

County Durham and Darlington

# Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy

2026-2029



Better for everyone

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# Glossary of Terms used across the Domestic Abuse System

**CAPVA** – Child and Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse. Abusive behaviours by a child or young person towards a parent or carer.

**CJS** – Criminal Justice System. The collective institutions involved in upholding law, including police, courts, and probation.

**CSEW** – Crime Survey for England and Wales. A key national survey used to estimate prevalence of domestic abuse and other crimes.

**DA** – Domestic Abuse. Behaviour of a controlling, coercive, threatening, violent, or abusive nature between individuals aged 16+ who are personally connected.

**DAHA** – Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance. National body promoting best practice in housing sector responses to domestic abuse.

**DAN** – Domestic Abuse Navigator – Specialist role supporting victims with complex needs across safe accommodation and community settings.

**DASVEG** – Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group. The County Durham and Darlington Partnership Board responsible for strategic oversight and delivery of domestic abuse and sexual violence duties.

**DARDR** – Domestic Abuse Related Death Review. New national term replacing Domestic Homicide Review (DHR), encompassing deaths by suicide or neglect linked to domestic abuse.

**DBC** – Darlington Borough Council.

**DCSP** – Darlington Community Safety Partnership.

**DHR** – Domestic Homicide Review. Statutory review of deaths resulting from domestic abuse (now transitioning to DARDR).

**DLUHC** – Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. Government department overseeing the Safe Accommodation Duty.

**DVDS / Clare's Law. Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme** – Enables individuals to ask police about a partner's history of domestic violence or abuse.

**GRT** – Gypsy, Roma, Traveller. Ethnic groups recognised under the Equality Act 2010.

**HNA** – Health Needs Assessment. A structured assessment identifying health and wellbeing needs within a population.

**ICB** – Integrated Care Board. NHS body responsible for planning and commissioning healthcare services locally.

**JSNA** – Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. Local authority-led assessment of population health and wellbeing needs.

**LGBTQ+** – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning (and others).

**MARAC** – Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference. Meeting of agencies to share information and create coordinated safety plans for high-risk victims.

**MATAC** – Multi-Agency Tasking and Coordination. Partnership process targeting repeat or serial domestic abuse perpetrators.

**MHCLG / NBF** – Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government / New Burdens Fund. Central government funding for statutory Safe Accommodation duties.

**NBF** – New Burdens Fund. The funding provided to local authorities to meet additional responsibilities under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

**OE / Operation Encompass**. Scheme enabling police to inform schools about domestic abuse incidents so children receive timely support.

**ONS** – Office for National Statistics.

**PCC** – Police and Crime Commissioner.

**PHSMT** – Public Health Senior Management Team.

**RYPP** – Respect Young People's Programme. Nationally accredited programme supporting families affected by CAPVA.

**SDP** – Safe Durham Partnership. The statutory Community Safety Partnership for County Durham.

**SV** – Sexual Violence.

**TTWCH** – Tackling Those Who Cause Harm

**DASVEG** subgroup focused on perpetrator management, rehabilitation, and accountability.

**VAWG** – Violence Against Women and Girls. A collective term for acts of gender-based violence disproportionately affecting women and girls.

**VAWDASV** – Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group. Proposed new name for DASVEG to reflect wider VAWG remit.

**WHA** – Whole Housing Approach. Framework integrating all housing options and support to improve safety and stability for domestic abuse victims.

# Introduction

Domestic abuse is an incident or pattern of incidents including controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading, or violent behaviour, including sexual violence. It is most often perpetrated by an intimate partner or ex-partner (husband, wife, boyfriend, girlfriend) but can also occur within families or in relationships where one person required care needs.

Sadly, domestic abuse is widespread, locally and nationally it has profound and lasting effects on individuals, families, and communities.

Nationally, in the year ending March 2024, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) estimated that 1.6 million women and 712,000 men aged 16 years and over experienced domestic abuse which is a prevalence rate of 6.6% of women and 3.0% of men.

Locally across County Durham and Darlington, domestic abuse remains one of the most significant safeguarding challenges. In 2024/25, more than 20,800 incidents and crimes related to domestic abuse were recorded by Durham Constabulary, representing 18% of all recorded crime. The Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) caseload rose from an average of 85 to 106 cases per month, with the number of children discussed increasing by 16% in a single year (from 2,013 to 2,341).

Anyone can experience domestic abuse regardless of age, disability, gender identity, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation. However, evidence shows that women are disproportionately affected and men are most often the perpetrators. Domestic abuse occurs in every community, but its impact is not evenly felt. Women, children, people with disabilities, older adults, LGBTQ+ individuals, and those experiencing poverty or rural isolation face greater risk and additional barriers to support. The emotional, physical, and financial consequences can last for years, reinforcing cycles of harm, disadvantage, and inequality.

Nationally, more women are killed as a result of domestic abuse than men, and women experience higher rates of repeated victimisation, are more likely to sustain serious injuries, and face a greater risk of homicide (Walby and Towers, 2018; Walby and Allen, 2004).

Domestic abuse has a devastating impact on children. It is now recognised in law that children who see, hear or experience the effects of domestic abuse are victims in their own right (Domestic Abuse Act 2021). National evidence shows that:

- **Over 105,000 children in England live in homes where there is high-risk domestic abuse.**
- **Around 78% of those children are directly harmed by the perpetrator, in addition to the harm caused by witnessing abuse.**
- **On average, victims live with domestic abuse for 2.5 years before accessing help.**
- **40.9% of partner abuse cases had at least one child in the household, and a fifth of victims stated the child had witnessed the incident (ONS, 2024).**

Our collective vision is that every victim-survivor and their children have access to safe, sustainable accommodation and wrap-around support, enabling them to recover and rebuild their lives free from abuse.

This three-year Safe Accommodation Strategy (2025–2028) recognises domestic abuse as both a crime and a public health issue requiring a coordinated, trauma-informed response. Developed in line with the statutory requirements of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and accompanying MHCLG guidance, it sets out how County Durham and Darlington will assess need, commission safe accommodation support, and monitor outcomes.

The strategy also builds upon the findings of local needs assessments (2021 and 2025) and ongoing quarterly performance data to ensure delivery remains responsive to local need. Through this joint approach, County Durham and Darlington continue to meet their statutory duties while striving to exceed minimum expectations through innovation, partnership, and survivor-centred practice.

# Safe Accommodation

## Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and Safe Accommodation

Safe and secure housing is fundamental to recovery from domestic abuse. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places a statutory duty on Tier 1 local authorities to commission appropriate support for all victims of domestic abuse, including children. This duty sits alongside, but is distinct from, existing housing responsibilities under the Housing Act 1996, the Homelessness Act 2002, and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

The Act overall seeks to improve the national response to domestic abuse by:

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

Under the Safe Accommodation Duty, local authorities must:

- **Appoint a Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board (fulfilled locally in County Durham and Darlington through the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive group (DASVEG)).**
- **Assess need for accommodation-based domestic abuse support for all victims and their children, including those from outside the area.**
- **Develop and publish a Safe Accommodation Strategy informed by the needs assessment.**

- **Deliver, monitor, and evaluate the strategy through commissioning activity.**
- **Report annually to central government on outcomes and delivery.**
- **Have regard to statutory guidance issued by the Secretary of State, following consultation with the Domestic Abuse Commissioner and partners.**

While the Act requires local authorities to ensure support within safe accommodation, it does not mandate direct provision of accommodation itself.



# Safe Accommodation Definitions

The Act defines a range of safe accommodation types to meet differing needs and risk levels:

Type	Description
<b>Refuge accommodation</b>	Single-gender or single-sex accommodation with on-site specialist support. Addresses are confidential, and victims (including children) receive therapeutic and practical help, enabling peer support from other residents.
<b>Specialist safe accommodation</b>	Accommodation offering tailored support for individuals sharing protected characteristics and/or vulnerabilities (e.g. disability, ethnicity, sexuality, complex needs).
<b>Dispersed accommodation</b>	Secure, self-contained units (flats/houses) providing the same specialist support as refuges but suited to those who cannot live in communal settings, including families with older teenage sons, multiple pets or complex needs.
<b>Sanctuary schemes</b>	Survivor-centred initiatives that enhance physical home security, with specialist DA support, allowing victims to remain safely in their homes if they choose (when the perpetrator does not live there).
<b>Move-on / second-stage accommodation</b>	Temporary homes for victims moving on from refuge or other safe settings who still require lower-level domestic abuse support before securing permanent housing.

## The Whole Housing Approach (WHA)

The Whole Housing Approach (WHA) provides the framework for delivering the Safe Accommodation Duty locally. It integrates housing, homelessness prevention, and domestic abuse support into a single system, covering all different types of housing including social housing, private rented, owner-occupied, and temporary accommodation.

Implementing a WHA across County Durham and Darlington creates opportunities for early intervention, keeps people safe in their homes, and reduces homelessness caused by domestic abuse. The model enables victims and survivors to either remain safely in their homes or access alternative accommodation where necessary, supported by trauma-informed, person-centred services.

## The National Plan to End Homelessness

Further guidance can also be found in [A National Plan to End Homelessness](#)

The National Plan to End Homelessness recognises domestic abuse as a significant driver of homelessness and identifies survivors as a priority group for prevention and support. It commits to earlier intervention so that people experiencing domestic abuse can remain safely housed wherever possible, including through a Whole Housing Approach and sanctuary-based options. The plan aligns homelessness policy with the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation duty, highlighting the need to remove practical barriers for survivors, such as issues around joint tenancies, local connection and housing-related debt.

## Local Delivery and Accommodation Options

Victims who need to escape abuse can apply for refuge and safe accommodation at any time, regardless of marital status, living arrangements, or whether they have children. Each service must assess individual risk factors, personal circumstances, and preferences to ensure that support is personalised and trauma informed.

Some victims may choose, or need, to relocate for safety reasons, while others may remain safely in their homes through Sanctuary or Remain Safe schemes. Where relocation is necessary, refuge placements can be made outside the local area to maintain confidentiality and reduce risk, supported through cross-boundary cooperation and reciprocal arrangements.

**Not all victims require refuge.**

**In County Durham and Darlington there is a range of safe accommodation pathways.**

**Having multiple pathways ensure that every victim, regardless of identity, family structure, or risk level, can access safe, appropriate housing and ongoing support.**

## Housing Prioritisation and Local Connection

To remove barriers and promote equality of access, this strategy ensures that victims of domestic abuse:

- **Are given appropriate priority within the local authority housing allocation schemes across County Durham and Darlington.**
- **Are not disadvantaged by residency or local connection requirements when fleeing from another area.**

**Housing and Homelessness Teams continue to work in partnership with Registered Housing Providers, specialist commissioned Support Services, and DASVEG to provide advocacy, advice, and safe housing options that promote long-term recovery and stability.**

## Strategic Direction

Delivery of the Safe Accommodation Strategy 2026–2029 will continue to be guided by the Whole Housing Approach partnership model. The focus remains on:

- **Preventing homelessness caused by domestic abuse.**
- **Supporting victims to remain safely at home, where appropriate and safe to do so.**
- **Providing a range of safe accommodation choices, including refuge, dispersed and sanctuary.**
- **Embedding trauma-informed and inclusive practice across all housing and support services.**
- **Using data and insight to understand need, equality impacts, and outcomes.**

Through this approach, County Durham and Darlington will continue to fulfil their statutory duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, while delivering an enhanced, coordinated housing and support system that ensures every victim and survivor can access safe, suitable, and sustainable accommodation free from violence, fear, and coercive control.

## Funding

Since 2021 local authorities have received ‘Domestic Abuse Act Part 4 Funding’ to specifically provide support to those in safe accommodation. It is vital that these funds continue to be dedicated for these purposes.

Local authorities continue to support community focussed domestic abuse support services (such as outreach services, perpetrator behaviour change programmes etc.) via other funding sources such as the Public Health grant.

# Wider Legislative and Strategic Alignment

The duty and this strategy align with a wide range of national and local frameworks, including:

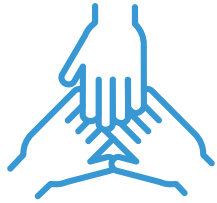
- **Domestic Abuse Act (2021)**
- **Serious Violence Duty (2022)**
- **Home Office Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan (2022)**
- **Victims and Prisoners Act (2024)**
- **Worker Protection Act (2024)**
- **Safe Durham Partnership Strategy (2024–2028)**
- **Freedom from Violence and Abuse: A Cross-Government Strategy to Build a Safer Society for Women and Girls (December 2025)**
- **Darlington Community Safety Plan 2026 refresh**
- **County Durham Vision 2035**

Together, these frameworks establish a shared commitment to improving safety, resilience, and recovery outcomes for all victims of domestic abuse, regardless of background or circumstance.



# The Council Plan 2025 - 2030 (Durham County Council)

The Durham County Council Plan 2025–2030 sets out the council's priorities and direction for the next five years, underpinned by five key ambitions:



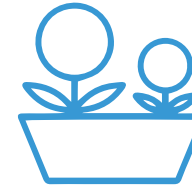
## Caring for our People



## Building Better Communities



## Reforming the Council



## A Practical Environmental Stewardship



## Supercharging our Economy

The Safe Accommodation Strategy aligns strongly with some of these ambitions, ensuring delivery of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 duties contributes to the wider corporate vision for County Durham.

## Caring for our People

The Safe Accommodation Strategy contributes directly to the ambition of caring for those who need it by providing support for victims in refuge, dispersed properties or by creating safe environments for people who chose to stay at home. This aligns with the Council Plan's objectives to ensure effective, high-quality, sustainable care and support services that enable vulnerable adults and children to live in a place they call home.

## Building Better Communities

Domestic abuse is a core community safety priority under the Safe Durham Partnership Strategy 2024–2028. Delivery of the Safe Accommodation Duty contributes to creating communities that are safe, connected, clean, and thriving. Through partnership with housing providers, voluntary agencies, and community organisations, the strategy promotes resilience, inclusion, and civic pride, ensuring all residents can live free from violence and fear.

## Reforming the Council

The Safe Accommodation Strategy supports the Council Plan's ambition to streamline processes and deliver value for money. Governance through the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group (DASVEG) ensures accountability, transparency, and performance oversight. Commissioning activity is data-led, outcome-focused, and aligned with statutory guidance and local transformation priorities.

Overall, through this alignment, delivery of the Safe Accommodation Strategy supports the County Durham Council Plan 2025–2030 by:

- **Protecting the most vulnerable residents through safe, stable housing and specialist support.**
- **Preventing homelessness and reducing demand on statutory services.**
- **Embedding partnership working, performance monitoring, and survivor voice within governance.**
- **Promoting resilient, inclusive, and connected communities.**
- **Ensuring that all actions deliver visible, practical benefits for residents.**

# The Darlington Council Plan 2024 - 2027

The Council plan outlines long term vision, ambitions and priorities for Darlington over the next 3 years. The plan has been shaped by 3 core principles:

- **addressing inequalities**
- **efficient and effective use of resources**
- **tackling climate change**

The plan recognises the fundamental links between health, wellbeing and the economy. It is shaped by the building blocks of good health with a focus on a good job, home and social connections.

The Safe Accommodation Strategy aligns strongly with some of these ambitions, ensuring delivery of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 duties contributes to the wider vision for Darlington.

The plan has six priorities for delivery to achieve these core principles, these are:

- **Economy**
- **Homes**
- **Living well**
- **Children and young people**
- **Communities**
- **Local environment**

Overall, delivery of the Safe Accommodation Strategy supports the Darlington Council Plan 2024 – 2027 by:

- **Protecting the most vulnerable residents through safe, stable housing and specialist support.**
- **Preventing homelessness and reducing demand on statutory services.**
- **Embedding partnership working, performance monitoring, and survivor voice within governance.**
- **Promoting resilient, inclusive, and connected communities.**
- **Ensuring that all actions deliver visible, practical benefits for residents.**

[Darlington Council Plan 2024-2027](#)



# Community Safety and Partnership Context

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 places a statutory duty on local authorities and named responsible agencies to form a Community Safety Partnership (CSP). These partnerships are responsible for tackling crime, disorder, anti-social behaviour, substance misuse, and other behaviour that adversely affects the local environment, as well as reducing re-offending and promoting community cohesion.

In County Durham, this duty is fulfilled by the Safe Durham Partnership (SDP), and in Darlington by the Darlington Community Safety Partnership (CSP). Both partnerships bring together representatives from local authorities, police, fire and rescue services, probation, health, and the voluntary and community sector to work collaboratively in preventing and responding to harm.

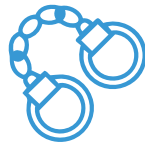
The Safe Durham Partnership Strategy 2024–2028 sets out a shared vision that **“People will feel safe and be safe”** and is aligned with the County Durham Vision 2035 ambition that



**People will live long and independent lives, connected to their communities.**



The SDP strategy focuses on protecting the most vulnerable, preventing harm, and promoting safer, more inclusive communities.



Darlington Community Safety Partnership remains committed to providing an environment where people can go about their everyday lives, day and night, confident in the knowledge that Darlington is 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.

Together, the Safe Durham Partnership and Darlington CSP provide the governance framework through which this Safe Accommodation Strategy is delivered.

# Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group (DASVEG)

The Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group (DASVEG) is the strategic multi-agency partnership for County Durham and Darlington, reporting into the Safe Durham Partnership and the Darlington Community Safety Partnership. It operates as the Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board, providing governance, oversight and assurance for the delivery of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 Safe Accommodation Duty.

DASVEG brings together statutory, voluntary and specialist partners from housing, public health, policing, health, children's services and criminal justice to deliver a coordinated, trauma-informed response to domestic abuse and sexual violence. The Group oversees system performance and demand through regular data review, embeds survivor voice and lived experience in service design and review, and provides assurance to senior leaders through formal reporting.

Its core functions include:

- **Evaluating performance and outcomes, embedding survivor voice and lived experience within all stages of service design and review.**
- **Sharing quarterly data reviews to monitor emerging trends and demand.**
- **Producing an annual report for senior leaders and scrutiny committees**
- **Reporting to the Safe Durham Partnership and Darlington CSP, providing assurance that local delivery continues to meet statutory requirements and contributes to safer, more resilient communities.**

Through this role, DASVEG ensures that the Safe Accommodation Strategy is delivered consistently across both areas, aligned with wider community safety and public health priorities, and focused on improving safety, access to support and long-term outcomes for victims and survivors.



**All agencies will work together to reduce the prevalence of domestic abuse, sexual violence, and all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG). A coordinated community response will continue to be developed to provide high-quality prevention, support, and protection services to all victims while effectively holding all perpetrators to account. Domestic Abuse, Sexual Violence and Violence Against Women and Girls will not be tolerated; perpetrators will be brought to justice, and victims and survivors will be supported, treated with dignity and respect, and helped to feel safe within their communities**



# Local Domestic Abuse Data

Domestic abuse is a cross-cutting issue that affects individuals and families across all socio-economic, geographical, and cultural groups. It is often a hidden crime, taking place in private settings with few witnesses, and is therefore widely under-reported and under-recorded.

Many incidents are not reported to the police, and prevalence estimates based on recorded crime only represent a partial picture of the true scale of harm within communities.

## Recorded Incidents and Crimes

There is no single criminal offence of “domestic abuse”, but many related offences including coercive and controlling behaviour, harassment, assault, criminal damage, sexual assault, attempted murder, and stalking.

Domestic abuse is therefore broader than any one category of offence and often overlaps with other forms of exploitation and vulnerability.

In the reporting year 2024/2025 Durham Constabulary recorded **20,811 domestic abuse related incidents and crimes across County Durham and Darlington, representing 18% of all recorded crime locally. Of these incidents, 57% were recorded as crimes, compared to 63% nationally (Durham Insights Domestic Abuse).**

Domestic abuse related crimes therefore continue to represent a significant proportion of overall police demand and remains a key driver of vulnerability, safeguarding concern, and repeat victimisation in the region.

Durham Constabulary works in partnership across the County Durham and Darlington domestic abuse system and is an active member of DASVEG, providing quarterly data and insight to inform strategic planning and commissioning.

# Local Domestic Abuse Data continued

## Aggravating Factors

Analysis of police data and the County Durham Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) Factsheet highlights key aggravating factors associated with domestic abuse:

**Alcohol was cited in approximately 43% of incidents (2022/23).**

**Mental health issues were identified in around 17% of incidents.**

**Substance misuse was a factor in approximately 4.6% of cases.**

**These factors frequently coexist, compounding risk and complexity for victims, children, and perpetrators, and requires a coordinated, trauma-informed, and multi-agency response.**

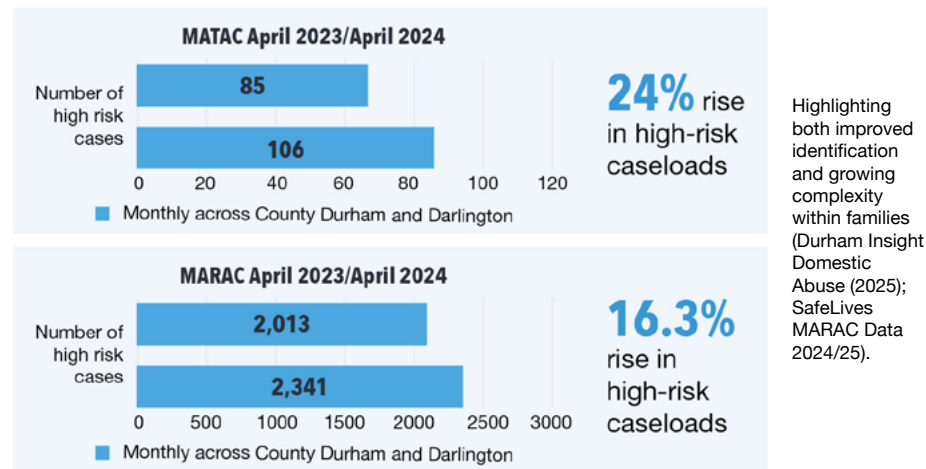


# MARAC and MATAAC County Durham and Darlington

## Multi-agency Risk Assessment (MARAC)

High-risk cases of domestic abuse are discussed through the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) process, coordinated by partners under the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group (DASVEG).

MARAC provides a structured, multi-agency approach to safeguarding those at highest risk of serious harm or homicide. Representatives from key agencies including; Durham Constabulary, DCC Planning and Housing, Children's Social Care, Health, Harbour Support Services, and other relevant partners share information to develop coordinated safety plans for victims and their children.



MARAC outcomes and actions are monitored quarterly through DASVEG, ensuring that system responses to high-risk domestic abuse remain effective and that lessons learnt, inform service delivery and commissioning decisions.

Local partners continue to focus on improving timeliness of referrals, increasing representation from specialist services (including health and education), and strengthening follow-up monitoring to ensure that victims receive ongoing support and protection.

## Multi-Agency Tasking and Coordination (MATAAC)

The Multi-Agency Tasking and Coordination (MATAAC) process operates alongside MARAC, focusing on perpetrator behaviour and system-wide accountability. Whereas MARAC centres on victim safety, MATAAC seeks to reduce offending and repeat victimisation by addressing the behaviour of those who cause harm.

MATAAC aims to:

- Prevent further domestic abuse offending by identifying repeat and serial perpetrators early.
- Improve victim safety through targeted disruption and monitoring of high-risk offenders.
- Change offending behaviour through coordinated intervention, rehabilitation, and enforcement.
- Strengthen partnership working across the domestic abuse system to ensure that responses are integrated and intelligence-led.

The process is coordinated by Durham Constabulary in partnership with probation, housing, health, Harbour Support Services, and DASVEG partners. Each MATAAC meeting reviews individuals who present a pattern of high-risk or repeat domestic abuse offending and agrees proportionate actions ranging from early intervention and safeguarding, to arrest, enforcement, or referral to perpetrator programmes.

The MATAAC approach in County Durham and Darlington is now well established as a core element of the local domestic abuse system, ensuring that victim safety and perpetrator accountability are addressed in tandem. Through shared information and targeted disruption, MATAAC complements MARAC by focusing on the root causes of abuse and preventing escalation or recurrence.

# 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 domestic abuse are victims in their own right. Statutory guidance under the Act requires that support is available to all victims, including children, within safe accommodation and the wider domestic abuse system. Domestic abuse remains one of the most significant safeguarding risks for children, profoundly affecting their emotional, physical, and cognitive development. It is consistently among the top three reasons for referral into Children's Social Care across County Durham and Darlington.

Under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, local authorities must assess need and provide safe accommodation and associated support for all victims, including children. The Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 further strengthens these duties through Operation Encompass, ensuring schools are promptly informed when a child has been exposed to domestic abuse so they can provide timely support.

While this Safe Accommodation Strategy 2025–2028 fulfils these statutory obligations, partners across County Durham and Darlington are committed to going further, aiming to support every child affected by domestic abuse, by early identification of need, effective support, and the ability to thrive in a safe, nurturing, and stable environment.



# 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**



# Support for victims with complex needs and vulnerable groups

Domestic abuse can affect anyone, regardless of background or circumstance. However, evidence from the 2024/2025 DASVEG Annual Report shows that some groups are at greater risk of experiencing abuse, face additional barriers to seeking help, and often require tailored support to meet their needs safely and effectively.

Providing additional support for victims with protected characteristics and/or complex needs remains a key priority within this strategy. Those identified as being at higher risk or underrepresented in services include:

- **People from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities**
- **People with disabilities**
- **LGBTQ+ individuals**
- **Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities**
- **Older people**

In addition, a number of factors increase vulnerability and risk, including:

- **Gender**
- **Pregnancy**
- **Low income and financial dependence**
- **Living in a rural community**
- **Age (younger women and older people at particular risk)**
- **Relationship separation**
- **Perpetrator's previous offending history**
- **Drug and alcohol misuse**
- **Mental health issues and multiple disadvantage**

**These intersecting vulnerabilities can intensify both the frequency and severity of abuse and limit opportunities for victims to access support. The Safe Accommodation Strategy 2026–2029 commits to addressing these inequalities through data collection (to inform the needs), commissioning, and service improvement.**

# Housing and Safe Accommodation Data

Just over half of domestic abuse victims need some form of support with housing, and there is 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**
- **Remain Safe Scheme and the Sanctuary Scheme provide target hardening and wrap around support to victims, including children and young people, living in the property.**

## Demand and Access

**954 referrals were made into safe accommodation services in County Durham during 2024/25, a similar level to the previous year.**

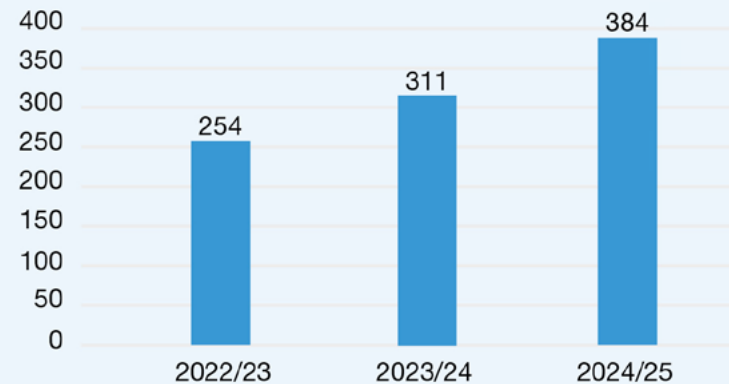
The number of women supported in safe accommodation increased year-on-year:

- **254 in 2022/23**
- **311 in 2023/24**
- **384 in 2024/25**

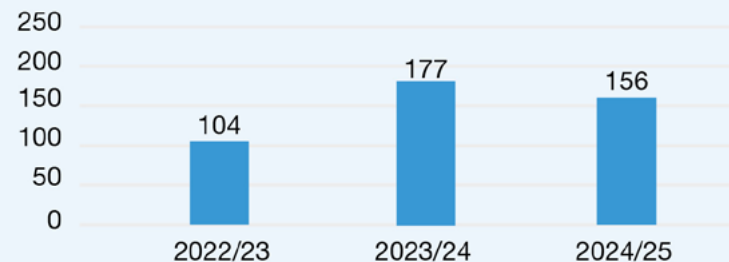
The figures for Darlington for the last three financial years are as follows:

- **104 in 2022/23**
- **177 in 2023/24**
- **156 in 2024/25**

**Durham - the number of women supported in safe accommodation increased year on year**



**Darlington - the number of women supported in safe accommodation**



In County Durham 177 homes were supported by the Remain Safe/ Sanctuary Scheme in 2024/25. Up from 72 in 2022/23 and 126 in 2023/24 showing rising demand for stay-safe-at-home solutions.

In 2024/25 Darlington Borough Council supported 50 homes under the Sanctuary scheme.

# Housing and Safe Accommodation Data

## Refuge and Dispersed Provision

County Durham and Darlington maintain a variety of accommodation options.

**County Durham has 32 Refuge places for women and their children experiencing domestic abuse.**

**County Durham has 27 dispersed properties for any gender victim of domestic abuse.**

**Darlington Borough Council has one refuge that can accommodate eight women plus children at any one time. There is also dispersed property and hostel provision.**

**In 2024/25, Darlington's hostel provision is female only and has supported 115 people.**

**Occupancy rates across County Durham and Darlington for all the accommodation remains high (typically 90-100%)**



Most referrals originate from Durham Constabulary, self-referrals, and Children's Services consistently the top three referral routes over the past three years.

The majority of victims in safe accommodation are female (approx. 93%), with men and LGBTQ+ survivors making up a small but growing proportion of referrals.



# Housing and Safe Accommodation Data

## Children in Temporary Accommodation

Children living in temporary accommodation is an area of increasing concern due to rising levels of homelessness linked to domestic abuse.

For example, in County Durham in 2024/25, a total of 208 households (including 357 children) were provided with temporary accommodation as a result of homelessness. Of these, 45 households (including 87 children) were accommodated specifically due to domestic abuse.

In Darlington 2024/25, 156 households approached us for housing advice due to a threat of domestic abuse.

61 households were placed due to domestic abuse, including 24 children. 16 of these were households placed in commissioned safe supported accommodation (9 children).

This data underlines the need for continued focus on safe, stable housing options that prevent repeat homelessness and minimise the disruption to children's education, routines, and emotional wellbeing.

## System Trends and Pressures

Demand for safe accommodation continues to rise in line with national trends and local population growth.


Complex needs (mental health, substance use, financial hardship) are present in more than one-third of referrals, an increase in male victims, families with older male teenage children, larger family groups all increase the need for dispersed property accommodation with multi-agency support models.

Rural access challenges remain, with transport and digital exclusion limiting choice for some victims.

The sustainability of the Part 4 Domestic Abuse funding beyond 2025/26 is critical to maintaining current capacity.

## Outcomes

In County Durham Safe Accommodation Clients say:

 **'I would like to thank everyone for all the support over the past few weeks, it really has been an enjoyable time.....considering'**

**'Made to feel very welcome. Room very spacious, warm, enough safety in place. Staff really helpful, will go above and beyond for me and my 10-month-old daughter. Very happy in here Thank you. X'**

**'Thank you with everything you have helped me with, you have been a God send. Thank you!'**

**'Thank you for running this place and for keeping so many of us women safe. So Grateful!!'**

**'Thank you for everything. I'm so grateful for this place & how it saved me'**

**'Finally fled the bird nest... Thank you for your continued support. We will be forever grateful for all the help!'**

In Darlington safe accommodation clients say:

**'Absolutely fantastic service that has really helped to change my life around'**

**'I just want to say a huge thank you to everyone, they were all so supportive and helped me to leave the fear of my ex behind'**

These outcomes demonstrate the effectiveness of coordinated housing and support services in improving long-term recovery and stability.



# Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy - Key Priorities

This strategy sets out a whole-system commitment to ensuring that victims and survivors of domestic abuse are safe, heard, and supported to recover and rebuild their lives. Survivor and victim voice will remain central to decision making, shaping commissioning, service design, and evaluation to ensure responses are trauma-informed, inclusive, and accountable. The strategy prioritises early identification, intervention, and prevention to reduce harm, prevent homelessness, and stop abuse from escalating. It recognises that some groups face greater risk and additional barriers, and commits to providing a diverse and accessible safe accommodation offer that meets the needs of all

victims, including those with complex needs, men and boys, and marginalised communities. Children and young people are recognised as victims in their own right, with a clear focus on ensuring safe accommodation provides appropriate emotional, therapeutic, and practical support to break cycles of harm. Strong leadership, effective governance, high-quality data, and a skilled multi-agency workforce will underpin delivery, ensuring sustainability, continuous improvement, and accountability through Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group in line with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

- 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: Leadership, Governance and Sustainability



# Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy - Key Priorities

## Priority One

1

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

Victim and survivor voices have shaped this strategy, highlighting the need to be believed, to name abuse early, and to access long-term, trauma-informed support.

Survivors emphasised stronger enforcement of protection orders and raised concerns about post-separation abuse through child contact and legal processes. They also called for better education in schools and consistent, trauma-aware responses across health, housing, schools, and workplaces.

Victim participation brings authenticity, insight, and accountability to system improvement, while peer support offers empowerment, recovery, and shared understanding within a whole-system approach.

### **Statement of intent:**

**Ensure that the lived experiences of victims and survivors inform all aspects of safe accommodation commissioning, service design, and evaluation. Establish consistent mechanisms to capture and use survivor feedback across agencies, in line with SafeLives' *Authentic Voice* principles and DASVEG procedures.**



# Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy - Key Priorities

## Priority Two

2

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

Early identification and intervention in domestic abuse, including access to safe accommodation, reduces harm and prevents homelessness. Domestic abuse is a leading cause of homelessness for women, often linked to rent arrears or property damage caused by abuse. Supporting survivors to stay safely in their homes through initiatives like the Sanctuary Scheme protects tenancies, improves outcomes for families, and prevents escalation to crisis or homicide.

### Statement of intent:

**Strengthen early identification and ensure all victims can access safe, appropriate accommodation and support at the earliest opportunity.**



# 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, members of the GRT community, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ and older people.

Consideration must also be given to a range of complicating factors including drug and alcohol misuse and mental health issues that can contribute to difficulties in accessing support.

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.

### Statement of intent:

**Provide a diverse and high-quality range of safe accommodation options that meet the needs of all victims and survivors, regardless of gender, household type, or complexity of need.**



# 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 local authorities to provide support to victims of domestic abuse, including children who are recognised in law as victims in their own right. Local intelligence shows high numbers of children and young people affected by domestic abuse, highlighting the need for trauma-informed, recovery-focused support to help them heal and break the cycle of abuse.

### **Statement of intent:**

**Recognise children and young people as victims in their own right and ensure that all safe accommodation provides appropriate emotional, therapeutic, and practical support.**



# Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy - Key Priorities

## Priority Five

5

### Leadership, Governance and Sustainability

Strong leadership, effective governance, and a skilled, data-informed workforce are central to delivering a coordinated and sustainable response to domestic abuse across County Durham and Darlington.

A key element of an effective whole-system approach is the ability to collect, share, and interpret high-quality local data. Consistent recording and performance monitoring enable partnerships to understand demand, track outcomes, and make informed commissioning decisions.

Across County Durham and Darlington, multi-agency data arrangements are continuing to be developed to better allow DASVEG and partners to monitor system performance, evaluate impact, and target resources effectively.

Workforce development is equally vital. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places clear emphasis on a whole-system, multi-agency approach to training and professional development. Embedding a consistent understanding of the statutory definition of domestic abuse, trauma-informed practice, and safe accommodation pathways will ensure that all partners can respond confidently and compassionately.

### Statement of intent:

**To maintain strong multi-agency leadership and governance that ensures accountability, sustainability, and continuous improvement. This includes strengthening data and performance frameworks, embedding multi-agency workforce development, and maintaining robust, inclusive commissioning and funding aligned with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.**



**MAKING DARLINGTON SAFER**

Safer People, Safer Places



**DARLINGTON**  
Borough Council



**Durham**  
County Council