

# DOMESTIC ABUSE

WE ARE DRAWING THE LINE IN SOLIHULL

## Solihull Domestic Abuse Strategy 2016–2020

## Foreword

Domestic abuse can be defined as *'Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality.'*

The impact of domestic abuse on the lives and well-being of individuals and communities across Solihull Borough is significant and its effects can be longstanding, sometimes across generations. In some cases, tragically, it leads to loss of life. Domestic abuse is widespread throughout every socio-economic group and occurs across all neighbourhoods and communities, amongst all ethnicities, gender identities, ages, disabilities, sexualities, immigration status and religious beliefs. The personal and intimate nature of domestic abuse can cause victims to feel shame and embarrassment over and above the abuse, with some families and communities stigmatising those who report it; all of which can prevent a victim from discussing the issue, reporting abuse and accessing help.

In 2014–15, West Midlands Police recorded 2,604 incidents of domestic abuse in Solihull; this is 10% of all recorded crime. Each year it is estimated that there are around 4,850 female victims of domestic abuse in Solihull, and 1,300 children and young people live in households in Solihull where domestic abuse occurs. There is significant evidence that prolonged exposure to domestic abuse can have a serious impact upon children's safety and welfare. It is vital therefore that we in Solihull act decisively to address both the causes and effects of domestic abuse. By being proactive, we aim to increase the reporting of domestic abuse so that the effects can be dealt with as early as possible, potentially reducing the remedial actions that need to be taken by the Council and other agencies.

Solihull has a range of preventative measures in place which include a dedicated specialist domestic abuse helpline, strong engagement with the education sector, multi-agency training provided by the Adult and Children Safeguarding Boards and free access to an e-learning package on domestic abuse. As Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities and Partnerships, I am committed to working with a number of agencies across the borough to ensure that domestic abuse is reported when it occurs and the people affected by it helped so that they can lead happy, safe and rewarding lives.

— **Councillor Tony Diccio**

Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities and Partnerships

## 1. Introduction

Domestic abuse has far reaching consequences throughout families, schools, workplaces and communities, often devastating the lives of those affected.

Over the last few years significant progress has been made as to how public and voluntary sector partners work together to raise awareness and deliver support and prevention work in relation to domestic abuse. We still however have a long way to go to ensure we are responding appropriately and safely to the whole range of abusive behaviours recognised as domestic abuse, which include forced marriage, female genital mutilation, so-called 'honour' based violence, stalking, harassment and coercive and controlling behaviour.

This strategy aspires to address not only the needs of victims of domestic abuse (adults and children) but also to tackle the behaviour of those who perpetrate domestic abuse and to strengthen the wider communities understanding of and attitudes to domestic abuse.

The strategy reflects the priorities highlighted in a Solihull JSNA (Joint Strategic Needs Assessment) deep dive and supports the priorities of Solihull's Health and Wellbeing Board, Adult and Children Safeguarding Boards and the Safer Solihull Local Police and Crime Board.

The strategy has been developed in consultation with stakeholders, service users and strategic partners and is symbolic of our commitment to continue to work together in partnership to obtain the best outcomes for victims and their families.

## 2. Understanding domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is about power relationships, control and fear. It is characterised by a pattern of repeated abuse directed at one person (the victim) by another (the perpetrator). The abuse can take many forms which may or may not always include physical assaults, but its purpose is to control another person and to maintain this control through fear. Control and fear are the factors that make domestic abuse different from other behaviours or 'domestic arguing' that can occur in some relationships.

The impact of domestic abuse on the lives and well being of individuals and communities across Solihull Borough is significant and its effects can be longstanding, sometimes across generations. In some cases, tragically, it leads to loss of life. Domestic abuse happens regardless of class, ethnicity or sexuality.

This strategy recognises that men and boys can also be victims of domestic abuse and women can be perpetrators. However, the group most likely to experience repetitive serious physical assaults, to be raped, seriously injured or to be killed as a result of domestic abuse is women. A gendered approach is therefore both appropriate and necessary as it allows us to understand the causes and consequences of domestic abuse and for responses to be developed accordingly. Similarly, approaches which do not recognise the influence of gender fail both men and women, as they assume that the experiences of men and women are the same.

Domestic abuse is widespread throughout every socio-economic group and occurs across all neighbourhoods and communities, amongst all ethnicities, gender identities, ages, disabilities, sexualities, immigration status and religions or beliefs. The personal and intimate nature of domestic abuse can cause victims to feel shame and embarrassment over and above the abuse, with some families and communities stigmatising those who report it; all of which can prevent a victim from discussing the issue, reporting abuse and accessing help. It has been estimated that around 34% of women have probably never told anyone about the abuse they are suffering.

## **■ I was in a place where I felt so beaten down by the emotional abuse, I needed to do something. ■**

Each year it is estimated that 1300 children and young people live in households in Solihull where domestic abuse occurs. The hidden nature of domestic abuse means that the harm it causes children and young people is often unseen to public services. Significant evidence reveals that prolonged exposure to domestic abuse can have a serious impact upon children's safety and welfare despite the best efforts of the non-abusing parent to protect them. All children living with domestic abuse:

- Will be at greater risk of abuse, serious injury, or death
- Will be growing up in an atmosphere of fear, tension, intimidation and confusion
- Will be at higher risk of experiencing depression and trauma
- Will respond individually and will have differing levels of resilience to their experiences and recovery.

Domestic abuse perpetrated by a parent is a significant indicator of failed and dangerous parenting by that parent. It will also significantly impact upon the parenting capacity of the victim who will usually be trying to parent and keep the children safe. An imperative of any intervention for children living with domestic abuse is to support the non-abusive parent.

While there is no specific offence of 'Domestic Abuse' under criminal law, many forms of domestic abuse are crimes; for example – assault,

false imprisonment, harassment, stalking, rape, criminal damage, attempted murder and murder. Domestic abuse represents a high proportion of violent crime occurring across the borough, but other forms of abuse such as emotional, financial and sexual abuse are considered to remain largely hidden or even unacknowledged by the victim, perpetrator and within our communities. Recent legislation has introduced specific offences related to Coercive or Controlling behaviour, Forced Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

Whilst some agencies, including central government departments, use the term 'domestic violence' others prefer to use 'domestic abuse'. Both terms cover all forms of domestic violence and abuse.

For the purpose of this Strategy, the following definition of domestic abuse applies:

***'Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality.'***

This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional

***'Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and / or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.'***

***'Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.' \****

\* This definition, which is not a legal definition, includes so called 'honour' based violence, FGM and forced marriage, and is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group. (Home Office 2013)

## **■ When you are in something for so long you think do I go, don't I? ■**

### 3. Background facts and figures

#### 3.1 National context

Domestic abuse accounts for 35% of all homicides in England and Wales

1 woman is killed every 3 days by a partner or ex-partner

Every minute police in the UK receive a domestic assistance call.



65,790 women in England and Wales estimated to have undergone FGM

Nearly 1,000,000 women experience at least 1 incident of domestic abuse each year

54% of female victims of serious sexual assault were assaulted by their partner or ex-partner

The UK Forced Marriage Unit receive 1,600 reports of forced marriage a year



200,000 children in England live in households where there is domestic abuse



Domestic abuse has high repeat victimisation compared to other crimes

Domestic abuse happens in teenage relationships



500 cases of honour based violence are reported each year (true level is expected to be 35 times higher)

### 3.2 Solihull context

333 women received specialist domestic abuse support and 33 families were accommodated in Solihull refuge



In 2014–15, 441 households reported more than one incident of domestic abuse

Estimated 1,300 children in Solihull are exposed to domestic each year

In 2014/15, 175 women in Solihull were identified as high risk due to domestic abuse

3 Domestic Homicide Reviews since 2011

In 2014–15 West Midlands Police recorded 2,604 incidents of domestic abuse



Birmingham SDVC heard 1,989 cases of domestic abuse and secured successful convictions for 68.6% of the cases



Domestic abuse identified as a factor in 43% of children's social work assessments

Domestic abuse costs Solihull £20.1 million per year



## 4. What victims tell us

In summer 2015 a group of women who had experienced domestic abuse and accessed Solihull services, kindly offered to share their experiences and thoughts.

The discussions highlighted that victims need to be ready to seek help. This is linked to difficulties recognising their experiences as domestic abuse and shifting from accepting themselves as at fault to seeing their abuser as the cause of the problem. This was especially evident when women were subjected to long term coercive and controlling abuse.

**■ If I had known more and understood what domestic abuse is, that you get physical abuse but also mental abuse. If I had known I'd be on a different journey. ■**

It was clear that women approached a range of agencies when they initially decided to seek help and received a mixed response from these agencies. They all agreed that this first response was crucial to them having sufficient trust to continue their engagement, with reassurance and a believing attitude being key.

It was evident that women had different though similar experiences of abuse. For some the abuse had been extremely violent, but most of the women spoke about coercive control and how it left them with little or no confidence or strength and feeling 'burnt out by it'.

When asked how things could be improved they provided the following suggestions:

- Victims need to get the message that it is OK to tell someone
- Legal professionals and judges should listen to women and their concerns
- There should be more legal support and free advice for women going to court – a list of solicitors providing this
- There are some positive responses from professionals and these should be built upon
- When reporting to the police, women should be given a clear explanation of what is going to happen
- Information about domestic abuse services 'should be everywhere'
- More advertising about non-physical forms of domestic abuse, between popular programmes like soap operas
- Both women who attended support groups and those who had not said there should be on-going groups for women
- Support for children is lacking – there should be one-to-one, group work and advocacy for children in relation to the court process

## 5. Responding to domestic abuse in Solihull

Our approach reflects the key areas of intervention identified by central government and our Assessments aimed at reducing offending and victimisation. Building on the previous strategy, our future work will reflect the necessity for prevention and early intervention to reduce further harm, the provision of services, partnership working and holding perpetrators to account. An implementation plan will be developed and monitored by the Domestic Abuse Priority Group (DAPG). This will be reviewed and refreshed annually.

### Prevention:

Preventing domestic abuse from happening by challenging the attitudes and behaviours which foster it and intervening early where possible to prevent it.

### Provision:

Providing accessible and appropriate high quality specialist support for victims and their children who are affected by domestic abuse.

### Partnership working:

Working in partnership to obtain the best outcome for victims and their families.

### Protection:

Developing a 'whole system' response to ensure that those who perpetrate abuse are accountable.

## 5.1 Preventing abuse

Solihull has a range of preventative measures in place which include:

- A specialist domestic abuse helpline
- Strong engagement from the education sector
- A Healthy Safe Relationship programme being delivered to older young people
- Multi agency training provided by the Adult and Children Safeguarding Boards
- Free access to an e-learning package on domestic abuse
- An established brand and marketing materials
- Adult and Children Domestic Abuse procedural guidance
- Active use of Disclosure Law
- Positive screening embedded in midwifery services.

Moving forward we will build on this by:

- Continuing to raise awareness of domestic abuse across the borough through publicity material that will challenge some of the myths around domestic abuse, highlight abusive behaviours and provide information about where and how to seek help. Targeted campaigns will be undertaken to reach specific groups, geographical locations and on specific types of domestic abuse.
- Continuing to train practitioners, particularly those who work directly with the public, to help develop their skills in identifying and confidence in responding appropriately to the early signs of abuse, particularly coercive and controlling behaviours.
- Continuing to develop our well established 'Healthy Safe Relationships' programme to make it suitable for delivery to children at a range of ages as a resource to educate and challenge their understanding about positive relationships and inappropriate behaviours.

**■ It would have been so much better if it had been talked about. It's all so hidden. If there was more information it's easier to speak about it. You don't know what to do. I never experienced before what I went through. It was just a roller coaster. I went down inch by inch every day. ■**

## 5.2 Provision of services

Solihull already has a range of services and responses in place to support victims, their children and to reduce the risk of harm, which include:

- Independent specialist support for all women affected by domestic abuse to access
- Specialist refuge accommodation for women and children who need to leave their home
- Independent support for male victims who are assessed as high risk
- Access to specialist support at Maternity and A&E departments
- A specialist Domestic Abuse Public Protection Police Unit to manage cases
- A Target Hardening Scheme to increase the security of victim's homes allowing more the option to remain in their own home
- Specialist Domestic Violence Court
- Processes which allow a range of professional agencies to come together to assess risk and agree appropriate interventions to address concerns
- A new 'Early Help' system to engage with communities and families before they reach crisis point.

Moving forward we will build on this by:

- Maintaining access to quality independent specialist support provided in the community or in specialist refuge accommodation and will seek opportunities to expand service provision.
- Supporting and encouraging key agencies across the borough to achieve compliance with the principles of good practice contained in the regional standards.
- Providing equal access to information, advice and support to all victims.
- Supporting those who work with adults with care and support needs to be proactive in identifying, protecting and providing support in relation to domestic abuse.
- Supporting those who work with children and families to be proactive in identifying, protecting and providing support in relation to domestic abuse.
- Implementing a mother/child programme to increase resilience and support families to move forward.

**■ I didn't know about refuges. They sound like something out of Oliver Twist. ■**

## 5.3 Partnership working

Being able to intervene positively at the earliest opportunity to make sure victims and their children get the help they need when they need it and perpetrators are held accountable for their behaviour requires a joined up community response from statutory and voluntary agencies. Solihull has good relationships and commitment from partners and we will continue to work together to strengthen effectiveness by:

- Ensuring that domestic abuse is a priority for all partners and partnerships whose work impacts on our ability to deliver this strategy successfully
- Ensuring that partner agencies work effectively together and those pathways for victims, their children and perpetrators are understood
- Maintaining good information sharing processes
- Exploring opportunities for collaborative working between agencies to increase capacity and improve the response to those affected by domestic abuse particularly those with complex needs
- Maintaining a robust performance dashboard which will support the strategic boards to monitor the success of the strategy and to inform how local provision is meeting needs.

## 5.4 Pursue perpetrators

While we want to stop domestic abuse happening in the first place, where it does happen, perpetrators must be held accountable for their behaviour. We recognise that at this time in Solihull there is not a whole system response to identify and respond to perpetrators. Our intention is to develop a multi-agency sustainable approach to preventing, intervening and sanctioning perpetrators appropriately. Early findings show currently in Solihull there are a number of interventions available to prevent, disrupt and pursue those who perpetrate domestic abuse. However it is felt that they are not being used in a consistent and coherent way and that there are significant gains to be achieved by considering how the application of each intervention can be improved.

Moving forward we seek to:

- Improve early identification of those who perpetrate abuse and provide appropriate responses that communicate accountability
- Identify interventions that are available to disrupt and pursue perpetrators and ensure all partner agencies are making best use of these to safeguard victims and challenge perpetrators.

**■ I wish I had spoken to someone sooner. I would have acted very differently and been able to identify domestic violence earlier. I would have known about my rights. ■**

## 6. Best practice

How services are delivered is as important as what is delivered. In September 2015, the West Midlands launched 'Domestic abuse standards'. The standards are intended to identify and promote evidence-based, safe and effective practice in working with adult and child victims of domestic abuse, and to ensure perpetrators are held to account. The standards identify the need for victims, both adults and children, to be listened to and believed, to be treated with dignity and respect and for services that help them to be safe, accessible and available when they need support. Solihull recognises that the standards are ambitious and challenging but is committed to driving best practice through adhering to the 10 principles and using our influence where possible to encourage our partner agencies to adopt them.

Principles of the West Midlands Regional Domestic Abuse Standards:

1. Prioritise the safety of victims and their children in every aspect of decision making and intervention. Understand that victims and their children are at most risk when they end an abusive relationship or seek help and will work to protect them when they do.
2. Understanding that without effective intervention domestic abuse often escalates in severity and therefore will make every effort to reach and identify adult and child victims earlier.
3. Treat victims with respect and dignity. Listen to them and believe their experiences of abuse; take seriously their concerns and seek to understand and strengthen their safety strategies.
4. Seek to gain informed consent from victims where possible when there is an intention to share information.
5. Respect confidentiality and privacy wherever possible and understand the increased risks associated with information sharing in the context of domestic abuse.
6. Maximise choices for domestic abuse victims and empower them to make informed decisions about their lives wherever possible.

7. Actively work to develop competent services which are sensitive to the diverse range and needs of the individuals and communities we serve.

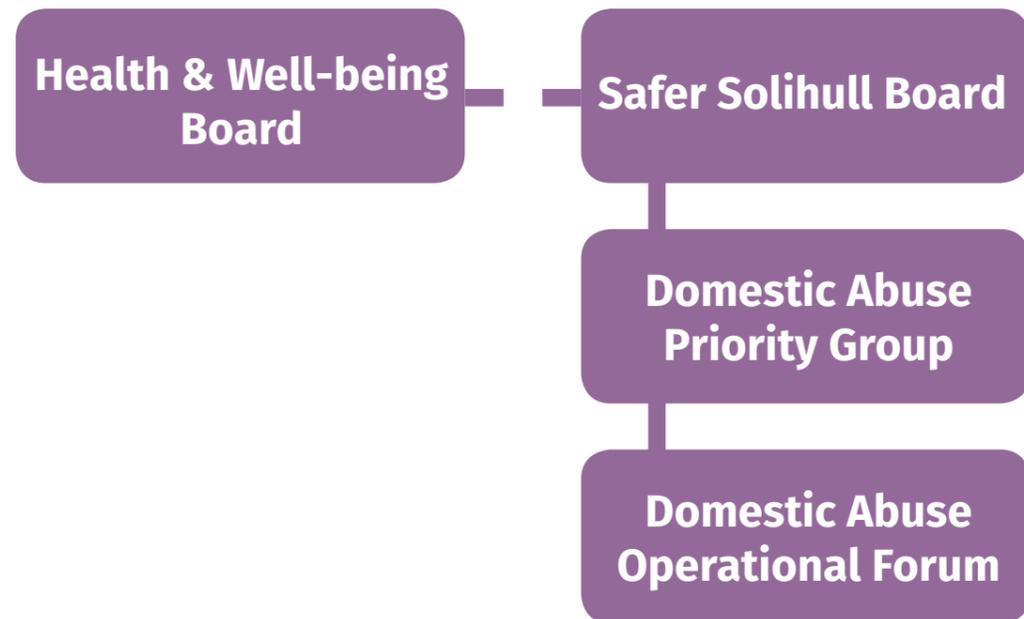
8. Send clear messages that domestic abuse perpetrators are accountable for their behaviour and that victims are never to blame.

9. Work co-operatively with the range of services that victims need.

10. Recognise the importance of specialist independent domestic abuse services in providing a voice for victims and children and guiding us on safe practice.

**/// I had to pluck up the courage. I needed to speak to someone helpful. ///**

## 7. Governance and delivery structure



## Myths

There are many myths surrounding domestic abuse. Believing them allows the problem to continue. By challenging the myths, you can play a part.

If it was that bad they'd leave.

Making it hard to leave, emotionally and practically, is often part of the abuse. They may be afraid. The partner may have threatened to hurt them, their children or themselves if they leave.

It's between them. It's nobody else's business.

Domestic abuse is against the law. It is a crime. Domestic abuse is not the same as a domestic argument. Threats, intimidation, violence and controlling behaviour have no place in a loving, respectful relationship.

They must have brought it on themselves.

Being violent, physically and emotionally, is never acceptable in a relationship. Neither is controlling the person through threats and intimidation. Even if their behaviour has been terrible, it is no excuse for abuse.

People lose their temper. It happens.

Abuse isn't about losing control, it's about taking it. It's about choosing when and where to abuse; at home, when the kids are in bed, where the bruises can't be seen. And they don't lose their temper with other people or their children. Abuse is very much deliberate.

**DOMESTIC**  
**WE ARE DRAWING THE LINE IN SOLIHULL**  
**ABUSE**