



Darlington Domestic Abuse Local Working Group Terms of Reference

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Most recent national guidance:

The implementation of the [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) created new statutory responsibilities, particularly around support for victims in safe accommodation and the recognition of children as victims in their own right.

The aims of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 are to improve the national response to Domestic Abuse by:

- Protecting and supporting victims, including children and young people
- Transforming the justice system
- Improving performance; and
- Promoting awareness.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places a responsibility on Tier 1 local authorities to introduce the following:

- Appoint a local domestic abuse partnership board.
- Assess the need for accommodation-based domestic abuse support in their area for all victims or their children, including those who come from outside the area.
- Develop and publish a strategy for the provision of such support to cover their locality, having regard to the needs assessment.
- Give effect to the strategy (through commissioning/de-commissioning decisions).
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy.
- Report back to central government.
- Require the Secretary of State to produce statutory guidance, having consulted the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, local authorities and such as other persons as considered appropriate.
- Require local authorities to have regard to the statutory guidance in exercising their functions.
- The Act does not place a requirement on authorities to provide domestic abuse victims with accommodation

Part 4 of the Act places a duty on local authorities to provide accommodation-based support for victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other safe accommodation.

Local authorities will need to ensure all victims of domestic abuse have access to the right support within safe accommodation when they need it. Support within safe accommodation is to be available to local and out of area victims and their children. Provision cannot include safe accommodation already in place under duties imposed under alternative legislation (the Housing Act 1996, the Homeless Act 2002 and the Homeless Reduction Act 2017).

1.2 Other national guidance that also relates to the domestic abuse prevention agenda:

[Housing Act 1996](#)

Domestic abuse is explicitly addressed in the Housing Act 1996, particularly under Part VI (Allocation of Housing) and Part VII (Homelessness). The Act has evolved over time, especially with amendments introduced by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, to better protect and support victims.

[Care Act 2014](#)

The Care Act 2014 brought together social care legislation and placed a series of new duties and responsibilities on local authorities about care and support for adults.

Under **Section 42** of the Care Act 2014, local authorities have a **duty to make enquiries** if they suspect an adult:

- Has **needs for care and support**,
- Is **experiencing or at risk of abuse or neglect**, and
- Is **unable to protect themselves** due to those needs

(Domestic abuse is one of the **ten types of abuse** listed in the Act, alongside physical, sexual, emotional, financial, and other forms)

[Homeless Reduction Act 2017](#)

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA) amended the Housing Act 1996 to strengthen protections and support for victims. Those who have experienced domestic abuse are considered to have priority need under homelessness legislation if they are vulnerable due to having to leave accommodation because of violence or threats likely to be carried out.

1.3 Local arrangements:

To fulfil our responsibility Darlington and County Durham Local authorities and partners created a local domestic abuse partnership board DASVEG (Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group).

DASVEG develops 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.

Domestic abuse remains a significant challenge nationally and locally. In County Durham and Darlington, over 20,000 incidents and crimes related to domestic abuse were recorded in 2023/24, placing local rates above the national average.

To respond effectively, the County Durham and Darlington Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group (DASVEG) commissioned a SafeLives system review and hosted a face-to-face development session with over 20 agencies. This work has helped inform the refreshed three-year plan aligned to four key areas: prioritising prevention, supporting victims, tackling those who harm, and addressing sexual violence.

Key priorities emerging from engagement include improving Relationship, Sex and Health Education (RSHE), workforce training, safe accommodation, Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) governance and expanding perpetrator interventions.

A shift to a more integrated governance model, DASVEG will be renamed to the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group (VAWDASV), and aligning with national VAWG strategy.

The sexual violence agenda remains a key priority within the [Darlington Community Safety Partnership](#) and the Safe Durham Partnership plan. Three options were considered for a restructure of the DASVEG subgroups to ensure wider VAWG and sexual violence is given adequate profile and is fully represented within governance arrangements.

The new subgroup structure 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.

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.

Darlington’s working Group should reflect the subgroup structure and remove local priorities, to demonstrate the partnership approach to the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence across County Durham and Durham.

2. PURPOSE

- 2.1 The purpose of the Local Working Group is to develop robust actions for achieving compliance with local authority duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, to:
- identify domestic abuse services available in Darlington
 - identify gaps in service provision in line with the authority’s responsibilities under the Act
 - identify potential solutions, both internal to and external from the authority, in order to adhere to service requirements
 - identify internal training provisions available to support the authority’s duties
 - identify training gaps and potential solutions from both internal and external sources
 - ensure appropriate referral processes are in place to utilise provisions currently available as well as future provisions commissioned in response to the authority’s new duties under the Act
 - ensure that there is a Darlington presence at all of VAWDASV’s Sub Groups and that feedback/updates are shared at every meeting of the Working Group

3. GOVERNANCE



4. APPROACH TO WORKING UNDER A SHARED 3 YEAR STARTEGY OF VAWDASV

4.1 Members of the Local Working group shall represent Darlington on all of VAWDASV's Sub Groups and shall feedback to this meeting:

- **Prioritising Prevention** – key themes are education and early intervention; workforce development and culture and systems change.

Membership: Abbie Kelly (Vice Chair), Martin Webster, Alison Lavender/Alisha Lynas, Amanda Hugill, Stef Hurren (OPPC).

- **Supporting Victims** – key themes are safe accommodation and crisis response, victim-centred services (including MARAC), pathways, access and inclusion.

Membership: Janette McMain, Rachel Watt/Steph Simpson, Alison Moffat, Hailey Tinson (OPPC), Tonya Pattison.

- **Tackling those who cause harm** – key themes criminal justice and enforcement, risk management and perpetrator accountability.

Membership: Chris Knox, Liane Green, Alisha Lynas.

4.2 Working under a partnership arrangements enable Darlington to participate in and benefit from

- Joint Safer Accommodation Strategy for County Durham and Darlington
- The Health Needs Assessment

5. MEMBERSHIP OF LOCAL WORKING GROUP

5.1 Membership of Local Working Group:

Lorraine Hughes - Director of Public Health, DBC

Christine Shields - Assistant Director Commissioning, Performance and Transformation, DBC

Chris Knox - Head of Community Safety, DBC

Amanda Hugill – Safeguarding Boards Business Manager, DBC

Liane Green – Detective Inspector for Safeguarding, Police

Hailey Tinson – Policy & Commissioning Officer, Police Crime Commissioning

Rachel Watt/Steph Simpson – Adult Social Care nominated representative, DBC

Alison Lavender/Alisha Lynas – Head of Service Childrens Services, DBC

Tonya Pattison - Voice of the Victim Champion, Police Crime Commissioning

Janette McMain - Housing Manager, Options and Lifeline, DBC

Martin Webster - Workforce Development Manager, DBC

Sarah Lochrane - Performance Coordinator, DBC

Sharon Cable - Commissioning Officer, Working Aged Adults, DBC

Kimberley Icton - Commissioning Officer Childrens, DBC

Abbie Kelly - Public Health Portfolio Lead, DBC

5.2 Delegation to an appropriate member of staff should be made when a member is unable to attend.

5.3 Internal or external persons may be invited to attend the meetings at the request of the Chairperson on behalf of the group to provide advice and assistance where necessary.

6. CHAIRPERSON and / or VICE CHAIR

6.1 Lorraine Hughes and Chris Shields will co-chair the group. Their responsibilities include:

- Scheduling and agenda meetings and notifying members.
- Inviting specialists to attend meetings when required by the Group.
- Guiding the meeting according to the agenda and time available.
- Applying equality, fairness and diversity of all members.
- Ensuring all discussion items end with a decision, action or definite outcome.
- Review and approve the draft minutes before distribution.
- Ensure feedback from Darlington and Durham VAWDASV to the task and finish group; and
- Agree representation at all appropriate internal and external stakeholder groups.

6.2 Coordination support for the group will be provided by DBC Commissioning Officers

7. MINUTE TAKER

7.1 A volunteer for minute taking is required at the beginning of each meeting.

7.2 The role of the minute taker is to:

- record action notes during the meeting.
- distribute minutes as a link within the meeting chat facility at the end of the meeting

8. DURATION OF MEETINGS

8.1 Meetings shall be held on Teams bimonthly for up to 1 hour. Additional meetings may be arranged as required to facilitate completion of all tasks required under the Act within timescales.

8.2 Attendance or delegated attendance is required at all meetings to ensure effective key decision making and information sharing.

9. LEVEL OF INFORMATION PROTECTION

9.1 The information and discussion topics provided by the group may be deemed at times to be sensitive.

9.2 All members are to take full responsibility for the management of the minutes and any information being circulated from the group.

10. AMENDMENTS

10.1 The terms of reference shall be reviewed annually from the date of approval. They may be altered to meet the current needs of all group members or any amendment in statutory guidance.