

ADULTS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
6 JANUARY 2026

DOMESTIC ABUSE UPDATE REPORT

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Scrutiny Committee with an update in relation to the requirements on the Local Authority under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and how Darlington is supporting victims of Domestic Abuse.

Summary

2. The Domestic Abuse Act came into force in 2021 which brought in new requirements which Local Authorities must fulfil. The Act created the first 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".
3. The Domestic Abuse Act was implemented to help ensure that victims have the confidence to come forward and report their experience, safe in the knowledge that the justice system and other agencies will do everything they can both to protect and support them and their children and pursue their abuser. This supports a whole family approach.
4. Domestic Abuse is an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence, in the majority of cases by a partner or ex-partner, but also by a family member or carer. In the vast majority of cases, it is experienced by women and is perpetrated by men.
5. Domestic abuse can include, but is not limited to the following:
 - (a) Coercive control (a pattern of intimidation, degradation, isolation and control with the use or threat of physical or sexual violence).
 - (b) Psychological and/or emotional abuse.
 - (c) Physical or sexual abuse.
 - (d) Financial or economic abuse.
 - (e) Harassment and stalking.
 - (f) Online or digital abuse.

6. Since the Domestic Abuse Act came into force the statutory requirements on the Local Authority are:
 - (a) To provide support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other safe accommodation.
 - (b) Establish a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board.
 - (c) Assess the need for accommodation-based domestic abuse support for all victims (and their children) who reside in relevant safe accommodation, including those who come from outside of their area.
 - (d) Publish a domestic abuse strategy.
 - (e) Give effect to the strategy through commissioning/decommissioning.
 - (f) Produce an annual return detailing the effectiveness of the strategy.
7. As part of the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-2024 Darlington set out six priorities (see below). The strategy was jointly produced with Durham County Council, with Durham officers leading this work.
 - a) Priority One: Survivor/Victim Voice will be at the heart of our decision making.
 - b) Priority Two: Early identification, intervention and prevention of domestic abuse.
 - c) Priority Three: Effective support for vulnerable groups Priority.
 - d) Priority Four: Prioritising the needs of children and young people effected by domestic abuse within safe accommodation.
 - e) Priority Five: Improve the use of data and intelligence in order to better understand and respond to demand and levels of need.
 - f) Priority Six: Improve the workforce knowledge and skills in responding effectively to domestic abuse.
8. These priorities are reported on at our Partnership Board Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group (DASVEG).
9. To shift to a more integrated governance model, approval is still required from the Safer Durham Partnership to rename DASVEG to the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group (VAWDASV), aligning with national VAWG strategy. (For the purpose of this report the Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board will be referred to as VAWDASV).
10. There will also be a new subgroup structure that will consist of three groups, working to the pre-existing themes of prioritising prevention, supporting victims and tackling those who harm, but that each group will work on both domestic abuse and sexual violence as their topic areas and a partnership risk register will be produced to support governance and accountability across the multi-agency system.
11. All of this will reflect the system's aims, improve efficiency, and strengthen delivery across the broader violence against women and girls, domestic abuse and sexual violence system.

12. The Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy is currently being refreshed in partnership with Durham County Council. This work is being led by Durham County Council officers on behalf of VAWDASV and is due to be finalised in late January 2026.

Recommendation

13. It is recommended that: -
- (a) Scrutiny note and agree joint working arrangements on Domestic Abuse.
 - (b) The updated Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy be shared with Scrutiny.
 - (c) Update reports be given to Scrutiny on an annual basis.

Christine Shields
Assistant Director Commissioning, Performance and Transformation

Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Christine Shields - Extension 5851

Council Plan	This report contributes to the priorities agreed in the Council Plan.
Addressing inequalities	There are no implications arising from this report.
Tackling Climate Change	There are no implications arising from this report.
Efficient and effective use of resources	This report supports the efficient use of resources through shared partnership priorities.
Health and Wellbeing	This plan supports the priorities set out in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
S17 Crime and Disorder	This plan will support measures to reduce crime and disorder.
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	There are no implications for the Budget or Policy Framework.
Key Decision	This is not a key decision.
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report supports measures to reduce the number of Looked After Children.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

14. Before the Domestic Abuse Act, the Local Authority commissioned 2 Domestic Abuse support services, the Women's Refuge (Family Help) and an Outreach Support Service (Harbour).
15. As part of the implementation of the Domestic Abuse Act, funding was made available to Local Authorities in the form of the Burdens Fund. Initial funding received allowed Darlington to commission the following additional services, which were highlighted as being required following a needs assessment.
 - (a) 2 Dispersed properties
 - (b) Domestic Abuse Housing Options officer
 - (c) Counselling for adults
 - (d) Outreach support and therapy for children
 - (e) Additional children's workers based with the children's team for a multi-agency approach.
 - (f) Domestic Abuse Navigator worker
 - (g) Domestic Abuse Navigator emergency crash pad
 - (h) Prevention scheme for perpetrators
 - (i) Sanctuary scheme for accommodation
 - (j) 2 therapy workers for children in The Refuge (part time)
16. In addition to the services funded through the Burdens Fund, the following services are also commissioned:
 - (a) The Refuge
 - (b) Harbour outreach services - jointly commissioned by DBC, the Police Crime Commissioner (PCC) and Public Health
 - (c) Independent Domestic Abuse Advocate (IDVA) service - funded by the PCC

Governance Arrangements

17. Local governance arrangements have been reviewed recently to strengthen the implementation of the Act at a local level. These are outlined below:

Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board (LDAP)

18. The Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board (LDAP) is a partnership group responsible for supporting Durham County Council (DCC) and Darlington Borough Council (DBC) in meeting their duty under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act. The LDAP is known locally as the County Durham and Darlington Violence Against Women and Girls, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group VAWDASV) and has developed a three-year plan on a page, which is regularly refreshed and the new three year plan and plan on a page for 2025 – 2028 demonstrates a strategic realignment of the DASVEG across County Durham and

Darlington. **(Appendix 1)**

Darlington Domestic Abuse Local Working Group

19. The purpose of the Officer Working Group is to raise awareness across all Council departments ensuring that 'Domestic Abuse is everyone's business' and to ensure that work being undertaken locally is coordinated and reported into VAWDASV (Terms of Reference is provided in **Appendix 2**).

County Durham and Darlington Violence Against Women and Girls Provider Forum

20. The purpose of the Forum is to:
- (a) To support the continued development of community-based, 'by and for' and specialist voluntary and community sector organisations in County Durham and Darlington.
 - (b) Increase communication and collaboration between practitioners operating in County Durham and Darlington who are part of the system preventing harm, supporting victims, and pursuing perpetrators of violence against women and girls.
 - (c) Provide a platform which uses a problem-solving approach encouraging members to share barriers, challenges, and good practise.
 - (d) To support the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group agenda which include information sharing between operational and strategic professionals and organisations.

Communications Campaign

21. The Council supported the White Ribbon Day 2025: We Speak Up on 25 November 2025, which marks the beginning of the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence.
22. The social media campaign included reels of support to speak up, clips of a victim's story and information and support advice from our providers.

Quality Assurance Arrangements

23. Services are monitored on a quarterly basis by officers in the DBC Commissioning, Contracts and Brokerage team through contract monitoring meetings. These meetings focus on performance data and qualitative feedback received from service users.
24. Currently the Police and Crime Commissioning team are involved in quarterly monitoring meetings for those services they jointly commission with the Council.

Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy

25. The Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy is currently being refreshed in partnership with Durham County Council. This work is being led by Durham County Council officers on behalf of VAWDASV and is due to be finalised in late January 2026.