

County Durham and Darlington

# Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy

2021-2024



Better for everyone

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# Glossary of Terms

**DA** – Domestic Abuse

**DAHA** – Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance

**DAN** – Domestic Abuse Navigator

**DASVEG** – Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group

**DCSP** - Darlington Community Safety Partnership

**GRT** – Gypsy, Roma, Traveller

**LGBTQ+** - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning

**MARAC** – Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference

**MATAC** – Multi-Agency Tasking and Co-ordination Protocol

**SDP** – Safe Durham Partnership

**VAWG** – Violence Against Women and Girls

**WHA** – Whole Housing Approach



# Introduction

Domestic abuse is an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence, in most cases by a partner or ex-partner, but also by a family member or carer. It is very common. In most cases, it is experienced by women and is perpetrated by men.

Domestic abuse can affect anyone, regardless of age, disability, gender identity, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. In the year ending March 2020, it is estimated that 1.6 million females and 757,000 males aged 16 to 74 years experienced domestic abuse, with more women killed as a result of domestic abuse than men.<sup>1</sup>

Every case of domestic abuse should be taken seriously and each individual given access to the support they need. All victims should be able to access appropriate support. Whilst both men and women may experience incidents of inter-personal violence and abuse, women are considerably more likely to experience repeated and severe forms of abuse, including sexual violence. They are also more likely to have experienced sustained physical, psychological, financial abuse or emotional abuse, or violence which results in injury or death.<sup>2</sup>

It is estimated that 130,000 children and young people live in households where there is high-risk domestic abuse and around 64% of high and medium -risk victims have on average 2 children. Studies have identified that 25% of children in high-risk domestic abuse households are under 3 years old; on average, high risk abuse has been going on for approx. 2.6 years, meaning these children have lived with abuse for most of their life.<sup>3</sup>

It is nationally recognised that domestic abuse is a significant cause of homelessness across the UK, however the true extent of the issue is still

unknown. Survivors of domestic abuse who become homeless face multiple barriers to gaining a safe secure place to live. Housing is a basic need that must be met before other disadvantages can be addressed and housing providers play a vital role in the response to domestic abuse.<sup>4</sup>

Victims of domestic abuse should have access to Safe Accommodation that is of the highest quality and is provided with the needs of the specific user group at its heart. The County Durham and Darlington Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021 – 2024 is a joint area strategy that sets out how both local authorities will meet the needs of victims of domestic abuse; both residents of County Durham and Darlington and those who come from outside the local area with the aim of commissioning a range of appropriate support services.



<sup>1</sup> Delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse safe accommodation services, Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, 2021

<sup>2</sup> Domestic abuse is a gendered crime, Women's Aid, 2021

<sup>3</sup> Who are the victims of domestic abuse? Safelives 2021

<sup>4</sup> Safe at home: Homelessness and domestic abuse, Safelives, 2018

# The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 including Safe Accommodation Duty

In the spring of 2021, the government introduced the Domestic Abuse Act 2021<sup>5</sup>; its key aims are to improve the national response to DA by:

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

The Safe Accommodation Duty under the Act is separate to the local authority housing duties under the Housing Act 1996, the Homeless Act 2002 and the Homeless Reduction Act 2017. 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.**

Safe Accommodation is defined by the Act as:

- **Refuge accommodation:** a refuge offers single gender or single sex accommodation and domestic abuse support which is tied to that accommodation. The address will not be publicly available. Victims, including their children, will have access to a planned programme of therapeutic and practical support from staff. Accommodation may be in shared or self-contained housing, but in both cases the service will enable peer support from other refuge residents.
- **Specialist safe accommodation:** specialist safe accommodation offering single gender or single sex accommodation, alongside dedicated domestic abuse support which is tailored to also support those who share particular protected characteristic(s) and / or who share one or more vulnerabilities requiring additional support. Accommodation may be in shared or self-contained housing, and the address will not be publicly available.

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5. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021, Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities

# The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 including Safe Accommodation Duty

continued

- **Dispersed accommodation:** Safe (secure and dedicated to supporting victims of domestic abuse), self-contained accommodation with a similar level of specialist domestic abuse support as provided within a refuge but which may be more suitable for victims who are unable to stay in a refuge with communal spaces, and/or where peer support from other residents may not be appropriate, due to complex support needs, or where older teenage sons cannot be accommodated in a women only refuge, for example. Where two or more units share any part of the accommodation, including shared hallways or access routes, provision should be single gender or single sex. Safe (secure and dedicated to supporting victims of domestic abuse), self-contained 'semi-independent' accommodation which is not within a refuge but with support for victims who may not require the intensive support offered through refuge, but are still at risk of abuse from their perpetrator/s. Where two or more units share any part of the accommodation, including shared hallways or access routes, provision should be single gender or single sex.
- **Sanctuary schemes:** properties with local authority or private registered providers of social housing installed Sanctuary Schemes which provide enhanced physical security measures to a home or the perimeter of the home. A Sanctuary Scheme is a survivor centred initiative which aims to make it possible for victims of domestic abuse to remain in their own homes, where it is safe for them to do so, where it is their choice, and where the perpetrator does not live in the accommodation. This is done by providing additional security – 'installing a sanctuary' – to the victims' property or perimeter.

- **Move-on or second stage accommodation:** accommodation temporarily provided to victims, including their children, who are moving on from other forms of relevant accommodation and/or who no longer need the intensive level of support provided in a refuge, but would still benefit from a lower level of domestic abuse specific support for a period before they move to fully independent and settled accommodation. Where second stage accommodation is in shared housing it should be single gender or single sex. There is no expectation that every victim will require this. Many victims are ready to move straight to a settled new home from refuge. However, second stage accommodation (sometimes known as 'move-on') may be helpful in some cases.

The already well-established County Durham and Darlington's Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group (DASVEG) will act as **the Local Domestic Abuse Partnership** and will provide the oversight and governance structure for the delivery of the duty and the forthcoming 'whole system approach' strategy to domestic abuse and violence against women and girls to be published in 2022; this will also include how DASVEG will effectively tackle perpetrators of abuse.

This joint area strategy is based upon the findings of the local area needs assessment, used to inform future priorities and identify key ambitions that will be monitored and evaluated over the next 3 years.

The future whole system approach strategy will be developed in line with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and the Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2021.

# The County Durham Vision 2035

The County Durham Vision 2035 is a document developed with partners to provide a shared understanding of what everyone wants our county to look like in 15 years time.

The County Durham Vision 2035 was written together with partner organisations and the public and sets out what we would want the county to look like in 15 years time. It provides strategic direction and enables us to work together more closely, removing organisational boundaries and co-delivering services for the benefit of our residents.

This vision is structured around three ambitions which are:

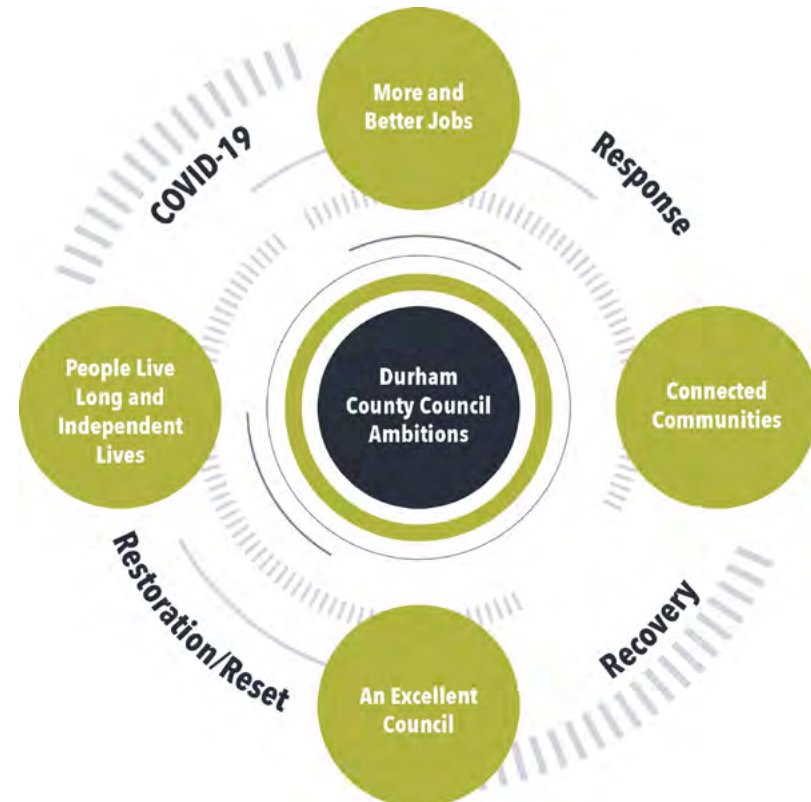
- **More and better jobs**
- **People live long and independent lives**
- **Connected communities**

A new partnership structure framework was agreed by the County Durham Partnership (the overarching partnership in County Durham) in September 2020 which ensures the County Durham partnership structure aids delivery of the County Durham Vision 2035. The vision informs all our strategies and plans, focusing our resources into the things that matter/areas of priority it identifies.

The Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021 – 2024 directly contributes to the delivery of a number of objectives linked to the ambitions of the County Durham Vision including:

- **All children and young people will have a safe childhood**
- **Victims of crime will have access to the right level of support, with services available to address their needs**
- **Communities will come together to accept and support each other**

Equality and inclusion are at the heart of our Durham 2035 Vision and the Council's core values. We understand the impact of inequality, prejudice and discrimination affecting the diverse communities which we serve and are committed to tackling this. As an employer, service provider, partner and community leader we will ensure that all communities have opportunities to access our services, be involved in decision making and be part of our workforce. Our equality objectives are embedded in the Council Plan and help us to achieve our vision and comply with our legal duties. We believe that everyone in County Durham deserves excellent public services which take account of their needs and circumstances.



# Darlington's Sustainable Community Strategy "One Darlington Perfectly Placed" 2008 - 2026 revised in 2014

Darlington Partnership brings together all those who are committed to achieving the best for Darlington and its people. Membership includes the Council, NHS, Police, Fire and Rescue Service, business leaders, community and voluntary sector representatives and people from the wider community. 'One Darlington: Perfectly Placed' is the overall vision for Darlington's future agreed by the Partnership members. The vision is that "We will improve quality of life for all and reduce inequality by ensuring we have: Children with the best start in life; More businesses and more Jobs; A safe and caring community; More people caring for our environment; More people active and involved; Enough support for people when needed; More people healthy and independent; A place designed to thrive. The Strategy;



**Outlines our approach to people, and specifically the need to make sure that people do not miss out on the opportunities arising from living and working in Darlington on account of a lack of income, where they live, or by any other potential disadvantage.**





# Safe Durham Partnership (SDP)

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 placed a statutory duty on local authorities to form a Community Safety Partnership (CSP) to tackle crime, disorder, anti-social behaviour, substance misuse, other behaviour adversely affecting the local environment and to reduce re-offending. In County Durham, the CSP is the Safe Durham Partnership.



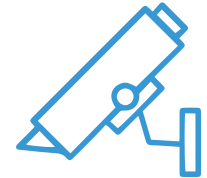
**A future free from harm due to drug and alcohol misuse**



**Support for victims to cope, recover and engage in the justice system**



**To work with communities most affected by long-term empty properties**



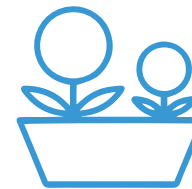
**Tackle crime and anti-social behaviour**



**Address the underlying causes of crime and community tensions**



**Actively take steps to encourage community cohesion**



**Provide a range of activities and opportunities to divert people away from crime and anti-social behaviour**



**Approach to selective licensing of private landlords**

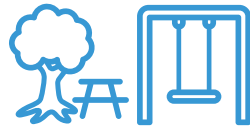
# Darlington Community Safety Partnership (DCSP)

The Darlington Community Safety Partnership Plan 2021-2026 vision is to provide a place where people treat each other fairly and with respect, and they are safe from harm or the effects of crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour.

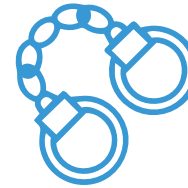
To achieve our vision for Darlington we have identified four key priorities:



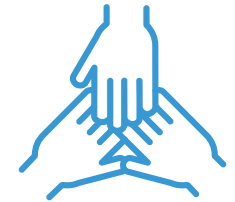
**Protecting and supporting people**



**Promoting safer places**



**Tackling violent crime, including domestic abuse**



**Building strong and cohesive communities**



# Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group (DASVEG)

DASVEG, a subgroup of the SDP and DCSP, work together to achieve their shared vision for domestic abuse and sexual violence.



**Our vision for domestic abuse is that all agencies work together to seek to reduce the prevalence of domestic abuse in County Durham and continue to provide and further develop a co-ordinated community response that provides high quality preventative, support and protection services and effectively deals with perpetrators.**

**Our vision for sexual violence is that it will not be tolerated and that perpetrators will be brought to account for their actions. Victims of sexual violence will be supported, treated with dignity and respect and made to feel safe within their community whilst seeing their offenders brought to justice.**

This vision sets out Durham and Darlington's approach to developing a co-ordinated community response to domestic abuse which keeps the voice of the victim/survivor at its heart.



# Local Domestic Abuse Data

Domestic abuse is a cross-cutting issue that effects all socio-economic, geographical and cultural groups. It is a crime that is largely perpetuated in private, with few witnesses and as a consequence is under-reported and under-recorded.

## Durham Constabulary

Durham Constabulary continue to respond to high numbers of domestic abuse incidents each year and are predicted to see an expected increase in demand from domestic abuse with a projected **16.8% increase** from **18,093 incidents** reported at the end of 2019/20, to **21,134 incidents** reported at the end of 2024/25.

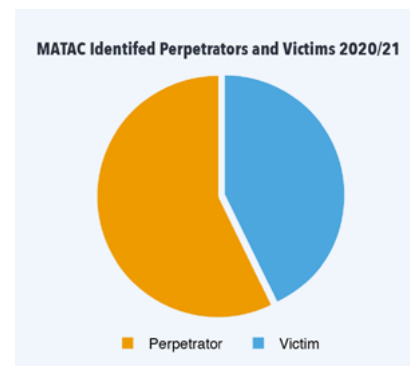
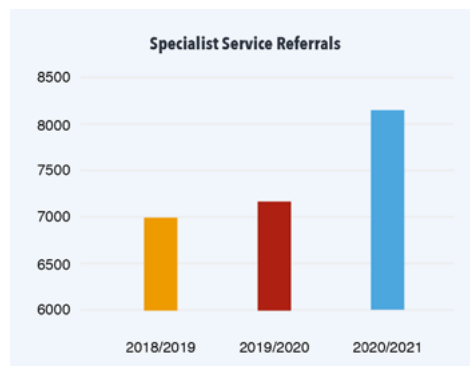
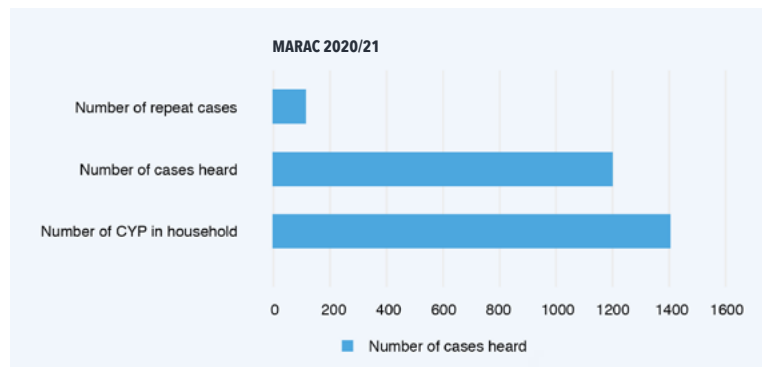
For the period April 2020 - end February 2021, the main aggravating factors were: **alcohol in 43.1% of incidents** (increase of 3.7% to same period 2019/20); **mental health in 17.2% of incidents** (decrease of 0.6% to same period 2019/20); and **drugs in 4.6% of incidents** (increase of 1.3% to same period 2019/20).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> County Durham JSNA Factsheet, Domestic Abuse, 2021

# MARAC<sup>7</sup> and MATAAC<sup>8</sup> County Durham and Darlington 2020/21

Domestic abuse is a cross cutting issue that effects all socio-economic, geographical and cultural groups. It is a crime that is largely perpetuated in private, with few witnesses and as a consequence is under reported and under recorded.



## Countywide Domestic Abuse Outreach Specialist Service

- ↑ Demand for specialist outreach domestic abuse services continues to rise
- ★ The services top 3 referrers remain consistent and include
  - Durham Constabulary
  - Self-referrals
  - Children and Young People's Services
- ↑ Referrals for perpetrator support have increased by 35% since 2019/20

<sup>7</sup> Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference: MARAC is a multi-agency meeting is where information is shared on the highest risk domestic abuse cases

<sup>8</sup> Multi-Agency Tasking and Co-ordination Protocol: MATAAC is a Police led bespoke set of interventions to target and disrupt perpetrators

# Children and Young People Identified as Victims in their own right

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 recognises that children and young people who see, hear or experience the effects of domestic abuse and are related to the person being abused or the perpetrator is also regarded as a victim of abuse. Guidance acknowledges that support should be offered to victims of domestic abuse, including children within all domestic abuse safe accommodation services.

Needs Assessment data highlights the growing need for improved capacity within services commissioned to support children and young people affected by domestic abuse across County Durham and Darlington.

## Children and Young People

- **Domestic abuse is consistently in the top 3 reasons for referral into Children's Social Care**
- **In 2020/2021 a total of 3915 Operation Encompass<sup>9</sup> notifications were sent directly to education settings across County Durham**
- **There are increasing numbers of families who are experiencing child/adolescent to parent violence and abuse**



<sup>9</sup> Operation Encompass is a system that enables schools to receive alerts about Police reported domestic abuse incidents where a child/ren or young person is present

# Rural Considerations

Rural settlements across the county are diverse and differ in their scale. Larger settlements generally offer more service provision as they incorporate more houses, jobs, existing infrastructure, better public transport provision and community facilities. These settlements can provide a critical service centre role for a wider surrounding area, typical to the function of a traditional market town. It is important to also recognise that some smaller settlements also have an important role to play as localised service centres for their immediate surrounding area, particularly if they are relatively remote from one of these larger settlements.

In the context of domestic abuse victims, experience additional challenges and inequalities, this includes:

- **Abuse lasts on average 25% longer in rural communities**
- **The more rural the setting, the higher the risk of harm**
- **Rurality and isolation are deliberately used as weapons by perpetrators**
- **Support services are often less available, less visible and less effective<sup>10</sup>**



<sup>10</sup> Captive and controlled; Domestic abuse in rural areas, National Rural Crime Network 2019

# Support for victims with complex needs and vulnerable groups

Additional support for victims with relevant protected characteristics and/or complex needs is a priority. Anyone can be a victim of domestic abuse, but some groups are identified as being at most risk from domestic abuse, these include:

- **Women**
- **Black minority ethnic groups**
- **People with disabilities**
- **LGBTQ+**
- **Children and young people**
- **GRT**
- **Older people<sup>11</sup>**

In addition, there are a range of characteristics that also increase the likelihood and risk levels, they include:

- **Gender**
- **Low income**
- **Age**
- **Pregnancy**
- **Separation**
- **Previous criminality of the perpetrator**
- **Drug and alcohol misuse**
- **Mental health issues<sup>12</sup>**

**Local needs assessment identified that information relating to the identification of victims with protected characteristics and/or additional vulnerabilities is currently not routinely collected or where information is collected it is not consistent across all agencies; this will be a key focus for development moving forward.**

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<sup>11</sup>. County Durham and Darlington Domestic Abuse Health Needs Assessment 2020

<sup>12</sup>. Who are the victims of domestic abuse? Safelives 2021



# Housing and Safe Accommodation

The Whole Housing Approach (WHA) is a framework for addressing the housing and safety needs of victim/survivors in a local area. It brings together under one umbrella all the main housing tenure types alongside the housing options and support initiatives needed to help people experiencing domestic abuse to either maintain or access safe and stable housing<sup>13</sup>.

Utilising a WHA across County Durham and Darlington will create opportunities for early intervention, increase tenancy sustainment options so that people experiencing domestic abuse can remain in their homes and reduce the numbers of people who are made homeless.

Victims who need to escape from their abuser can seek refuge and safe accommodation provision at any time. It does not matter whether the victim is married to or living with an abuser, or whether they have children.

Victims can choose (subject to space and availability) whether they travel a long way away from their hometown or remain in the same area. To ensure that support is appropriately personalised, all services, including refuges, must assess the risk factors faced by individuals, take account of their needs and what provision might best meet those needs. It can be necessary for women to be accommodated away from the local area but may alternatively be able to find support closer to home if it is safe to do so.

Refuges don't generally accept local women as this might not be safe. Any refuge accepting a woman would have to be a "safe" distance away from any areas where her abuser has connections.

This strategy recognises that housing provision is a key element of support and that some victims may require support in other forms of temporary accommodation either as an alternative to refuge provision or in order to move on from refuge; this could be inside the boundaries of County Durham and Darlington or within other local authority areas in order to put a safe distance

between themselves and their abuser. These alternatives should be self-contained and/or semi-independent units able to support families with older teenage sons, male victims and/or those with complex needs<sup>14</sup>.

This strategy seeks to ensure that victims of domestic abuse:

- **Have appropriate priority under the local authority allocation scheme**
- **Those who have fled refuge to another area are not disadvantaged by any residency or local connection requirements<sup>15</sup>**



<sup>13</sup>. Whole Housing Approach, The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance, 2021

<sup>14</sup>. Delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse in domestic abuse safe accommodation services statutory guidance, Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities 2021

<sup>15</sup>. Improving access to social housing for victims of domestic abuse statutory guidance, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government 2018

# Building on good practice, local context

There are a wide range of existing provisions in place for victims of domestic abuse across County Durham and Darlington, including:

- **Five women's refuges**
- **Domestic Abuse Navigator Service: for victims with complex needs**
- **Dispersed properties including some move on accommodation**
- **County Durham's Remain Safe Scheme: target hardening**

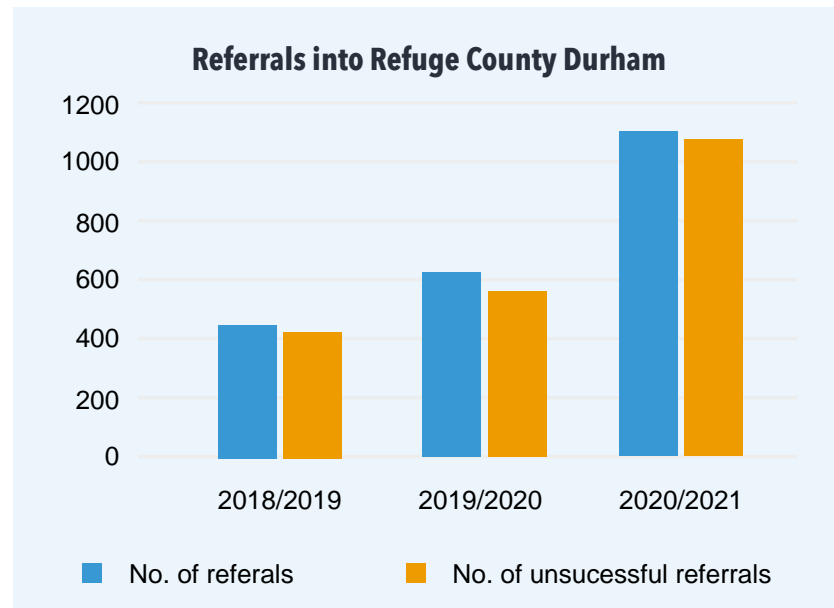
The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 ensures that this provision is appropriately needs assessed and that wrap around support is made available to victims, including children and young people, who access this provision.



# Housing and Safe Accommodation Data

High quality data and intelligence plays a key role in ensuring an effective co-ordinated community response to domestic abuse is in place. Local needs assessment work has identified a range of key issues that have informed the development of this strategy.

- There has been an increase of approx. 55% of domestic abuse victims presenting as homeless between 2018/19 and 2020/21
- The majority of all out of area homeless referrals come from neighbouring local authorities; this is an increasing trend



## Refuge

- Demand for refuge provision increases each year
- All victims presenting at refuge are women

## Homeless Data

- Most homeless presentations are accommodated in temporary accommodation (not refuge)

## Remain Safe (County Durham only)

- Victims and multi-agency partners all value the contribution of Remain Safe in ensuring victims can stay in their own home
- Despite an increase in demand across the system referrals into Remain Safe have decreased over the last 3 years

## Gender Breakdown Safe Accommodation (not refuge)



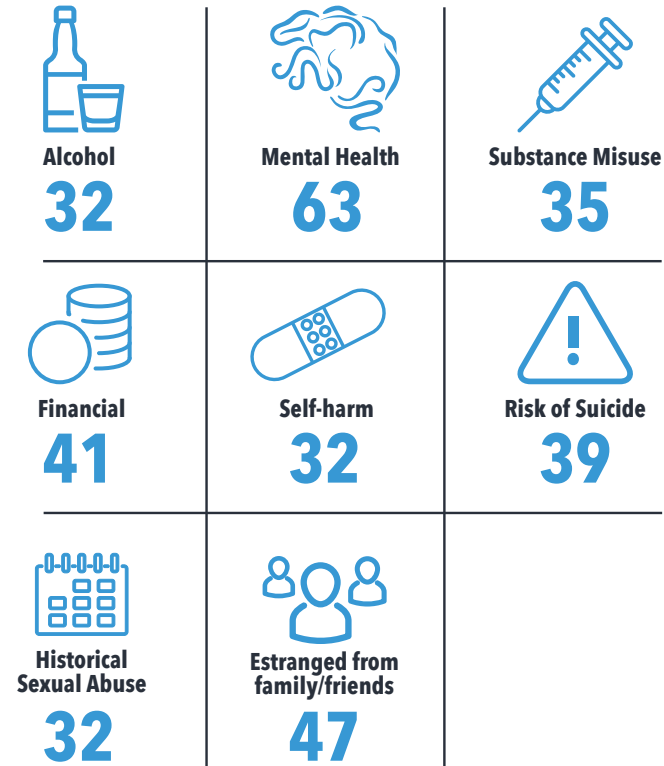
**94% of victims that accessed safe accommodation were female**



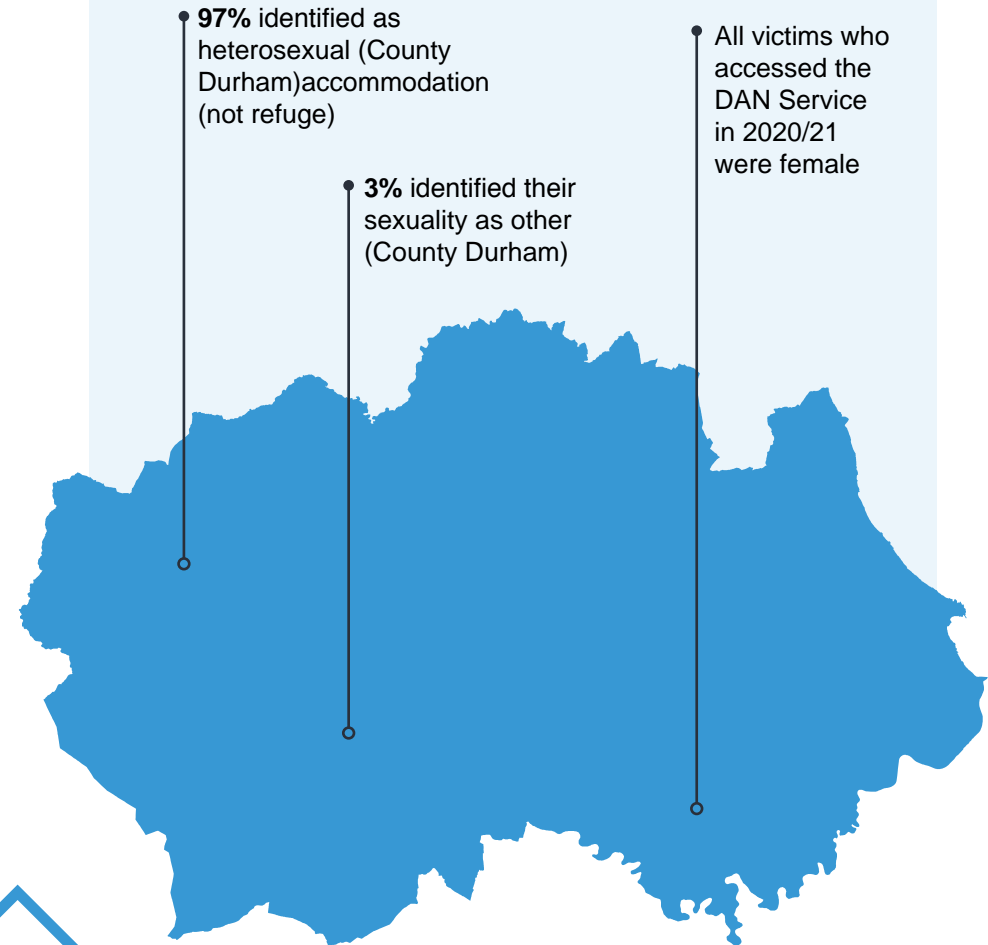
**4% of victims that accessed safe accommodation were male**

# Housing and Safe Accommodation Data continued

## DAN Service Risk Factors County Durham



## DAN Service County Durham and Darlington



# Survivor voice – expert by experience, utilising County Durham’s approach to wellbeing

After living through domestic abuse many survivors wish to speak out, tell others about their experiences and use their expertise to create change. This strategy aims to put survivor voice at the heart of everything we do and channel that experience to shape future service design.

“ We know what it’s like to live in fear, we can offer support to others, we have been through it ourselves, we are the only ones that truly know what it’s like. ”

Survivor interview Durham August 2021

We will utilise County Durham’s Approach to Wellbeing, designed to promote whole system change and to invoke a culture where the wellbeing of the County’s residents is considered in every decision that is made whether this be regarding decisions about people or places or the systems designed to support them.

Our approach has six guiding principles which are all underpinned by a strong evidence base. These principles affirm the key role that communities can play in supporting their own residents and the significant improvements in health and wellbeing outcomes that can result from involving communities more in decisions that affect them.

Our approach has people and places at its heart. Working with communities, building on the assets of those communities, supporting the positive development of the neighbourhoods that people live in and fostering the resilience and empowerment of these communities through the support offered to everyone, and importantly to those who are most vulnerable.

Our approach highlights the importance of supporting systems – encouraging alignment of activities across agencies and sectors and ensuring that services are commissioned and delivered in a way that is collaborative and supportive. For those who require more formal interventions or treatment, our approach supports person centred interventions that are empowering rather than stigmatising. Through commissioners and providers of services across the sectors the model helps to provide a framework against which we can address the needs of people, communities and neighbourhoods whilst working towards a cultural change. This means ensuring all services self-assess against the model using the structured framework that helps to reflect on current practice and will inform future decisions about how local work and activities can support the wellbeing of people living in communities. Over time it is aimed that the model will be integrated into commissioning decisions, supporting providers to deliver services that place improving wellbeing at the centre of service delivery. Finally, and most importantly, all our actions need to be informed by local conversations with people and communities – using and building on their knowledge and learning from their own experiences of knowing what they need, what is right and what works for them. In doing this, we will also ensure that the model is dynamic, adapting, changing and that it is shaped and developed over time by County Durham residents.

# Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy - Key Priorities

Domestic Abuse is a complex, multi-faceted system that requires each core component to work in partnership to improve the lives of victims/survivors of abuse. The ambitions set out in the Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-2024 will not take place in isolation but as part of a co-ordinated approach to supporting vulnerable people and families; very few victims of abuse will only experience the safe accommodation offer of support. These wider system ambitions and outcomes will form the Whole System Approach to Domestic Abuse Overarching Strategy due for publication in early 2022.

The following six priority area objectives have been developed based upon the findings of local needs assessment and in line with key national and local policy drivers:

- 1** Priority One: Survivor/Victim Voice will be at the heart of our decision making
- 2** Priority Two: Early identification, intervention and prevention of domestic abuse
- 3** Priority Three: Effective support for vulnerable groups
- 4** Priority Four: Prioritising the needs of children and young people effected by domestic abuse within safe accommodation
- 5** Priority Five: Improve the use of data and intelligence in order to better understand and respond to demand and levels of need
- 6** Priority Six: Improve the workforce knowledge and skills in responding effectively to domestic abuse

It is acknowledged that for the first year of this strategy a primary focus will be the requirement to develop and implement a comprehensive performance framework which will include a range of multi-agency indicators and measurements. Once implemented, this framework will monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of this strategy and how they will contribute to the achievement of the broader system outcomes set out in the future Whole System Approach to Domestic Abuse Strategy due for publication in 2022.



# Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy - Key Priorities

## Priority One

1



### **Survivor/Victim Voice will be at the heart of our decision making**

Victim participation can be one of the major contributors in the development of effective, credible and influential systemwide development and improvement. Victim participation offers several potential benefits to system processes and procedures as well as to victims and survivors themselves. Participation can promote individual healing and rehabilitation by providing victims with a sense of agency, empowerment and closure. Survivors are experts in the field due to their lived experience and are critical to system growth, they truly understand where improvements are needed and can advise how improvements can be made.

Victim/Survivor peer on peer support is an important resource within a whole system approach, whether it takes the form of independent peer-run programmes, self-help and mutual support groups, or services delivered by peers working within the domestic abuse system. Through the establishment of collaborative relationships with peer support providers, domestic abuse advocates can increase their own understanding of domestic abuse and develop their skills for supporting other survivors who are experiencing or have experienced abuse, while also sharing their knowledge about trauma and domestic abuse.

### **DASVEG - 3 Year Focus**

- **Develop mechanisms to capture the lived experience of survivors across all agencies**
- **Ensure that survivor representation is central within all relevant strategic governance arrangements and is used to inform service provision and interventions**
- **Opportunities to co-produce appropriate service provision with victims/survivors of domestic abuse are explored and implemented**

 **We know what it's like to live in fear, we can offer support to others, we have been through it ourselves, we are the only ones that truly know what it's like.**   
Durham Survivor 2021

# Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy - Key Priorities

## Priority Two

2

### Early Identification, Intervention and Prevention of Domestic Abuse

Taking a prevention and early intervention approach to domestic abuse, including the provision of safe accommodation, reduces risk and harm, and can prevent homicide in the most serious of cases. Without support, survivors can often struggle to access the services and support they need.

Nationally, Domestic Abuse is a leading cause of homelessness for women. Abuse is not always disclosed by survivors at the point of access to homeless support. Domestic Abuse can lead to loss of accommodation due to complaints of anti-social behaviour, rent arrears and property damage associated with the abuse. Preventing homelessness and loss of tenure achieves better outcomes for survivors and children and saves public money. Effective intervention at the earliest possible stage reduces the risk of losing accommodation and protects security of tenure. National data shows that 85% of survivors sought help five times in the year before they got the help they needed. It is vital that local services, especially housing providers, identify Domestic Abuse and intervene at the earliest possible stage.

Sanctuary Scheme is a victim centred initiative which aims to enable households at risk of violence to remain safely in their own homes through the installation of improved home security measures such as extra locks, improved lighting, police alarms.

### DASVEG - 3 Year Focus

- **Support housing providers to adopt a whole housing approach in order to effectively identify and respond to those effected by domestic abuse at the earliest opportunity**
- **Ensure victims of domestic abuse are supported to remain in their own homes if this is their preferred choice and it is safe to do so**
- **Increase system wide awareness of safe accommodation support available to victims and survivors**

“ You need to better promote what support is available, I'd have left earlier, if I'd known how much support was out there. ”

Durham Survivor 2021



# Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy - Key Priorities

## Priority Three

3

### Effective Support for Vulnerable Groups

Anyone can be a victim of domestic abuse however some groups are at more risk than others, these include women, those from black minority ethnic groups, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ and children and young people. In addition, the County Durham and Darlington needs assessment identified that members of the GRT community and older people can also be at greater risk locally. Consideration must also be given to a range of complicating factors including drug and alcohol misuse and mental health issues that contribute to difficulties in accessing local provision. It is also acknowledged that although the majority of victims are female, men and boys can be victims too and that there are currently limited opportunities for male victims to access safe accommodation support.

Working together with neighbouring authorities enables pooling of resources and a proportionate approach to meeting needs of diverse survivors, this approach also has the potential to provide funding opportunities for the 'by and for' sector, often at a disadvantage when tendering.

“ There's not really information out there to help older women, it's seen as a young'uns issue. ”

Durham Survivor 2021

### DASVEG - 3 Year Focus

- Provision of support for victims and survivors with complex needs
- Whole system awareness raising regarding support available for vulnerable groups and hidden victims
- Provision of systemwide, wrap around support that sufficiently meets the needs of vulnerable groups and those with protected characteristics
- Provision of a range of safe accommodation options for victims of Domestic Abuse, including those with protected characteristics and vulnerable groups
- Explore opportunities to work more collaboratively across the region in order to maximise resources and opportunities to support victims of domestic abuse effectively

# Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy - Key Priorities

## Priority Four

4

### Prioritising the needs of children and young people effected by domestic abuse within safe accommodation

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places a statutory duty on the local authority relating to the provision of support to victims of domestic abuse and their children, as victims in their own right, residing in refuges and other safe accommodation options.

Local data and intelligence have identified the high numbers of children and young people effected by domestic abuse with further work required to understand the impact. Development of high quality, trauma informed approaches to supporting children and young people recover and break the cycle of abuse must be a priority across all agencies.

### DASVEG - 3 Year Focus

- Children and Young People have access to appropriate wrap around support within all Safe Accommodation
- Children and young people have access to trauma informed support when required and at the earliest opportunity

“ People need to listen to us - they don't realise how much it impacts on us. As siblings, we've all been through it, so in different ways we support one another and Mum. ”

Darlington Young Person 2021



# Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy - Key Priorities

## Priority Five

5

### **Improve the use of data and intelligence to better understand and respond to demand and levels of need**

A key element of an effective co-ordinated community response is the ability to collate and interpret local data and intelligence. To ensure a robust understanding of demand and outcomes, all service elements and providers should record consistently so that meaningful comparisons can be made. Local domestic abuse partnerships must be able to map and monitor their systems in order to inform service planning and/or commissioning intentions. It is only with high quality data that demonstrates demand and levels of needs can the appropriate commissioning decisions be made.

Across County Durham and Darlington multi-agency arrangements are immature and will require significant focus moving forward.

### **DASVEG - 3 Year Focus**

- **Develop multi-agency mechanisms that allow information to be shared across the partnership to better understand and respond to the needs of victims of domestic abuse**
- **Develop a performance framework that effectively monitors progress of County Durham and Darlington's co-ordinated community response**
- **Development and implementation of a Joint Commissioning Plan**



# Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy - Key Priorities

## Priority Six

6

### Improve the workforce knowledge and skills in responding effectively to domestic abuse

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 highlights the need for whole system, multi-agency approach to workforce development and the move away from single agency training. Workforce development within a multi-agency context provides an opportunity for partnership links and inter-agency coordination. Domestic abuse should be a workforce development priority for all services and be fully embedded in all workforce development planning. It requires the development of a whole new framework which includes practice standards, effective evaluation and CPD accreditation. The new statutory definition provides an opportunity to increase the awareness of the dynamics of domestic abuse and how it manifests. There needs to be an understanding across all partners and services of this statutory definition to ensure it is embedded in frontline practice. Workforce development needs to be responsive to any guidance that comes from the Government regarding changes which affect Safe Accommodation providers. Workforce development plays a critical role in supporting the development of best practice, providing opportunities for those engaging in the process to upskill and build their knowledge base, which in turn better equips them to support appropriately and effectively, service users. Improving staff knowledge in relation to domestic abuse within safe accommodation and beyond alongside the development of mechanisms for active communication and the sharing of information across the system must be a priority in Durham and Darlington.

### DASVEG - 3 Year Focus

- The development, implementation and evaluation of an accredited, multi-agency training programme that supports the workforce to respond to domestic abuse at all levels
- Awareness raising of all safe accommodation options across County Durham and Darlington, this includes pathways and how to access support collaboratively across the region in order to maximise resources and opportunities to support victims of domestic abuse effectively

“ Train staff to stop blaming us, the victim, understand and support us, don't blame us. ”

Durham Survivor 2021

**MAKING DARLINGTON SAFER**

Safer People, Safer Places



**DARLINGTON**  
Borough Council

