

# Luton domestic abuse strategy

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## Introduction

Domestic abuse has a devastating impact on victims, their families, friends and the wider community. It is an issue which threatens the physical and mental wellbeing of those it affects, damaging relationships with others and limiting the ability of individuals and families to live safe, happy, productive and fulfilling lives.

This strategy aims to raise awareness of the impact, prevalence and causes of domestic abuse in all its forms, to improve outcomes for those affected by it and help them to break the cycle of domestic abuse and go on to live a life free from its effects.

Domestic abuse costs society around **£66 billion pounds annually**. This includes:

- the physical and emotional harm suffered by the victims themselves: **£47 billion**
- lost output relating to time taken off work and reduced productivity afterwards: **£14 billion**
- estimated cost to society for a single victim of domestic abuse: **£34,015**

[See the economic and social costs of domestic abuse](#) (1).

The [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) has introduced a new [two part cross-government statutory definition of domestic abuse](#) and also places a new statutory duty on local authorities in England to provide support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other safe accommodation.

## Definitions

### New definition in part 1, subsection 1

The new act and states that:

- the behaviour of person (a) towards another person (b) is domestic abuse if:
  - a and b are each aged 16 or over
  - a and b are personally connected to each other
  - the behaviour is abusive
- behaviour is abusive if it consists of any of the following:
  - physical or sexual abuse
  - violent, threatening, controlling or coercive behaviour
  - economic abuse
  - psychological, emotional or other abuse

It doesn't matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct. Economic abuse means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on b's ability to:

- acquire, use or maintain money or other property
- obtain goods or services

For the purposes of this act a's behaviour may be behaviour towards b, despite the fact that it consists of conduct directed at another person (for example, b's child).

### Part 2 subsection (1) of the act defines a personal connection

1. For the purposes of this act, two people are personally connected to each other if any of the following applies:
  - a) they are, or have been, married to each other
  - b) they are, or have been, civil partners of each other
  - c) they have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated)
  - d) they have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been terminated)
  - e) they are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other
  - f) they each have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child
  - g) they are relatives
2. In this section 'child' means a person under the age of 18 years. For the purposes of subsection 1f, a person has a parental relationship in relation to a child if either:
  - a) the person is a parent of the child

- b) the person has parental responsibility for the child

## Who is affected by domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is considered a gender biased crime, with significantly more female victims coming forward to report abuse than men. Women are:

- more likely to experience repeat victimisation (Walby & Towers, 2017; Walby & Allen, 2004)
- according to the Office of National Statistics in 2019, much more likely to be physically injured or killed as result of domestic abuse
- more likely to experience higher levels of fear and are more likely to be subjected to coercive and controlling behaviours (Dobash & Dobash, 2004; Hester, 2013; Myhill, 2015; Myhill, 2017)

Locally, data from Bedfordshire police shows that between April and December 2020 approximately **76% of the 4,582 domestic abuse crimes and incidents reported**, were those against women.

Men are also subjected to abuse by female partners and both men and women experience abuse from same sex partners. Data provided by Mankind suggests that only about half of male victims tell anyone about the abuse they are experiencing ([see statistics on male victims of domestic abuse](#)).

The proportion is significantly less for men and women experiencing abuse from same sex partners who may also have their sexuality and gender identity used against them by their perpetrator.

**3.5% of cases** being heard at Luton's Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) during 2020 were for **male victims** and **less than 1% were for victims that identified as LGBT+**.

Children experiencing or exposed to domestic abuse suffer a range of harms that can last into adulthood and have multiple physical and mental health consequences. Research by SafeLives ([see effective help for children living with domestic abuse](#)) suggests that 62% of children living with domestic abuse are directly harmed by the perpetrator of the abuse, in addition to the harm caused by witnessing the abuse of others.

One in seven (14%) of children and young people under the age of 18 will have lived with domestic violence at some point in their childhood ([see the survivor's handbook - Women's Aid](#)) and the [Crime Survey for England and Wales \(CSEW\) in March 2020](#) showed that females aged 16 to 19 years were significantly more likely to be victims of any domestic abuse than all other age groups.

Luton's Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) dealt with over 2400 contacts related to children and domestic abuse in 2019-20 which represented 25% of all contacts for the reporting period.

Domestic abuse can affect anyone; regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, sexuality, background, circumstances or status. There are a variety of characteristics that can make some individuals more vulnerable to abuse, these characteristics include:

- being female
- being aged between 16 and 25 years of age
- being on a low income
- being pregnant
- having separated from your partner
- previous criminality of the perpetrator

- having a disability
- misuse of drugs and alcohol
- mental health issues

### [See who are the victims of domestic abuse?](#)

There are other characteristics that have been found to affect disclosures and reporting of domestic abuse. Some of these characteristics are: being male, identifying as LGBT+, having a disability, belonging to a minority ethnic group and, crucially, being a victim of domestic abuse.

- It's estimated that **less than 24% of domestic violence crime** is reported to the police. (Walby and Allen (2004))
- For every 10,000 of the female population, **Luton MARAC handles 58 high risk cases per year** (as of April 21). The **national average is 43 cases**.

It's clear that for individuals and families in our community the harm caused by domestic abuse is significant. We believe that if all local statutory and community partners work together, they can:

- help to empower victims to recognise and disclose abuse and accept support
- challenge those who continue to perpetrate domestic abuse

## Our vision

Our vision is for Luton to be a place where children, young people and adults can live free of fear, violence and abuse. Working with all our partners and our communities to ensure this vision becomes a reality, we'll work to:

- improve our response
- benefit from innovation
- learn from our and others experience to continue to improve outcomes for victims and perpetrators
- help reduce the incidence of abuse

## Purpose

The purpose of this document is to set out what our partnership intends to do over the next three years in order to break the cycle of all forms of domestic abuse within our families and communities in Luton. The partnership is comprised of the following organisations:

- Community Safety
- Children's Safeguarding
- Adult Safeguarding
- the newly established Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board

The detail of this work and progress made is provided in a separate domestic abuse action plan which supports this document.

## Principles

The partnership accepts that domestic abuse is a complex and sensitive issue and one which no single organisation can tackle alone. This is a strategy that will be owned by all partners and the four partnership boards.

Underpinning this strategy is the principle of collaborative working across agencies in both the statutory and voluntary sector. Furthermore, central to the strategy is the voice of the victim (adult

and child). As a partnership, we're required and committed to consult with and be influenced by service users. Their experiences of domestic abuse and of the services in place to support them will be fundamental to the partnership shaping new services and our strategic approaches.

## How we'll deliver our aims

Our strategy has four priorities. These are the values that will enable us to achieve our goals:

- prevention and early help
- partnership
- provision and improvement
- protection

### Priority one: prevention and early help

This means supporting communities to prevent and build resilience to, and intervene at the earliest stage to prevent escalation and behaviours which foster, domestic abuse. To achieve this we will:

- ensure the availability of appropriate learning material to support the promotion of:
  - healthy relationships
  - understanding of domestic abuse
  - understanding of harmful practice to young people in our schools, colleges and universities
- strengthen and develop early intervention work including the provision of programmes which model respectful relationships to provide individuals and families with the skills and confidence to recognise harmful relationships and behaviour
- work with all communities in Luton to:
  - promote a culture of zero tolerance to:
    - harmful practices
    - violence against women and girls (VAWG)
    - domestic abuse
  - provide a rolling programme of awareness raising for adults and communities on the impact of domestic abuse in all its forms on individuals, children and families

This is important because domestic abuse is a 'hidden harm' affecting a disproportionate number of families in Luton. We believe that everyone deserves to feel safe and be healthy, happy and productive and it is vital that they are supported to understand the importance that healthy relationships have in their lives.

Our intended outcomes are:

- learning resources that are current, consistent, fit for purpose and accessible for all
- age appropriate relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) embedded in all education settings
- greater understanding of healthy relationships and abuse by young people evidenced by:
  - feedback from young people (for example, [Schools & Health Education Unit SHEU Survey](#))
  - increased disclosures, reporting and referrals for support across all service areas and settings
- evidence of positive outcomes across Adult and Children's Social Care and Safeguarding Boards
- reduction in police reports, MARAC cases and safeguarding board audits or reviews involving repeat domestic abuse
- evidence of perpetrator engagement with available programmes and support

- increased referrals at all levels of risk across all support services
- ongoing use of social and wider media to promote awareness and report positive stories about response to domestic abuse

## Priority two: partnership

This means all practitioners work together to achieve the best possible outcomes for the individual or family. Practitioners include:

- voluntary sector
- children's services
- health
- housing
- adults' social care
- community safety
- education
- police
- probation

To achieve this we'll:

- share and review data from all partners to develop a better understanding of needs and provision within Luton
- ensure that we have the right knowledge and services in place to accommodate the needs of all victims, supported by our partners

This is important because domestic abuse is a complex and sensitive issue that no-one agency can tackle alone. It is vital that all partners share their knowledge, experience and resources to support each other to ensure that all victims of domestic abuse have access to the right support when they need it.

Our intended outcomes are:

- clear and effective governance structure including an agreed terms of reference for the DA Local Partnership Board (LPB)
- availability of accurate and relevant data that:
  - facilitates effective design of services
  - aids LPB in commissioning/de-commissioning decisions
  - supports completion of Home Office reporting
- Local Needs Assessment completed and outcomes shared
- domestic abuse strategy updated and reviewed in line with needs assessment outcomes
- LPB is able to support all partners to meet the support needs of victims and their children
- increased reporting and disclosure of all domestic abuse types across all levels of risk and across all service providers

## Priority three: provision and improvement

This means ensuring the services provided in Luton are timely, consistent and deliver appropriate outcomes that enable victims, perpetrators and children to cope and recover from domestic abuse.

To achieve this we will:

- develop coordinated service provision and pathways to provide access to services for victims which are predicated on the different typologies of domestic abuse and that recognise the gendered nature of domestic abuse

- ensure there is a clear oversight on how organisations in Luton work, both individually and collaboratively, to effectively respond to and prevent all forms of domestic abuse

This is important because we all have a duty to safeguard anyone vulnerable to harm or abuse. To ensure that we can meet the support needs of those affected by domestic abuse as effectively as possible, we want to utilise all existing resources, as well as identifying new ones, and best practice to provide the best possible response for individuals and their families.

Our intended outcomes are:

- increased awareness and use of 'access to support' points/front door by service users
- greater understanding and use of domestic abuse referral pathway by professionals and service users, evidenced by feedback and reporting from domestic abuse partners and key service areas
- feedback from partners about response and outcomes for victims and families, including performance reporting
- evaluation from service users surveys
- joint working on key activities, projects, campaigns and services (where appropriate)

## Priority four: protection

This means responding to risk, protecting vulnerable victims and families affected by domestic abuse. To achieve this we will:

- ensure all frontline practitioners are trained to recognise and offer appropriate support and signposting to all victims including those:
  - with additional vulnerabilities
  - from minority groups
  - from groups with characteristics that may inhibit reporting
- strengthen our response to challenging, disrupting and holding perpetrators to account

This is important because we know that domestic abuse will usually get worse over time if left unchallenged but that recognising and acknowledging the abuse is incredibly difficult for the victim. It means that all our partners and front line practitioners must feel confident to be able to recognise and respond to the signs and effects of domestic abuse and be able to assess the risk to victims and children as well as safely respond to unhealthy or abusive behaviours.

Our intended outcomes are:

- quarterly reporting from Bedfordshire Domestic Abuse Partnership (BDAP) and Luton's Learning and Development team, showing completion of learning and development by front line practitioners
- evaluation and feedback from learners
- line management reporting and evidence of best practice outcomes
- increased referrals to suitable support programmes and existing (domestic abuse pathway) services, including:
  - increased awareness
  - appropriate use of safeguarding processes
  - specialist domestic abuse risk assessments
- understanding of safe working with perpetrators by frontline officers with learning and change evident in frontline cases
- perpetrator outcomes that evidence they are being held to account for their offences and behaviours



# Governance

This strategy and its activities will be accountable to the Community Safety Partnership. It will be reviewed annually and delivered:

- by the local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board
- in collaboration with the two local safeguarding boards
- with support of the relevant pan-Bedfordshire partnerships

## Our Luton domestic abuse partners

- **Luton Council:**
  - Adults and Children's Services
  - Housing Needs
  - Customer Services
- **Heath partners:**
  - Public Health
  - NHS
  - CCG
  - ELFT
  - hospital and GPO services
- **Law enforcement partners:**
  - Police
  - PCC
  - Bench
  - probation
  - courts
- **Community partners:**
  - councillors
  - faith and community groups
  - CAB
  - Luton Access
  - Luton Culture
- **Safeguarding partners:**
  - MARAC
  - LSCB
  - LSAB
  - IDVA
- **Local business community:**
  - LLAL
  - Pharmacies
  - The Mall
- **Pan-Beds partnerships:**
  - BOAP
  - strategic leaders
  - pan-Beds coordinator
- **Education partners:**
  - Early Years
  - schools
  - colleges
  - university



- Adult Learning
- RSHE
- **Voluntary sector partners**
  - Luton All Women's Centre
  - Women's Aid
  - Stepping Stones
  - TOKKO
  - Victim Support
- **Commissioners and funders:**
  - LLAL
  - MHCLG
  - OPCC
  - Public Health
  - Business partners

## Contact

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