-reported. Whilst statistics are helpful in providing an indication of how far-reaching domestic abuse is, reports will be much lower than the levels of actual abuse experienced.⁵ We know research states that individuals and their families may live with domestic abuse for many years^{iv} before asking for help or they may never seek help for fear of 'making a fuss', or stigma, or fear of repercussions.

Safeguarding is inextricably linked to domestic abuse due to its wide-ranging harms. All statutory agencies with a responsibility for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults have a duty to respond to domestic abuse. **The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 made several provisions designed to:**

- Promote awareness – to put domestic abuse at the top of everybody's agenda, including introducing a statutory definition of domestic abuse and recognising children as victims of domestic abuse in their own right. Protect and support victims – to enhance the safety of victims and the support they receive, including establishing in law the office of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, introducing a new Domestic Abuse Protection Notice (DAPN) and Domestic Abuse Protection Order (DAPO), and placing a new duty on local authorities to provide support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in safe accommodation.
- Tackle perpetrators – to provide an effective response to perpetrators to end the cycle of abuse, including extending existing offences such as the coercive controlling behaviour offence to cover post-separation abuse, and creating new offences including such as non-fatal strangulation or suffocation.
- Transform the justice response – to provide support to victims throughout the justice process, including helping victims give evidence in court.
- Improve performance – to drive consistency and better performance in the response to domestic abuse.

Scale and impact of domestic abuse - what do we know; the local picture

As a partnership we recognise the high level of under-reporting likely to take place across Somerset and that people in different circumstances are impacted by domestic abuse in different ways. It is important that we work together to strengthen

⁵ [Facts and Statistics - Refuge](#)

our collective knowledge of under-reported abuse and expand local research and intelligence to help gain a fuller picture of the issues.

We know from our local statutory domestic homicide reviews (see section 7 for more detail), that many of those who died in Somerset and had experienced domestic abuse prior to their death, or were killed by a partner (ex/current) or relative, had not disclosed clear concerns to local services. Often conveying other factors that may have actually been symptomatic of domestic abuse taking place. Where victims had limited contact with any agency, the opportunities for professionals to 'ask the question' were therefore minimal.

A common theme from speaking with families and friends of domestic homicide review victims is that more awareness both within communities and across agencies needs to occur, in order for the many facets of domestic abuse to be clearly known. Including that there's an understanding that confidential specialist local help is available.

The Needs Assessment estimates from population and crime survey of England and Wales data that in 2023-24, 21,084 people aged 16 years and over experienced domestic abuse in Somerset.

In the same year, the local Somerset Domestic Abuse Service received 2435 referrals (This includes those that received a service, inappropriate referrals and those where no contact could be made).

These referral numbers are broadly similar to previous years. The Somerset Domestic Abuse Service contracts changed on 1st April 2023 and now offers a range of specialist support. This is available for anyone who requires specialist advice and support in the county of Somerset, due to domestic abuse, irrespective of the risk level as determined by the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and 'Honour' based abuse risk assessment checklist (DASH).

This was a significant change to the previous services, which were largely based upon risk level. Although in practice most referrals into the local specialist domestic abuse service continue to be for those identified at higher risk of serious harm from domestic abuse. Section 7 provides more detail on the local specialist domestic abuse service.

There are many types of harm that someone may experience within their domestically abusive relationship. It is important to acknowledge that sexual violence often occurs within the context of domestic abuse and should be recognised in our co-ordinated community response. Sexual violence may be under-disclosed due to trauma, stigma, or lack of professional inquiry, yet its prevalence within domestic abuse settings is evidenced. A trauma-informed, holistic response to domestic abuse must therefore include clear pathways for identifying and responding to sexual violence, and strong partnership working with specialist sexual violence support services to ensure survivors receive the comprehensive support they need.

Section 5: Intersecting local strategies

In preparing this section 57 strategy, we are required to have regard to:

1. violence against women and girls
2. modern slavery
3. community safety
4. victims of crime
5. housing and homelessness reduction
6. safeguarding
7. supporting families

and any other matters that the Council considers relevant.

Therefore, together with considering the achievements of the previous Domestic Abuse Strategy (2021-24), outlined in sections 2 and 8. **This strategy also considers and to seek link into local strategies and policies such as:**

- Housing and homeless prevention
- Somerset Children and Young People's Plan^v
- Somerset Safeguarding Adults Strategic Plan
- Somerset Health and Care Strategy
- Suicide prevention/early mortality board
- Community Safety Strategy
- Serious Violence Strategy

Somerset Council's Declaration of Intent establishes its commitments to tackle Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking.

This strategy also seeks to take into account the [Somerset Council Plan 2023-27](#)^{vi} which includes this vision: "Somerset Council will build a fairer, greener, resilient, more flourishing Somerset that cares for the most vulnerable and listens to you."

The Avon and Somerset Police Crime Commissioner 2024-29 [Police and Crime Plan](#) includes the priority to 'reduce violent crime, with a specific focus on (a) male violence against women and girls and (b) serious youth violence.

We recognise that successful delivery of this Strategy depends on cohesive and effective partnership working. The Strategy will be supported by a Strategic Action Plan which will be aligned to a robust performance framework so impact can be measured. Performance will be reported to the Domestic Abuse Board, the Safer Somerset Partnership and the Somerset Council Scrutiny Committee.



Section 6: Supporting children as victims

In 2025, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales published a report “Victims in their own right? Babies, children and young people’s experience of domestic abuse”. This included the Commissioner calling for whole systems changes that recognises and responds to children experiencing domestic abuse as victims in their own right, with a strong cross governmental response so that improvements are holistic and sustainable.

Somerset Council is committed to a ‘whole family approach’ and the Somerset Children and Young People’s Plan 2024-30^{vii} sets out a shared vision to keep children and young people in Somerset safe. Improving the understanding across our communities and workforce about the impacts of domestic abuse is essential.

The 2024 Needs Assessment showed that the number of referrals to the Somerset Domestic Abuse Service – children/young people team were as follows:

Year	Number
2021/22	209
2022/23	271
2023/24	308

In 2025, practitioners were asked to provide information in preparation for a Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) around how children are supported as victims of domestic abuse. The findings show that children affected by domestic abuse are not consistently recognised or supported as victims in their own right, with practice still largely centred on adults. Across the system, practitioners struggle to translate legislative expectations into day-to-day work, resulting in variable identification of risk - particularly coercive control, cumulative harm, unborn baby vulnerability, and risks at relationship breakdown. Training is inconsistent and often inaccessible, multi-agency information sharing is unreliable, and pathways for support lack clarity. Children’s voices are not routinely captured in casework, service development, or strategic decision-making, and learning from reviews highlights repeated gaps in professional curiosity, challenge, and understanding of perpetrator behaviour.

The Somerset service offers a range of interventions for children and young people of any age, more information online at [Support for children](#). These can all be accessed by contacting the service through its central hub.

Given the necessity to help support children affected by domestic abuse, this strategy aims to meet the needs of children as survivors by:

- Increasing access to support services in the community as well as in safe accommodation

- Ensuring there is specialist children's support across the pathway, from prevention and early intervention through to crisis.
- Ensuring that all services are supportive of the non-abusive parent and recognise all of the actions they take to keep their child safe.
- Supporting non-abusive parents to maintain custody of their children.
- Holding abusive parents to account. This includes recognising how perpetrators can use child contact to continue abuse, use the children to monitor and report on the non-abusive parent's life, and threaten or hurt children to escalate control
- Recognise that abusive partners cannot be good parents, due to the impact of the abuse on the children and the non-abusive parent (most often the mother)^{viii}

Section 7: Holding perpetrators to account

This strategy calls on everybody to hold perpetrators to account for their behaviours and recognise that they can change but only if they choose to.

A notable activity within this strategy is to increase awareness/improve professional engagement with perpetrators around this. There is nothing that a survivor can do to change the behaviour of the person choosing to abuse them.

Whilst the criminal justice system provides a range of interventions and sanctions, this sometimes maybe the 'last resort'. There is more that can be done to challenge 'societal norms' at an early stage, with everyone potentially being able to be an 'active bystander' ^{ix}and not condone unhealthy relationships and attitudes through silence.

The Somerset Domestic Abuse Service provides programmes which support those who cause harm to address their harmful behaviours. Specialists within the service can also support victims to access protective orders through the appropriate legal channels. Somerset also has an established Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences where local partners meet to discuss high-risk domestic abuse to determine what interventions can be put in place to make victims and families safe.

Somerset will take a proactive approach to encourage our communities and professionals to learn how to identify harmful behaviours and also to promote awareness of the services available to those whose cause harm.



Section 8: Discharging our Part 4 duty and learning from our Needs Assessment

Part 4 The Safe Accommodation Duty places several requirements upon local authorities, including:

- Provide support for survivors and their children in refuges and other safe accommodation.
- Appoint a multi-agency domestic abuse local partnership board.
- Conduct and produce a Needs Assessment.
- Publish a strategy.
- Ensure sufficient provision for minoritised groups, including disabled people, older people, male survivors.
- Report back to the government on progress.

The provision of support for victims of domestic abuse into safe accommodation is specific as to what is considered relevant property types:

2 - (1) Accommodation is relevant accommodation for the purposes of section 57(2) of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 if it is of the description specified in paragraph (2) or (3).

(2) Accommodation which:

- a) is provided by a local housing authority, a private registered provider of social housing or a registered charity whose objects include the provision of support to victims of domestic abuse;
- b) is of a description specified in paragraph (4); and
- c) is not bed and breakfast accommodation.

(3) Accommodation which is part of a sanctuary scheme.

(4) Accommodation is of a specified description for the purposes of paragraph (2)(b) if it is:

- a) refuge accommodation;
- b) specialist safe accommodation;
- c) dispersed accommodation;
- d) second stage accommodation; or

- e) other accommodation designated by the local housing authority, private registered provider of social housing or registered charity as domestic abuse emergency accommodation.

Somerset had a domestic abuse partnership group prior to the enactment of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, and since 2021, this has developed into the Somerset Domestic Abuse Board. This not only fulfils the requirements of the act, but also provides oversight of other domestic abuse related matters, such as assisting the Safer Somerset Partnership with the monitoring of Domestic Homicide Reviews, and, non-statutory but vital arrangements such as MARAC.

The previous strategy 2021-24 was based upon an Avon and Somerset area wide Needs Assessment, and this Needs Assessment has been refreshed in 2024, to help with the production of this new Somerset Domestic Abuse Strategy for 2026-29.

In 2023, Somerset Council competitively tendered its integrated domestic abuse service, with an improved emphasis on the expectation for specialist support to all victims who require support, irrespective of their protected characteristic. This is significant given research suggests that there are significant barriers to accessing support for victims from differing groups.^x

The service was commissioned over five main separate contracts for a five year period to 2028. (Please note there are a number of other supplementary contracts commissioned by the Council to support the delivery of the service, for example a case management system). **These 5 contracts are:**

1. Lot 1: Central Hub (Helpline, Referrals, Entry, Exit, Administration, Coordination and overarching management of all lots, Prevention, Awareness and Behaviour Change for Perpetrators)
2. Lot 2: Safe Accommodation
3. Lot 3: Advocacy and Support (for Victims/Survivors)
4. Lot 4: Counselling for adults and children
5. Lot 5: Children and Young People including play therapy

Separate contracts were required due to the scale of the service but are known as collectively as “Somerset Domestic Abuse Service”, with the entry (and exit) from the service being at Lot 1 – where the confidential helpline (8am to 8pm, 7 days a week), webchat, emails and referrals are handled.

Our 2024 Needs Assessment tells us that:

The information gathered provided an overview of each of the four local authority communities included in the Needs Assessment – which are Bath and North East Somerset, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire and Somerset areas. It reveals that each area has residents living in the 20% most deprived areas of England, one

in five residents are aged 65 years and over, and a large majority of residents are from White British ethnic groups.

Research demonstrates that domestic abuse is experienced across all communities, but we know that some people find it harder to access support than others. Barriers may include not recognising a situation as abusive (this may be particularly true for male or older victims), being isolated due to being part of a minority community or through living in a rural area.

While there has not been a significant decrease in the estimated prevalence of domestic abuse, referrals to safe accommodation services across all four local authorities appear to be decreasing, with support being provided in around one in four cases. Safe accommodation services often offer support to those from other areas, so it is possible that local residents are being offered accommodation elsewhere.

Referrals to other (community based) local specialist domestic abuse services have generally remained more stable. Any increases in reporting of domestic abuse is welcome. However, the local strategic partnerships need to be aware that there will be an impact upon the capacity of the service to respond, and potential re-prioritisation of resources to respond.

Females are nearly twice as likely to have experienced partner abuse in the last year compared to males (4.0% vs. 2.1%), whereas family abuse is more equally distributed between females and males in the last year (2.2% vs. 1.5%). However, when looking at experiences since the age of 16, females have experienced family abuse at twice the rate of males (11.0% vs. 6.5%).

The table below shows the estimated number of people who have experienced any domestic abuse in the four local authority areas who were included in this Needs Assessment. For every male who has experienced any domestic abuse, there are two females who have experienced any domestic abuse.

Estimated number of people with experience of domestic abuse within the year 2024:

	Bath and North East Somerset	North Somerset	Somerset	South Gloucestershire	Total	Proportion of population aged 16 years and over
Females	4,729	5,254	13,848	6,832	30,663	5.7%
Males	2,492	2,737	7,349	3,723	16,301	3.2%
Persons	7,175	7,927	21,084	10,538	46,724	4.4%

Estimated number of people with experience of domestic abuse since age 16:

	Bath and North East Somerset	North Somerset	Somerset	South Gloucestershire	Total	Proportion of population aged 16 years and over
Females	22,576	25,084	66,115	32,618	146,393	27%
Males	10,835	11,899	31,955	16,189	70,878	13.9%
Persons	33,191	36,672	97,537	48,747	216,147	20.5%

While anyone can be a victim of domestic abuse, the crime survey estimates indicate that individuals with specific characteristics are more at risk.

Domestic Homicide Reviews data from the Needs Assessment

Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) are statutory processes (Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act 2004) designed to enhance responses to domestic abuse and prevent similar tragedies in the future. These reviews are conducted when the death of an individual aged 16 or over results from violence, abuse, or neglect by a relative, household member, or someone with whom they have had an intimate relationship.

The primary purpose of a DHR is to thoroughly examine the circumstances surrounding the death and identify areas where responses can be improved or best practices shared. This process involves a multi-agency review panel composed of representatives from local statutory and voluntary agencies, led by an independent chair. Importantly, DHRs are not inquiries into how someone died or who is to blame; they operate alongside inquests and other forms of inquiry to inform better practices moving forward.

The aim of DHRs is to ensure that agencies can enhance their collaborative responses to domestic abuse situations, ultimately working to prevent future tragedies. The reports generated from these reviews are published online in accordance with statutory guidance and are anonymised to protect the identities of those involved.

Between 2021/22 and 2023/24, there were 36 deaths identified which led to a Domestic Homicide Review across the four local authorities. This total includes none in Bath and North East Somerset, four in North Somerset, 25 in Somerset, and seven in South Gloucestershire.

This does evidence that Somerset has a high number compared to the other 3 local authority areas who were part of the Needs Assessment however, it is of note that Somerset has a significantly higher population (circa 571,000 at 2021 Census).

The Needs Assessment found that the proportion of male deaths was significantly greater than the proportion of males seeking support services, indicating that male victims of domestic abuse may be under-represented in-service usage compared to their higher incidence of domestic abuse related deaths.

Additionally, when reviewing the age of those who had died across the four local authority areas, there were notably higher numbers within the 45-49- and 60-64-year age groups.

The age profile of those who died and were notified to the Safer Somerset Partnership to consider for a domestic homicide review was as follows for 2021-24:

Age	2021	2022	2023	2024
Under 40 years	3	0	1	3
40 to 50 years	3	2	4	1
51 to 60 years	0	3	2	0
61 years plus	3	2	2	1

Recommendations made:

The 2024 Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment suggested the following overarching recommendations.

Enhance Services

- Understand barriers to reporting domestic abuse and engagement with services by means of further consultation with service users and wider services engagement
- Maximise available resources to respond to the increasing complexity of domestic abuse in order to break the preventative - recovery cycle building on trauma informed approaches. This includes effective pathways for all domestic abuse community and safe accommodation settings
- Find ways to challenge abusive behaviour and support perpetrators to change.

Training and Education

- Ensure up to date and regular training in responding to local need and changes in legislation, across all statutory and key voluntary/community sector partners.

Policy Development

- Further embed and develop our joined-up strategic responses to domestic abuse at local authority and regional level for both community and safe accommodation responses.
- Ensure that children and young people affected by domestic abuse are supported, are recognised as victims in their own right, and are supported to access appropriate services – whether in the community or safe accommodation

- Ensure that everyone affected by domestic abuse is enabled to access support through an embedded healthcare response across all settings.

Monitoring and evaluation

- Use the Needs Assessment supported by funding mapping to give a clear evidence base to identify where funding is most needed in order to deliver targeted responses that meet local needs – for both community and safe accommodation specialist domestic abuse services
- Standardise data collection and enhance collaboration for consistent insights into domestic abuse trends
- Implement a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the effectiveness of housing interventions and make data-driven improvements.
- Collect and analyse data on housing outcomes for survivors to identify gaps and areas for improvement.

Community Awareness and Education

- Raise awareness within the community about the availability of safe accommodation options and how to access them.
- Provide education and training for community members and organisations on the importance of safe housing for survivors of domestic abuse.

The Needs Assessment was shared with the Somerset Domestic Abuse Board, and comments on the recommendations requested, with those who responded in agreement with these.

In creating the Needs Assessment, through the council's monitoring of the domestic abuse service contracts, and through Domestic Homicide Reviews, it's clear that data collection could be improved across all settings in order to develop the clear understanding of the prevalence of domestic abuse in the county, and how agencies are responding as part of the co-ordinated community response to domestic abuse.

Co-ordinated Community Response to Domestic Abuse (CCR)

Most public services are not designed with domestic abuse or violence against women and girls (VAWG) in mind, and they can struggle to effectively help people. Poor communication and gaps between services put survivors at risk. The CCR brings services, including health, housing, social care, education, criminal justice and communities, together to ensure local systems keep survivors safe, hold abusers to account, and prevent domestic abuse. It addresses prevention, early intervention, crisis, and long-term recovery and safety, working with a wide range of services, pathways, and systems.

This model of a coordinated local partnership to tackle and ultimately prevent domestic abuse is now widely accepted as best practice. There are 12 components to the Coordinated Community Response CCR^{xi} aimed at shifting responsibility away from individual survivors to the communities and services who exist to support them.

The CCR is a methodology which this strategy advocates, and as such requires those agencies across the various partnerships within the county, including the

Somerset Domestic Abuse Board as the lead to take action about domestic abuse in accordance with the CCR.

Section 9: Achievements to date

The previous Somerset Domestic Abuse Strategy for 2021-24 included 5 priorities, which are detailed below along with their key achievements:

Priority	Key achievements
1. Supporting survivors and families to access safe accommodation and support as set out in Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act (2021)	• Development of Sanctuary Scheme – there were two pilot projects within the strategy period • Development of an authentic voice strategy
2. Identification, response, disruption, and support for people who cause harm	• Variety of programmes within the Somerset Domestic Abuse Service contracts for people who cause harm, including teenagers and adults. (Adult programme now RESPECT⁶ accredited)
3. A focus on the prevention of domestic abuse	• Somerset Council completed a major review of its online suite of domestic abuse learning
4. Create a robust domestic abuse system	• Somerset Council commissioned Safe Lives to review the county's whole system response to domestic abuse (public health approach), with findings continuing to be implemented
5. Targeted activity for those with protected characteristics	• Increased emphasis in Somerset Council commissioned domestic abuse service contracts for those with protected characteristics. During 2024, Standing Together⁷ also funded the domestic abuse service an 'older persons IDVA'

Work took place over the three years of the previous strategy to make progress on achieving all of these aims. In developing this 2026-29 strategy, the Somerset Domestic Abuse Board were surveyed to establish whether they felt these priorities remained valid. All respondents felt that yes, they are all continuing priorities, with the exception of 'create a robust domestic abuse system', as agencies felt a robust system has been created.

⁶ [About us | Respect](#)

⁷ [Home - Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse](#)

Voice of Survivors

During 2023-24 an Authentic Voice Strategy was approved by the Somerset Domestic Abuse Board in order to provide a clear framework for working with survivors. Due to resource constraints, this has not yet been fully embedded but will be progressed during the forthcoming strategy period.

Domestic Homicide Reviews

There is of course more work to be done, as mentioned earlier, Domestic Homicide Reviews provide a rich source of information on how not only agencies work both internally and with each other as part of the co-ordinated community response, but also how communities understand domestic abuse.

What has Somerset done to date with information from DHRs?

Due to the increasing trend of both older victims and male victims of domestic homicides, Somerset Council when it recommissioned its domestic abuse service for 2023, did require an increased focus by the providers on working with the council to make the services more overtly accessible to both older people and males.

Additionally, for the 2023/24 Standing Together as part of the charity's 'Crossing Pathways' project on improving the health response to domestic abuse, provided funding to the local domestic abuse service for a 12-month post that specifically was focused on working within primary care to improve the response to older victims.

Somerset's current domestic abuse safe accommodation provision (as at 31.12.2024)

In response to the previous Domestic Abuse Strategy and Domestic Abuse Act 2021, Somerset Council has commissioned an increase in variety and numbers of safe accommodation, **which is currently as follows:**

- Short term emergency accommodation: 0
- Refuge: 11 bedrooms/units
- Safehouse: 13 properties
- Move-on: 0

According to the statutory guidance, refuge accommodation must be single sex. Whilst the refuges in Somerset are for females, one of them does accommodate women with substance misuse or mental health issues.

Of the 13 safehouses, they offer accommodation for a variety of groups:

- 8 of the properties are suitable for pets
- 13 of the properties are suitable for cultural/religious needs

- 10 of the properties are suitable for substance misuse
- 13 of the properties are suitable for LGBTQ+
- 8 of the properties are suitable for males
- 13 of the properties are suitable for females
- 12 of the properties are suitable for victims with children
- 8 of the properties are suitable for victims with teenagers (including teenage boys)
- 12 of the properties are suitable for victims who are 16-18 years (without parent)

The refuge and safehouse provision offer a range of accessibility options for those with pets and children, substance misuse issues or cultural barriers.

However, to date none are designed to be accessible for those with disabilities.

A priority piece of work is ongoing between the service providers and Somerset Council to increase the provision of safe accommodation, including establishing a short-term emergency assessment unit, to avoid victims having to move into bed and breakfast accommodation which is contrary to the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 aims.

The safe accommodation service is part of the Somerset Domestic Abuse Service, and this comprises of counselling to children and adults living in the safe accommodation.

Somerset Domestic Abuse Service

In January 2026, the Somerset Domestic Abuse Service was confirmed as Leading Lights Accredited⁸ for the next three years. Leading Lights is a SafeLives' accreditation programme for frontline domestic abuse services. Leading Lights is the mark of quality for domestic abuse services and is recognised by commissioners and funders across the UK and beyond.

⁸ [About our Leading Lights programme - SafeLives](#)

Section 10: Somerset's response and priorities

The previous strategy 2021-24 priorities where the Domestic Abuse Board consultation suggested they continue, have been combined with the new Needs Assessment priority areas to create the following priorities. Please note the priorities have been numbered for ease of identification and not in order of importance.

Priority	Action required	How will we measure success?
Priority one A focus on the prevention of domestic abuse through community awareness and education, and skilling up of professionals	1. A series of awareness raising campaigns focusing on specific groups e.g. older adults and men, plus other key themes from Domestic Homicide Reviews (e.g. non-fatal strangulation, stalking, etc). These should: a. Include both online methods and offline materials (e.g. posters). b. Be across multiple settings, e.g. local businesses, supermarkets, schools. c. Involve survivors when developing campaigns and training to ensure trauma informed approaches are reinforced d. Reinforce the service offer to include support for those wishing to explore legal options e. Continue to promote the Coordinated Community	1. Increase in self-referrals to specialist domestic abuse service, plus increase referrals from non-police agencies (other statutory and voluntary sector plus self-referrals) 2. Measure activity on social media platforms and Somerset Domestic Abuse website following any public campaigns 3. Survivor engagement through feedback to the Somerset Domestic Abuse Board

Priority	Action required	How will we measure success?
	Response⁹ (CCR) within all messaging around domestic abuse f. Acknowledge consultation feedback and refresh our approach to communicating with the public to more effectively inform them of the service aims and performance (i.e. share positive examples and 'did you know...')	
Priority two Increase understanding of familial domestic abuse across professionals and communities	1. Specific multi-media awareness raising campaign, ensuring emphasis that familial abuse spans generations and sex, plus consider other protected characteristics (e.g. disability) This should include: a. Acknowledging consultation feedback to refresh our approach to communicating with the public to more effectively inform them of the service provision (i.e. share positive examples of how families have been supported and 'did you know...')	1. Increase in non-intimate partner abuse referrals in specialist DA service 2. Increase in numbers of safe accommodation spaces required where victim is experiencing familial abuse 3. Measure activity on social media platforms and Somerset Domestic Abuse Website following any public campaigns

⁹ [CCR Network - Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse](#)

Priority	Action required	How will we measure success?
Priority three Supporting survivors and families to access safe accommodation and support as set out in Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act (2021)	1. Considering innovative options, e.g. Safe Havens^{xii} 2. Analysing existing safe accommodation provision and securing fully disabled adapted properties 3. To ensure Somerset Housing organisations and domestic abuse services have clear referral pathway, re safe accommodation; not putting the responsibility on the victim to source accommodation 4. Acknowledging consultation feedback, refresh our approach to communicating with the public to more effectively inform them of the service aims and performance (i.e. share positive examples and 'did you know...')	1. Increase in the range of accommodation types so survivors and their children can access safe accommodation in Somerset, irrespective of protected characteristic 2. Increase in referrals for safe accommodation to the Somerset Domestic Abuse Service, with clear recording to understand where supply is not meeting demand (e.g. victims who are older or disabled or male or have cultural needs), to better commission services that meet needs.
Priority four Improvement of identification, response, disruption, and support for people who cause harm (intimate and familial relationships within scope of Domestic Abuse Act 2021)	1. All agencies to hold people who cause harm to account, including through identification and supporting to access the specialist Somerset Domestic Abuse perpetrator services (available for men and women) 2. Number of Right to Know / Ask applications (Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme) 3. Acknowledging consultation feedback, refresh our approach to communicating with the	1. Increase in people who cause harm accessing 'Engage' and 'Aspire' programmes within local specialist DA service 2. Increase in positive criminal justice outcomes, e.g. more successful prosecutions, increase in out of court resolutions. 3. Increase in civil orders used. 4. Increase by wide range of services

Priority	Action required	How will we measure success?
	public to more effectively inform them of the provision for those who cause harm (i.e. share positive examples of behaviour changes and 'did you know...')	for Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme.
Priority five Targeted activity for those with protected characteristics (e.g. older and younger victims, disability, different sexes, races and sexual orientation), by enhancing services, and educating professionals	1. Clarify the baseline data of those with protected characteristics within the Somerset Domestic Abuse Service 2. Devise a clear plan on how to target different groups to ensure the public are aware that the service supports all 3. Be informed by those with lived experience to help ensure services and activity best meet their needs 4. Acknowledging consultation feedback, refresh our approach to communicating with the public to more effectively inform them of the provision for those with protected characteristics (i.e. share positive examples and 'did you know...')	1. Increase in diversity of victim/survivors and people causing harm accessing the local specialist DA service 2. All agencies should commit to effective data quality, which supports understanding of our community needs 3. Measure activity on social media platforms and Somerset Domestic Abuse Website following any public campaigns
Priority six Improve identification of and access to specialist support for children who have witnessed domestic abuse	1. Agencies to ensure safeguarding / domestic abuse policies clearly identify that children are part of statutory definition of who experiences domestic abuse, and how to access specialist local Somerset Domestic Abuse Service 2. Targeted campaign to increase understanding	1. Increase in referrals by agencies to domestic abuse service for children who are victims 2. Increase in self-referrals (or by parent/carer / guardian) for children who need specialist support

Priority	Action required	How will we measure success?
	across communities about children being victims of domestic abuse and that specialist local support is available. 3. Targeted training and development activity focusing on education settings – to include producing learning materials appropriate for children and young people and developing training for education professionals 4. Acknowledging consultation feedback, refresh our approach to communicating with the public to more effectively inform them of the provision for children and young people (i.e. share positive examples and ‘did you know...’)	3. KPI’s linked to training and the materials delivered within education settings

In the consultation with the Domestic Abuse Board, consideration was given to adopting the Needs Assessment recommendations of ‘policy development’ and ‘monitoring and evaluation’. These received mixed feedback. Therefore, they have not been included as specific priorities, however, both the matters of policy development and monitoring and evaluating services should underpin all of these priorities within all agencies and will comprise part of the supporting strategy action plan.

Specific factors to help improve the trauma informed response to domestic abuse are considered essential, including identifying the health impacts of domestic abuse, through alcohol, drug misuse and mental health. As part of policy development and monitoring and evaluation mentioned above, identification of the links between these subjects is essential, to help avoid re-traumatising adults and children.

The voice of survivors is essential to understanding if our strategic priorities are relevant. As part of development of the Needs Assessment, a survivor voice survey was completed across the four local authority areas, although the response from those within Somerset was low.

This strategy was subjected to public consultation as required by statute.

On an ongoing basis, the voice of survivors on the Domestic Abuse Board will be progressed, through the Somerset Domestic Abuse Service contract which includes a post whose role is to work across Somerset's communities and will represent their voices on the board.

Training is a key component both of the CCR and this Somerset Domestic Abuse Strategy. To support with learning and development, Somerset Council on behalf of the Safer Somerset Partnership have produced a local training offer.

The learning resource for the public, including those who own or work within businesses, aims to address domestic abuse by enabling more people to become aware of the signs and more confident in knowing how to help and what to do. This learning resource can be found here: [Domestic abuse online learning](#)

The learning resource for practitioners ranges from basic awareness to more specialised areas of learning, with the aim for the effective prevention and response to domestic abuse to be a priority for all agencies. All organisations can have a basic awareness of domestic abuse, which can help provide a shared community understanding of the complexity surrounding the problem. This learning resource can be found here: [Training for professionals](#)

Section 11: Governance

The Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board's (DA Board) role is to provide strategic oversight and assurance of delivery of the county's Domestic Abuse Strategy, including its statutory duty, and to coordinate domestic abuse work across other strategic partnerships/boards.

Therefore, it will report to the Safer Somerset Partnership and other safeguarding/health and wellbeing boards in order to ensure the DA Board has strategic oversight of all relevant activity and can ensure joined up approaches.



Somerset Safeguarding Executive

Somerset Strategic Partnerships

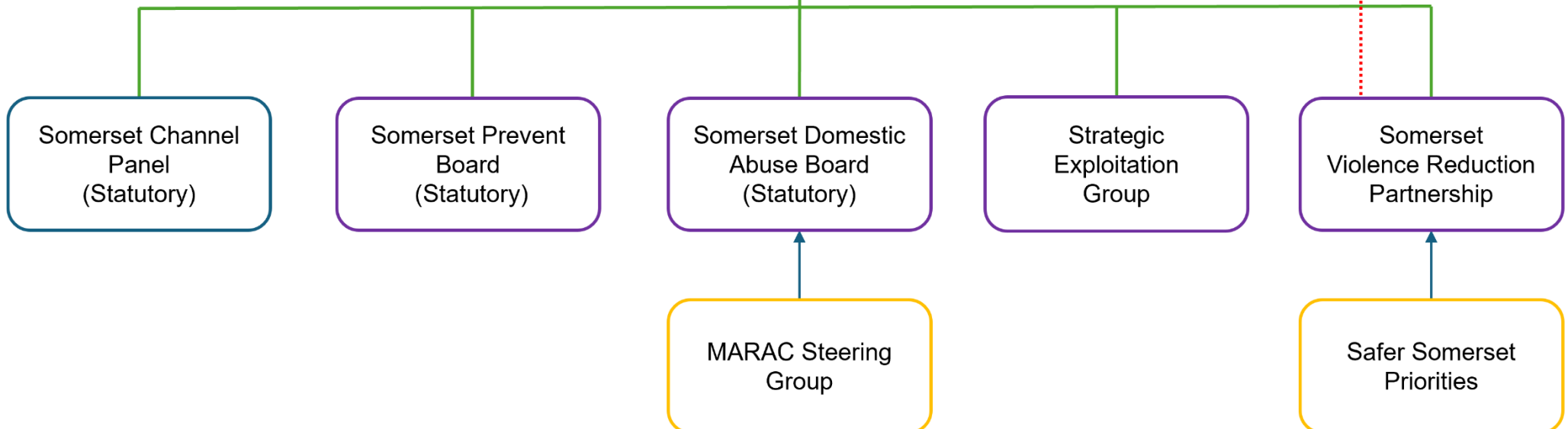
- Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board
- Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership
- Somerset Board
- Somerset Children, Young People and Families Partnership Board
- Corporate Parenting Board
- Somerset Youth Justice Partnership
- Somerset Strategic Drug & Alcohol Partnership
- Strategic Homelessness Board



Avon and Somerset Force-wide Strategic Partnerships:

- Anti-Slavery Partnership
- Domestic Abuse Steering Group
- Avon & Somerset Reducing Reoffending Board
- CONTEST Board

Avon and Somerset
Serious Violence Reduction
Partnership Board



Section 12: Strategic Action Plan

A Strategic Action Plan has been developed by all the partners in Somerset's Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board, in order to deliver the outcomes agreed in this strategy. For each of our six priorities, the joint action plan sets out what we will do, both as individual agencies and across the whole system, who is responsible, what the delivery timescale is and what the outcome will be for survivors. It is a live document, which will be overseen by the Domestic Abuse Board.



Glossary

Term / Acronym	Definition
Active Bystander	A person who safely challenges harmful or abusive behaviours to prevent escalation.
Advocacy	Support that helps victims/survivors understand options, access services, and navigate systems.
CCR – Coordinated Community Response	A multi-agency model ensuring a consistent and safe response to domestic abuse.
Children as Victims (Domestic Abuse Act 2021)	Legal recognition that children who see, hear, or experience domestic abuse are victims.
Coercive and Controlling Behaviour	A pattern of intimidation, isolation, monitoring, or emotional/financial abuse.
DA – Domestic Abuse	Any incident or pattern of controlling, threatening behaviour, violence, or abuse between personally connected people aged 16+.
DAPN – Domestic Abuse Protection Notice	A police-issued notice providing immediate protection to victims.
DAPO – Domestic Abuse Protection Order	A court order imposing restrictions or requirements on a perpetrator.
DASH	Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour-Based Abuse risk assessment checklist.
DHR – Domestic Homicide Review	A statutory review into deaths related to domestic abuse to identify learning.
Early Intervention	Actions taken early to prevent domestic abuse from escalating or occurring.
Familial Abuse	Abuse occurring between family members who are not intimate partners.

Term / Acronym	Definition
Honour-Based Abuse	Violence committed to protect or defend perceived family or community honour.
JTAI	Joint Targeted Area Inspections are a process that evaluates multi-agency arrangements for safeguarding services aimed at vulnerable children and young people.
KPI's	Key performance indicators used to measure achievement.
Leading Lights Accreditation	Quality mark from SafeLives recognising high-quality domestic abuse services.
MARAC – Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference	A meeting where agencies share information about high-risk cases.
Minoritised Groups	Communities facing structural barriers that limit access to support.
NAO	The National Audit Office
Perpetrator	A person who chooses to use abusive behaviours towards a partner, ex-partner, or family member.
Protected Characteristics	Characteristics protected under the Equality Act 2010. The following are determined as protected characteristics age, disability, gender identity, marriage or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
Refuge	Single-sex specialist accommodation for people fleeing domestic abuse.
Recovery Support	Long-term support to help survivors rebuild stability and safety.
Safe Accommodation	Accommodation types defined under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

Term / Acronym	Definition
Safe House	Self-contained accommodation for victims not requiring full refuge security.
Sanctuary Scheme	Security measures allowing victims to remain safely in their homes.
Somerset Domestic Abuse Service	Countywide commissioned service offering support, advocacy, counselling, and safe accommodation for adults, young people and children.
Survivor/Victim	A person who has experienced domestic abuse.
Trauma-Informed Approach	Approach recognising trauma's impact and avoiding re-traumatisation.
VAWG – Violence Against Women and Girls	Government-defined term covering violence disproportionately impacting women and girls.
Whole Family Approach	Model considering needs of all family members including victims and perpetrators.

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