

WEST BERKSHIRE DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY

2023-2027

In accordance with part 4 of the the Domestic Abuse Act (2021)



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A note on terminology:

Victim/survivor: We interchangeably use these terms to respect diverse experiences. We recognise that individuals with lived experience may relate differently to these terms. In most cases we have used the term “victim” to reflect ongoing abuse, and “survivor” to reflect victims journeys to recover from abuse. In all instances where we refer to victim-survivors this encompasses all ages, aligning with the DA Act’s recognition of children as victims in their own right.

Sex/gender: We acknowledge women are disproportionately affected by domestic abuse. We have used neutral language throughout to recognise anyone can experience abuse. However our delivery plan will include specific approaches based on the needs of different communities.

FOREWORD

In unveiling this comprehensive domestic abuse strategy, we embark on a critical journey toward fostering safety, respect, and dignity for all individuals in our community. Domestic abuse is a pervasive issue that transcends demographics, impacting people from all walks of life. It is a societal challenge that requires our collective commitment, attention, and a united front to dismantle its roots. Domestic abuse is everyone’s business. This strategy underscores our understanding that only through collaboration, across our communities, organisations, and individuals, can we create a District where no one lives in fear.

Recognising that domestic abuse can happen to anyone, irrespective of socio-economic status or geographic location, is paramount. Even in a relatively affluent, rural area like West Berkshire, we acknowledge that the experience of domestic abuse and the barriers to seeking help may be nuanced. This strategy stands as an affirmation that no community is immune, and our proactive measures are designed to address the unique challenges that may arise in diverse circumstances.

At its core, this strategy adopts a prevention-focused approach. We firmly believe that the most effective way to address domestic abuse is by tackling it at its roots, by fostering awareness, education, and community engagement. However, prevention does not mean turning a blind eye to those who have already suffered or dismissing the gravity of their experiences. This strategy strikes a delicate balance, ensuring that our proactive measures coexist with robust mechanisms to hold those causing harm accountable for their actions.

Central to our approach is the invaluable insight derived from individuals with lived experience. We have listened to their stories, learned from their resilience, and are committed to centering their voices in all facets of our strategy. Their perspectives will continually inform our policies, programs, and interventions, ensuring that our efforts remain grounded in the realities faced by survivors.

As we embark on the implementation of this domestic abuse strategy, we urge every member of society to be an active participant in this transformative process. Together, let us strive for a world where homes are sanctuaries of love and safety, and where no one has to endure the pain of domestic abuse. This strategy is a testament to our shared commitment to ensuring West Berkshire is a place where everyone can live free from fear.

Janine Lewis

Portfolio Lead for Culture, Leisure, Countryside, Public Health and Sport, West Berkshire Council.



WHAT IS DOMESTIC ABUSE

1

Defining domestic abuse

The Domestic Abuse Act (2021) introduced the first statutory definition for domestic abuse. Abusive behaviour is defined as:

- **physical or sexual abuse**
- **violent or threatening behaviour**
- **controlling or coercive behaviour**
- **economic abuse. Including behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on a person. Their ability to obtain, use, or maintain money or property, or obtain goods or services**
- **psychological, emotional or other abuse**
- **It does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a pattern of behaviour.**

Domestic abuse does not only happen in current romantic relationships. It can occur if the people involved:

- are, or have been, married to each other
- are, or have been, civil partners of each other
- have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated)
- have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been terminated)
- are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other
- there has been a time when the each have had a parental relationship in relation to the same child
- are relatives*

Domestic abuse can affect anyone. Regardless of age, gender identity, sex, race, sexual orientation, wealth, disability or location of the victim or perpetrator.

*Although the DA Act does not include Child and Adolescent to Parent Violence Abuse (CAPVA) within the definition, our approach in West Berkshire will include this as a specific type of domestic abuse.

Did you know?

Domestic abuse is often referred to as a 'hidden crime'. Domestic abuse largely happens behind closed doors or out of sight of others. It's also an under reported crime. Victims may fear not being believed or what might happen if they do report abuse. Or fears they may face barriers in accessing support. Therefore, it's likely that reported statistics will be much lower than real abuse levels.

How common is domestic abuse?

5%

of people over 16 in England and Wales experience domestic abuse every year.

35%

of all homicides in England and Wales are due to domestic abuse.

Every
30
sec

the police receive a call relating to domestic abuse.

Common myths

Myth

Victims can easily leave abusive relationships if they want to.

Fact

Leaving an abusive relationship is complex and can be dangerous. Factors such as fear, financial dependence, and emotional ties may complicate the decision to leave.

Myth

Abusers are always easily identifiable by their appearance or behavior.

Fact

Abusers can present themselves as charming and amiable, making it challenging for others to recognise their abusive tendencies.

Myth

Domestic abuse is a result of stress or anger issues and can be easily resolved.

Fact

Domestic abuse is about power and control, not just a momentary loss of temper. It requires comprehensive intervention and support to address underlying issues.

WHAT DO WE KNOW IN WEST BERKSHIRE

2

Data from agencies



25,500

people will experience domestic abuse over their lifetime in West Berkshire

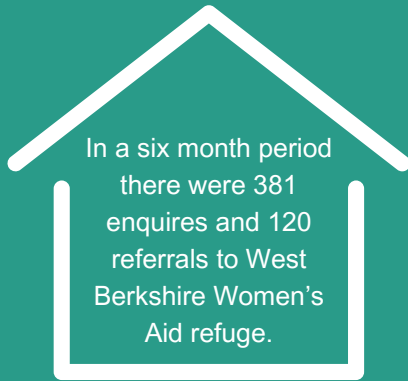
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victims at high risk of harm or homicide were referred to the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC).

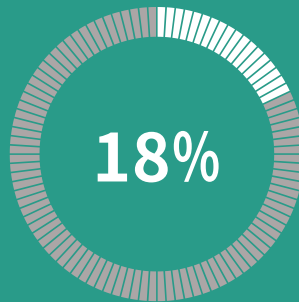


13%

of Children's Services contacts were due to domestic abuse as a primary reason, with many more cases finding it as a feature.



In a six month period there were 381 enquires and 120 referrals to West Berkshire Women's Aid refuge.



18%

of crimes reported to Thames Valley Police were due to domestic abuse.



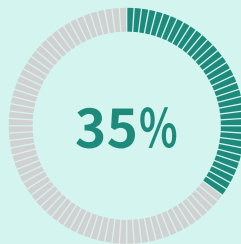
One in five

homelessness applications were related to domestic abuse.

Victims experiences

71%

of victims in West Berkshire told us the person abusing them kept track of where they went or how they spent time.

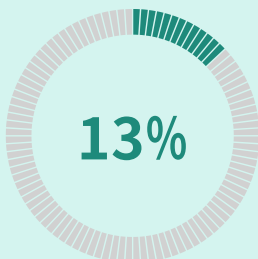


35%

of victims said the perpetrator had physically forced them in to sex or sexual activity. This is a crime.

Adult victim

I was scared of losing my friends and them siding with him and not believing me. The main thing was what he would do if he found out.

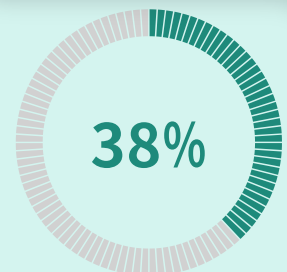


13%

of victims in West Berkshire reported everything to the police.

Child victim

We had to call the police and they sorted it – my Dad ran off when the police came, and they stopped and checked that we were ok, and then went after him.



38%

did not think they would be taken seriously if they told people what was happening.

Adult victim

I didn't know it was abuse at the time until the medical staff pointed it out and sign posted me to help.



93%

of victims said the most important thing they needed from support was confidentiality.

Child victim

I had about 12 different social workers – I had to tell them what had happened again and again. They didn't write it down and share it with the next one, they had to hear it themselves.

OUR APPROACH

3

We will deliver a coordinated community response

The Coordinated Community Response (CCR) is integral to our strategy, emphasising the imperative of collective action in addressing domestic abuse within West Berkshire. We acknowledge that fostering genuine change in our response to and eradication of domestic abuse necessitates effective collaboration among all relevant agencies, residents, and communities

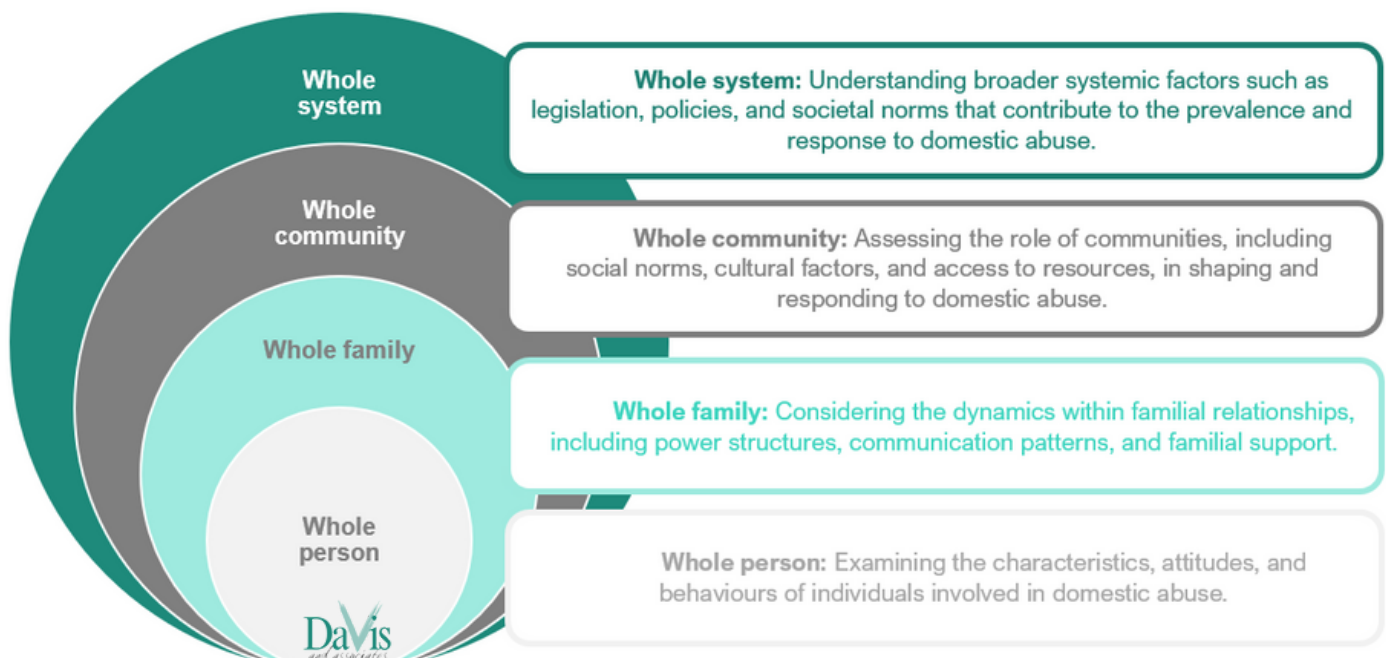
As survivors embark on their journey, they may interact with various services, organisations, and individuals, each holding crucial information pivotal to constructing a comprehensive support system. Our commitment to CCR ensures that survivors are not burdened with navigating an intricate web of services but receive seamless assistance. It involves clarifying the roles of all stakeholders in responding to domestic abuse and establishing cohesive collaboration, creating a unified approach that addresses the entire spectrum of a survivor's needs. We are dedicated to clarifying the roles of all stakeholders and fostering cohesive collaboration to ensure that survivors receive comprehensive support that addresses all their needs.

We will adopt a trauma-informed approach

Our commitment to a trauma-informed approach lies at the core of our strategy, recognising the profound impact of domestic abuse on survivors and the necessity for sensitivity in our response. We understand that individuals who have experienced trauma may interact with various services and support systems. In adopting a trauma-informed framework, we prioritise creating an environment that fosters safety, trust, and empowerment for survivors throughout their journey. We strive to empower survivors with choice and autonomy, acknowledging the importance of their voices in shaping their recovery. Through this trauma-informed lens, we aim to transform our response into one that not only addresses the immediate needs of survivors but also promotes healing, resilience, and a sense of control over their own lives.

We will work across all ecological levels

Our approach will use the ecological model of violence prevention to guide all of our work. The ecological model stands as the key to achieving enduring change in addressing domestic abuse by recognising that its multifaceted nature necessitates interventions across all levels—individual, family, community, and local systems—where a complex interplay of factors contributes to its occurrence. By collaborating across these dimensions, we target the broader context of domestic abuse, aiming for long term, cultural change. We strive to create an environment where domestic abuse is increasingly unacceptable, fostering change across different levels and ensuring collective contributions to transform the culture surrounding domestic abuse in our strategy.



WHAT WILL WE DO TO STOP DOMESTIC ABUSE

4

Starting with *why*

We heard from survivors the devastating impact domestic abuse continues to have in West Berkshire. No one should live with these consequences, and that is why we will work with a prevention focus to make long term, sustainable changes. Our 'why' will remain focussed on how we can improve **outcomes** for victims and survivors, including children, keeping them at the heart of all we do.

It was just caving in on me, and I did feel really, really low and started to think, actually, anything's better than being with him anymore and didn't even want to live really, at that point.

It's so subtle in a lot of ways that the combined effect of it all is absolutely devastating. And it changes you as a person, and it destroys everything about you, and the effects of it aren't just gonna last my lifetime. They're lasting my children's lifetimes now.

Our vision

West Berkshire will be a place where every individual, family, and community lives unrestrained by domestic abuse, cultivating a haven of safety and well-being by preventing harm as early as possible.

What outcomes are we focussing on?

Increasing safety

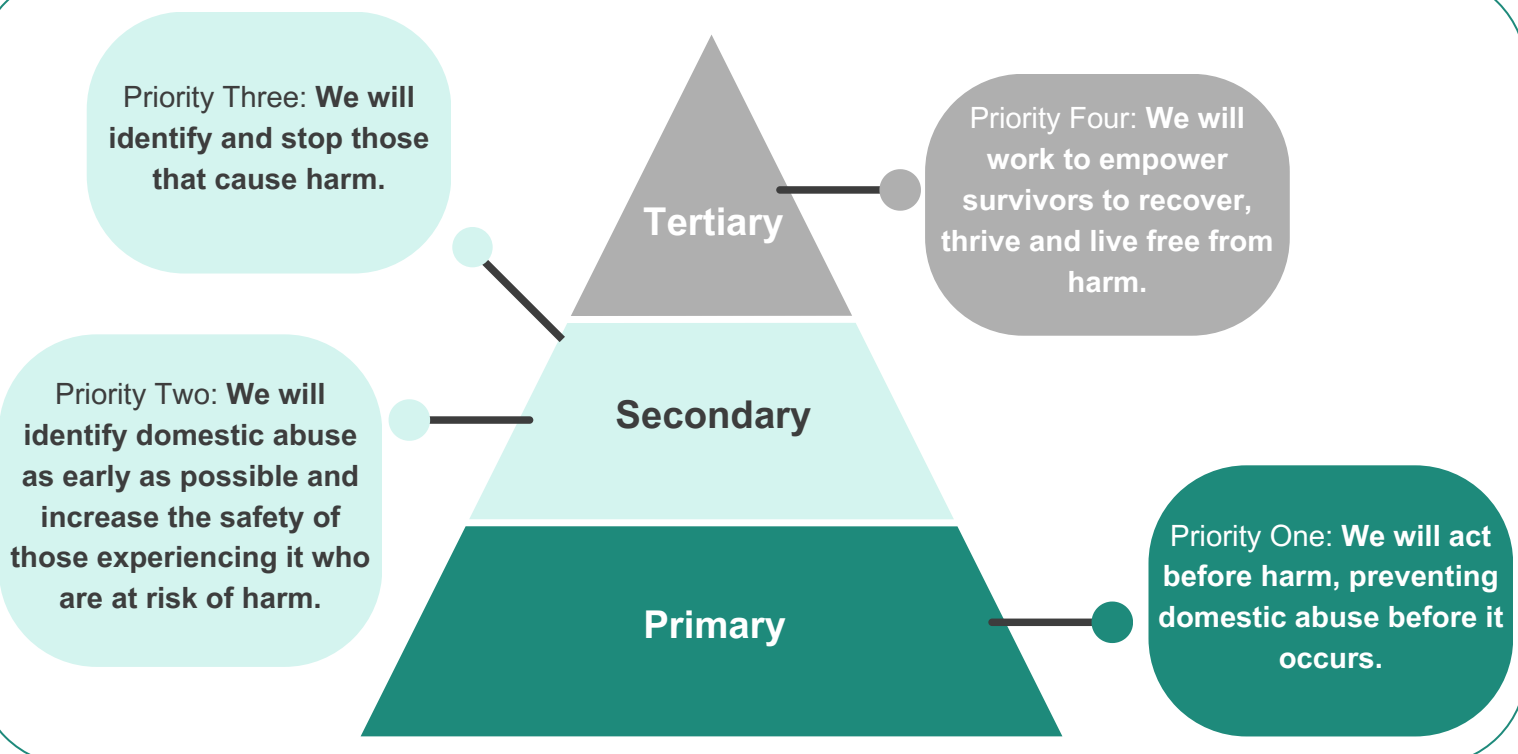
Being 'safe' is the condition of being protected from or unlikely to cause danger, risk, or injury. This can be physical safety, but we recognise that safety is also emotional and psychological safety.

Decreasing harm

Harm refers to the negative consequence or impact an individual might experience.

Our priorities

Our commitment to eradicating domestic abuse within West Berkshire extends beyond a reactive stance; it is rooted in a robust, prevention-focused model that aligns with the principles of the ecological framework. At the heart of our strategy lies the dedication to act before harm, ushering in a new era where prevention is paramount. We recognise that domestic abuse is complex, and experiences are not linear. These priorities are not aimed to be delivered in this way, rather simultaneously to ensure that the intersectionality of experiences is recognised.



HOW WE WILL ACHIEVE OUR PRIORITIES

5

By working together..

Our strategy recognises the complexity of addressing domestic abuse and emphasises collaboration as a cornerstone of our approach. We are committed to working closely as a partnership including police, probation, health, children's services, educational institutions, community and voluntary organisations, and other stakeholders. Through strong partnerships, we aim to create a united front against domestic abuse, ensuring a coordinated and effective response.

Our partnership includes:



with effective governance..

The effective implementation of our strategy relies on a robust governance structure led by the West Berkshire Domestic Abuse Board. This board serves as the cornerstone of our commitment to transparency, accountability, and collaborative decision-making.

Leadership and Representation:

The Board comprises leaders from key partner agencies, ensuring a comprehensive and multi-disciplinary approach.

Regular Oversight and Collaboration:

To maintain an active and responsive approach, the Board convenes on a quarterly basis. This regular schedule ensures ongoing oversight, facilitates collaboration, and allows for prompt adjustments to emerging needs or challenges.

Integration within the Local Governance Framework:

The Board operates within the wider governance framework of the West Berkshire Building Communities Together Partnership. As an integral part of this partnership, the Health and Wellbeing Board maintains overall oversight. This alignment reflects our commitment to integrating domestic abuse prevention and support within the broader health and community agenda.

Community Engagement:

Recognising the importance of community perspectives, the governance structure encourages active engagement with local communities, individuals with lived experiences, and advocacy groups. This inclusive approach ensures that the strategy remains responsive to the diverse needs of our community.

..and clear monitoring.

Monitoring and Evaluation:

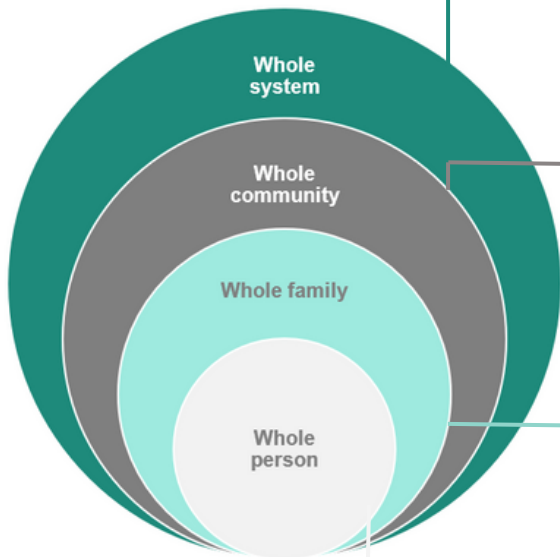
The Board is dedicated to a rigorous monitoring and evaluation process to continually assess the impact of the strategy. Through regular reviews and assessments, we will employ evidence-based decision-making, enabling us to adapt our approach based on real-time insights and emerging best practices.

Transparent Reporting:

To uphold transparency and accountability, the Board commits to regular and open reporting. Progress updates, key achievements, and challenges will be communicated openly, fostering trust. As part of our commitment to transparency, an annual delivery plan will be established. This plan, following the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) criteria and RAG (Red, Amber, Green) rating system, will comprehensively report progress against objectives through the delivery of specific actions. This annual plan will serve as a dynamic tool, providing a clear roadmap for our endeavours and ensuring accountability to our community.

5

Priority one: Act before harm.



- Implement a coordinated communication and awareness campaign approach targeting societal attitudes and beliefs, fostering a culture that rejects violence.
- Establish a system-level approach for ongoing evaluation and research, assessing the long-term impact of prevention efforts and refining strategies based on evidence.

- Develop and integrate a comprehensive domestic abuse 'whole setting' offer for education settings at the community level, fostering awareness and prevention strategies to cultivate a generation that rejects abusive behaviours.
- Develop and implement prevention strategies at the community level that are culturally competent, addressing the diverse needs of the community, particularly for West Berkshire's largest minority communities.

- Facilitate community-based initiatives at the family level to challenge harmful gender norms and promote healthy relationships.
- Implement a proactive strategy at the family level to identify and offer intensified support to families showing evidence-based domestic abuse risk factors. Focus on early intervention for families experiencing heightened stressors such as family conflict, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), and socioeconomic deprivation.

- Implement programs to promote economic empowerment for individuals, fostering independence to reduce vulnerability and increase resilience.

Our objectives

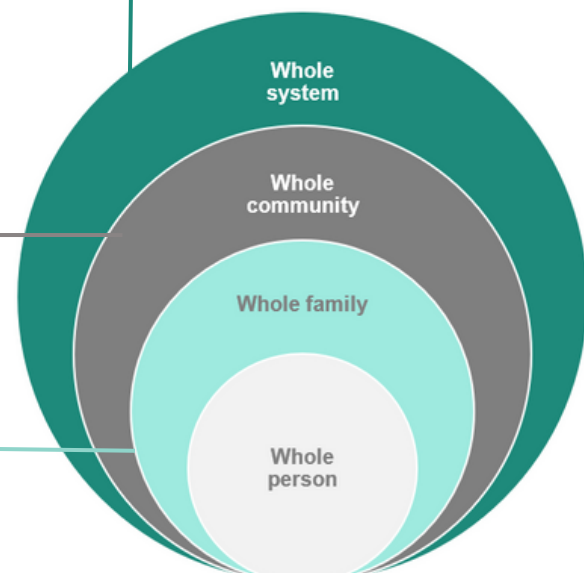
Priority two: Increasing safety for victims.

- Implement a coordinated education and awareness approach, including colocation where appropriate, for professionals to ensure they can spot the signs, undertake relevant risk assessments and offer information, advice and support.
- Reporting to the domestic abuse Board, develop performance and quality assurance processes across all organisations to ensure an effective response.
- Strengthen the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) process to ensure victims at the highest risk are adequately safeguarded.
- Explore how we could create an integrated pathway that seamlessly connects specialist domestic abuse service providers together to coordinate all referrals, assessments and support for victims and survivors through a triage type model so victims get the right support as soon as possible.

- Implement approaches to empower communities across West Berkshire to actively recognise, respond, and intervene when signs of domestic abuse are observed.
- Develop and implement a targeted community-level initiative to reach less visible families, particularly those residing in rural, affluent, and older communities prevalent in West Berkshire.

- Develop and implement a comprehensive, integrated support system to ensure a cohesive and joined-up approach for the whole family to enhance coordination and communication among various support services, providing a seamless pathway for families at risk of domestic abuse to access necessary resources and assistance.
- Enhance domestic abuse training across early intervention touchpoints, ensuring individuals at schools and Family Hubs can adeptly identify signs of domestic abuse and make informed referrals.

- Enhance the accessibility of support services for victims of domestic abuse by developing comprehensive resources/education and awareness to ensure individuals know where and how to seek help.
- Ensure there are high quality specialist support services for victims including children who are experiencing domestic abuse.

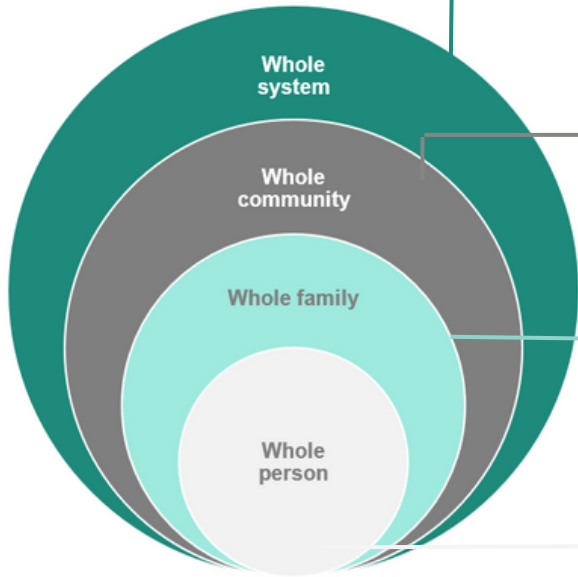


Our objectives

5

Priority three: Stopping those causing harm.

Our objectives



- Establish a comprehensive partnership approach for managing perpetrators, including protocols for collaboration among police, social services, and rehabilitation programs to ensure a coordinated response at every level of risk.

- Develop campaigns and initiatives to challenge problematic views, e.g. of masculinity, and cultural norms that perpetuate harmful behaviour to enhance community awareness by fostering a culture that rejects harmful actions and promotes healthier expressions of masculinity.

- Develop and implement a family-centered approach to provide comprehensive support for those choosing to stay together ensuring that the perpetrator is actively engaged and visible within the support framework.

- Develop and implement individual-focused intervention programs to address the specific needs of those using harmful behaviour, including children and adolescents as well as adults. Tailor interventions based on risk assessments and ensure access to broader services that may create barriers to change (e.g. substance use, housing).

Priority four: Empowering survivors to thrive.

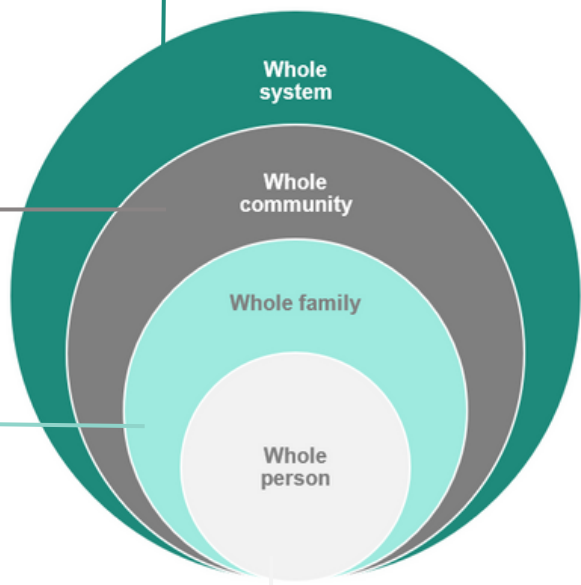
Our objectives

- Increase the housing related options available for survivors through a whole housing approach which includes Council, social housing providers and key professionals from money advice/financial support services to enable survivors to rebuild their lives, addressing financial stability and secure housing.
- Empower individuals with lived experience to actively shape the response to domestic abuse in West Berkshire ensuring their insights and perspectives inform policy development, services, and awareness campaigns.

- Support capacity building across the community and voluntary sector to establish and nurture peer support networks across communities in West Berkshire for ongoing longer term support.
- Develop and implement initiatives to support children impacted by domestic abuse in their education by collaborating with schools and wider stakeholders to address their unique challenges to ensure children receive the necessary support to thrive academically and emotionally.

- Build awareness and support options around child contact and post-separation abuse for social workers and children service practitioners to highlight nuanced challenges and risks associated with child contact in cases involving domestic abuse.

- Improve survivors access to legal advice by developing a legal support network to foster collaboration between domestic abuse commissioners, providers and local legal organisations.
- Empower survivors with the tools to navigate the psychological impacts of domestic abuse, fostering resilience and facilitating a path toward long-term recovery.





The development of this strategy was coordinated by Davis and Associates, a specialist violence reduction consultancy service, commissioned by West Berkshire's Domestic Abuse Board, For more information about West Berkshire's domestic abuse response contact westberksbct@westberks.gov.uk.