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The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead

Domestic Abuse Strategy 2024-27

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Foreword



By Councillors Catherine Del Campo, Cabinet Member for Adult Services, Health & Housing Services, and Amy Tisi, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education & Windsor

Welcome to the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead's Domestic Abuse Strategy 2024-27, inclusive of safe accommodation. This strategy outlines our wider partnership response to domestic abuse in the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM).

Domestic abuse is a pervasive menace in our society and a sad reality for far too many families. It's vital that we continue to raise awareness about the issue, and make sure both victims and people with potential to become victims know support and services are on hand, and where to find them. And with prevention in mind, we'll also offer support to perpetrators where it's safe and appropriate to do so.

We will work to ensure that all victims are supported to remain safe in their own home if they wish and it is safe to do so, or access alternative safe accommodation and support. We are committed to protecting and supporting vulnerable children and families; we will strive to create a safe, compassionate, healing environment demonstrated through relationships based on trust, respect hope and empathy.

The impact of domestic abuse can be devastating and long lasting for both individuals and families. It can have a detrimental effect on wellbeing and mental health; lead to physical and emotional harm; have negative employment, educational and financial impacts; lead to homelessness and can have a negative impact on children and families. At its extreme, domestic abuse can result in death either through homicide or suicide.

Domestic abuse has long been a priority for the RBWM Community Safety Partnership (CSP) but there is more work to be done and due to the complexities of domestic abuse, tackling the issue must be the responsibility of all agencies and services working across RBWM who support families and individuals affected by domestic abuse.

Throughout the strategy, we will continue to work with communities and those with lived experience to ensure our delivery of its commitments are tailored to meet the needs of RBWM. Most importantly, individuals who have been and continue to be affected by domestic abuse must be at the heart of everything we do. Our strategy, our values and our priorities are informed by their expert knowledge and our development of effective interventions shaped by their experience.

Introduction

The role of the Royal Borough

The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM) recognises the serious personal harms and wider impacts caused by the perpetration of domestic abuse. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 strengthened local government responses to domestic abuse, including creating a statutory duty to undertake a needs assessment to determine the level of need for support within safe accommodation for victims and survivors of domestic abuse, and their children and prepare and publish a strategy to provide such support. Other duties were also created through the Act, which are set out [below](#).

Our Domestic Abuse Strategy 2024-27 aims to improve the lives of those living in RBWM affected by domestic abuse. It seeks to update RBWM's responses to domestic abuse by outlining our commitments for those affected by domestic abuse, including victims and survivors, perpetrators and children who witness it. Our strategy is informed by the findings and recommendations of a renewed [needs assessment](#) which was concluded in October 2023, as well as stakeholder input via one-to-one discussions with relevant senior managers, practitioner focus groups, and an Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group. Our strategy also supports RBWM's statutory duty to prepare and publish a strategy for the provision of support for adults and children in safe accommodation.

Domestic abuse, housing and homelessness

Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places a duty on RBWM relating to the provision of support for victims and their children residing within relevant safe accommodation¹. A leading cause of homelessness for women is needing to flee from a domestic abuse perpetrator. 1 in 5 women who have experienced violence become homeless, compared with just 1 per cent of women who have not experienced violence².

In RBWM in 2021-22³ 8.4% of households who were owed a homelessness prevention duty⁴ had lost their last settled home due to domestic abuse (the figure for England is lower at

¹ See definitions from page 4.

² 'Women, homelessness and violence: what works?' (July 2021) by Emma Bimpson, Hannah Green and Kesia Reeve, Centre for Homelessness Impact, available at: <https://www.shu.ac.uk/centre-regional-economic-social-research/projects/all-projects/women-homelessness-and-violence-what-works>

³ Department of Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) 2021/2022

⁴ The requirement for a local authority housing department to take reasonable steps to prevent someone from becoming homeless; the duty lasts for 56 days.

7.8%). This equates to 18 households in RBWM. For those owed a homelessness relief duty⁵ 14.2% (36 households) were homeless for reasons relating to domestic abuse (the figure for England is slightly higher at 16.8%).

National legal and policy framework

All statutory agencies with a responsibility for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults have a duty to respond to domestic abuse.

The **Domestic Abuse Act 2021**⁶ made several provisions designed to:

- Promote awareness – to put domestic abuse at the top of everybody’s agenda, including introducing a statutory definition of domestic abuse and recognising children as victims of domestic abuse in their own right.
- Protect and support victims – to enhance the safety of victims and the support they receive, including establishing in law the office of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, introducing a new Domestic Abuse Protection Notice (DAPN) and Domestic Abuse Protection Order (DAPO), and placing a new duty on local authorities to provide support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in safe accommodation.
- Tackle perpetrators – to provide an effective response to perpetrators to end the cycle of abuse, including extending existing offences such as the coercive controlling behaviour offence to cover post-separation abuse, and creating new offences including such as non-fatal strangulation or suffocation.
- Transform the justice response – to provide support to victims throughout the justice process, including helping victims give evidence in court.
- Improve performance – to drive consistency and better performance in the response to domestic abuse.

In particular, the Act brought in provisions which impact RBWM and place duties on us:

- There is now a statutory definition of domestic abuse (see below)
- To treat those facing homelessness because of domestic abuse as being in immediate and priority need of housing
- To assess the need for, and provide, safe accommodation with the appropriate support for victim-survivors of domestic abuse in RBWM

⁵ The requirement for a local authority housing department to take reasonable steps to help secure accommodation for someone who is already homeless and is eligible for this help (there are statutory criteria placing limits on who is eligible).

⁶ Government factsheet: www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-bill-2020-factsheets/domestic-abuse-bill-2020-overarching-factsheet

- To produce a strategy for providing domestic abuse safe accommodation, in line with the needs assessment mentioned above

The national policy on **Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls**⁷ (VAWG) was introduced in July 2021 and created priorities around:

- Prioritising prevention
- Supporting victims
- Pursuing perpetrators
- A stronger system

It includes responses to domestic abuse, recognising it as a gendered form of violence:

“The term ‘violence against women and girls’ refers to acts of violence or abuse that we know disproportionately affect women and girls. Crimes and behaviour covered by this term include rape and other sexual offences, domestic abuse, stalking, ‘honour’-based abuse (including female genital mutilation forced marriage, and ‘honour’ killings), as well as many others, including offences committed online.”

The government published its **Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan**⁸ in March 2022, outlining its approach within the same four key areas of focus.

Language and definitions

Domestic abuse is one form of gendered violence which disproportionately impacts women and girls. People of all genders can be victims/survivors or perpetrators of domestic abuse, and RBWM recognises that people of all genders need support and safety to recover from abuse.

The term ‘domestic abuse’ has been widely used instead of ‘domestic violence’ for many years as a way of raising awareness to the fact it includes many behaviours, not just physical violence. RBWM recognises that whilst still commonly used, this term can have negative impacts for victims and survivors of domestic violence where the word ‘abuse’ is still interpreted in society as somehow less serious than ‘violence’. RBWM uses the term ‘domestic abuse’ in order to align with regional and national policy and debate, and to be consistent with the new statutory definition, which is for ‘domestic abuse’. However, we assert that all forms of domestic abuse are acts of violence and recognise the very serious impact this always has for victims and survivors.

⁷ Available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls-strategy

⁸ Available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-domestic-abuse-plan

Domestic Abuse

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021, provides the following statutory definition of domestic abuse:

Domestic abuse is any single incident, course of conduct or pattern of abusive behaviour between individuals aged 16 or over who are personally connected⁹ to each other as a result of being, or having been, intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. Children who see, hear or experience the effects of the abuse and are related to either of the parties are also considered victims of domestic abuse.

Behaviour is abusive if it consists of any of the following: physical or sexual abuse; violent or threatening behaviour; controlling or coercive behaviour; economic abuse; or psychological, emotional or other abuse. This includes incidences where the abusive party directs their behaviour at another person (e.g. a child). Economic abuse means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on someone's ability to acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or obtain goods or services.

Children (people under 18 years) are direct victims of domestic abuse when:

- They see or hear, or experience the effect of, the abuse and are related to either person
- The person is a parent of, or has parental responsibility for, the child
- The child and person are related

So-Called 'Honour'-Based Abuse

The definition of domestic abuse incorporates harmful traditional practices for example but not limited to so-called 'honour' killings, forced marriage and female genital mutilation. So-called 'honour'-based abuse is a type of domestic abuse and can take the same forms as other domestic abuse. It is a crime or incident committed to protect or defend the 'honour' of a family or community. A family or community may punish, or even kill one of their members if they believe they have shamed or embarrassed them by behaving in a certain way.

Coercive Control

Controlling or coercive behaviour is defined in section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015, and is when:

⁹ Personally connected means two people who: 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 ended); Have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been ended); Are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other; Have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child; Are relatives

- Someone repeatedly or continuously engages in behaviour towards another person that is controlling or coercive
- At the time of the behaviour, the people concerned are personally connected (this has now been amended by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 to include past relationships)
- The behaviour has a serious effect on the person subjected to it, and
- The person committing the behaviour knows or ought to know that the behaviour will have a serious effect on the other person.

Safe Accommodation

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 requires local authorities to provide safe accommodation for victims of domestic abuse and their children. It defines Safe Accommodation as being “...solely dedicated to providing a safe place to stay for victims of domestic abuse, including expert support...”.¹⁰ The different types of safe accommodation provision are outlined in Figure 1, below.

Accommodation and schemes	Description
Refuge accommodation	A refuge offers accommodation and intensive support which is tied to that accommodation. Victims, including their children, have to be refuge residents to access expert emotional and practical support.
Specialist safe accommodation	Safe accommodation specialist refuges for BAME, LGBTQ+, and disabled victims and their children which may provide single gender accommodation with dedicated specialist support to victims who share a protected characteristic(s) – including services that are led by those that also share the protected characteristic (also known as ‘by and for’) - and/or have complex needs.
Dispersed accommodation (i)	Safe (secure and dedicated to supporting victims of domestic abuse), self-contained accommodation with the same 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 due to complex support needs or for families with teenage sons for example.
Dispersed accommodation (ii)	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.
Sanctuary Schemes	Properties with local authority installed Sanctuary Schemes or other similar schemes which provide enhanced physical security measures within a 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

¹⁰ DLUHC- Delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse in domestic abuse safe accommodation services: www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-support-within-safe-accommodation/delivery-of-support-to-victims-of-domestic-abuse-in-domestic-abuse-safe-accommodation-services

	<p>does not live in the accommodation. This is done by providing additional security – ‘installing a sanctuary’ – to the victims’ property or perimeter.</p> <p>A number of local authorities run Sanctuary Schemes, working in partnership with the police to implement the scheme and any organisation working with an individual they deem suitable for sanctuary measures can make a referral to the scheme.</p>
Move on and / or Second Stage	<p>Interchangeable terms for projects temporarily accommodating victims, including families 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 permanent accommodation. There is no expectation that every victim will require this. Many victims are ready to move straight to a permanent new home from refuge. However, move-on and / or second stage accommodation may be helpful in some cases.</p>
Other accommodation designated by the local housing authority, registered social landlord or registered charity as domestic abuse emergency accommodation– i.e., a safe place with support	<p>i.e. a safe place with appropriate support. To give victims an opportunity to spend a temporary period of time to [consider and] make decisions in an environment which is self-contained and safe. This would include access to wrap around support and specialist support for victims with complex needs (including mental health needs and substance misuse). An example of ‘other’ forms of safe accommodation would be the ‘Whole Housing Approach¹¹.</p>

Figure 1 - Types of safe accommodation

Support

The Domestic Abuse Act statutory guidance describes Domestic Abuse Support within Safe or Relevant Accommodation as:

- Overall management of services within relevant accommodation – including, the management of staff, payroll, financial and day to day management of services and maintaining relationships with the local authority (such functions will often be undertaken by a Service Manager)
- Support with the day-to-day running of the service, for example scheduling times for counselling sessions, group activities (such functions may often be undertaken by administrative or office staff)
- Advocacy support – development of personal safety plans, liaison with other services (for example, GPs and Social Workers, welfare benefit providers).
- Domestic abuse prevention advice – support to assist victims to recognise the signs of abusive relationships, to help them remain safe (including online), and to prevent re-victimisation.

¹¹ The Whole Housing Approach (WHA) aims to improve housing options and outcomes for people experiencing domestic abuse so they can achieve stable housing, live safely, and overcome the abuse and its harmful impacts: www.dahalliance.org.uk/innovations-in-practice/whole-housing-approach/what-is-the-whole-housing-approach/

- Specialist support for victims. Designed specifically for victims with relevant protected characteristics (also known as by and for) such as faith services, translators and interpreters within BAME led refuges. Immigration advice, interpreters for victims identifying as deaf and or hard of hearing and dedicated support for LGBTQ+ victims.
- Designed specifically for victims with unique and or complex needs such as, mental health advice and support, drug and alcohol advice and support, including sign posting accordingly.
- Children’s support – including play therapy and child advocacy.
- Housing-related support – providing housing-related advice and support, for example, securing a permanent home, rights to existing accommodation and advice on how to live safely and independently.
- Advice service – financial and legal support, including accessing benefits, support into work and establishing independent financial arrangements; and,
- Counselling and therapy (including group support) for both adults and children, including emotional support.

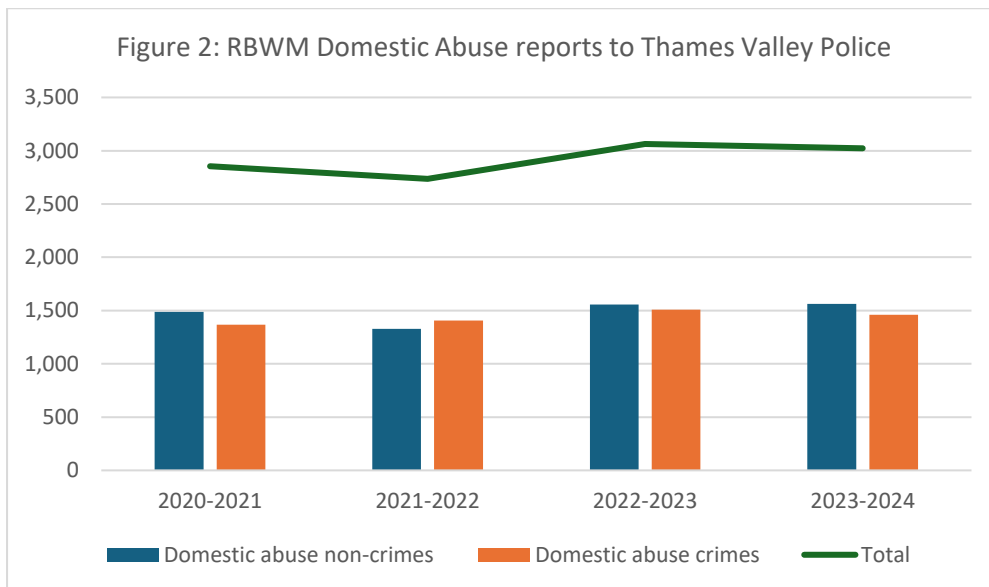
What we know about domestic abuse

The prevalence and impacts of domestic abuse

Domestic abuse perpetrators cause harm and trauma in many ways across RBWM, affecting both adult and child victim residents. We understand that, as with all figures on domestic abuse, real numbers are likely to be higher than those shown in official records. Awareness raising of what domestic abuse is and where to go to for help should remain a priority.

In the year ending March 2024, Thames Valley Police received 3,023 reports of domestic abuse in RBWM¹². Of these, 1,460 were recorded as crimes and 1,563 were recorded as non-crime occurrences (did not cross the threshold of being a criminal offence). Comparisons to previous years can be seen in Figure 2, below.

¹² RBWM Annual Domestic Abuse report 2023-2024.



In 2023-2024, 118 domestic abuse victims/survivors were discussed at the RBWM Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)¹³, 30% of which were repeat referrals. The repeat rate had reduced from 42% in 2022-2023 and 50% the year before that.

In the same year, the Dash (Domestic Abuse Stops Here) Charity, the local commissioned domestic abuse service, received 809 referrals, 86 of which were for their high-risk Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy (IDVA) service, 232 for the medium risk Outreach service and 491 for signposting to relevant other services and information. 99 referrals were received for the children’s 1:1 restorative programme.

We need to stop this abuse from happening, but where it does, we need to support those impacted to recover and build healthy lives in which they and their families can flourish. Domestic abuse is perpetrated in many forms, within intimate partner relationships, and within other family relationships, including by children and adolescents towards their parents. Domestic abuse is a gendered form of violence; it is predominantly perpetrated by men, and women are most often the victims/survivors. However, anyone can be a perpetrator of domestic abuse, and anyone can be a victim/survivor. We recognise that men, non-binary people and transgender people can also be subjected to domestic abuse and that these experiences will be different to those of cis women in significant ways. Children are always significantly impacted and are direct victims of domestic abuse when experiencing it in their home environment or from one parental figure towards another (even after separation).

Domestic abuse is commonly characterised by a pattern of coercively controlling behaviour. The abuse will always result in trauma, sometimes of a highly complex nature. The effects

¹³ MARAC is a multi-agency meeting where information is shared on high risk domestic abuse cases in order to put in place a multi-agency risk management plan to increase safety for the victim (and their children).

will always be significant and life-impacting, even when agency assessed risk appears to be in the 'standard' or 'medium' ranges.

Domestic abuse perpetrators commit abuse in all spaces of society, across all cultures, and all social and economic backgrounds. Perpetrators can cause greater harm and for longer in some cases because of social factors faced by victims/survivors, such as stigma and other barriers to finding help. For example, men, those with mental health issues, disabled people, those from LGBTQ+ communities, people living in rural communities, older people, and those from ethnic minority groups tend to be subjected to abuse for longer before being able to seek and receive the right help. They also tend to be under-represented in domestic abuse support services.

Male victims of domestic abuse are under-represented in some key services in RBWM, with police data showing for the 3-year period to March 2021, 29% of domestic abuse victims were male, and 1% were recorded as "other, not recorded or unknown".¹⁴ In the year ending March 2024, 95% of the Dash Charity's clients were female (both for IDVA and for Outreach services).¹⁵ People from LGBTQ+ communities also seem to be under-represented in these services¹⁶. In the year ending March 2024, 98% of the Dash Charity's clients were heterosexual and whilst population data for RBWM is not available in this regard, this compares with 89% of the general population being heterosexual according to census data. Some ethnic minority groups may be under-represented in services also. For the same time period, 9% of Dash Charity's IDVA clients and 15% of Outreach clients were Asian or Asian British, whilst 2021 census data identifies a representation of 13.1% in the RBWM general population. People identifying as Black or Black British were over-represented in the IDVA service at 6% however represented 1.7% in the Outreach service which is at a similar level to the RBWM population (1.5%).

Barriers to help-seeking are often created by perpetrators, who weaponise aspects of their victims'/survivors' lives, such as their children, immigration status, whether they are out regarding their sexual orientation, mental health issues etc, to undermine their confidence that they will be believed or helped, or that they can cope on their own. Barriers are also created by organisations and societal structures in the way that systems and processes are set up, and in the way, services speak and advertise themselves. RBWM recognises the need to continually address these issues in the delivery of all front-line services working with people who may be subjected to domestic abuse to increase accessibility to services.

Domestic abuse perpetrators are directly and indirectly responsible for hundreds of deaths each year in the United Kingdom. Nationally, a total of 242 domestic abuse related deaths

¹⁴ RBWM Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment, Neil Morland Co, 2023.

¹⁵ RBWM Domestic Abuse Annual report 2023-2024.

¹⁶ RBWM Domestic Abuse Annual report 2023-2024.

were recorded between April 2022 to March 2023, of which 38% were suspected suicides.¹⁷ Most victims of domestic abuse related deaths are women, and most suspects/perpetrators are men; this spans intimate partner relationships and family relationships (e.g. matricide). Victims from ethnic minority groups are slightly over-represented in these deaths. Suicide following domestic abuse is now a greater cause of death than domestic homicide.

Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) were established on a statutory footing in April 2011¹⁸. Since this time, RBWM has sadly carried out and published one such review relating to the death of a woman in 2018, murdered by her son. Relevant learning from this tragic death was identified and RBWM produced an action plan to ensure this was implemented¹⁹.

Support services, safe accommodation, and agency responses in RBWM

Support Services

RBWM has developed a range of services in collaboration with key partners in line with previous domestic abuse strategies, in order to support victims and their children, and to support perpetrators to change their behaviour.

Victims and survivors who have been subjected to domestic abuse are able to access the following services:

- The Dash Charity, who offer:
 - Single Point of Contact helpline
 - Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVA) for high risk domestic abuse, including a specialist older persons' IDVA
 - Domestic Abuse Outreach for medium risk domestic abuse
 - Children's support
 - Refuge accommodation (out of Borough)
 - The Freedom Programme groupwork for victims/survivors
 - Healthy relationships workshops in schools
- Aurora New Dawn, who offer support for victims/survivors who are being stalked by someone in a domestic context (e.g. former partner).
- Achieving for Children (delivering Children's Social Care in RBWM), who offer:

¹⁷ 'Domestic Homicides and Suspected Victim Suicides Year 3 Report', Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme, 2024. www.vkpp.org.uk/vkpp-work/domestic-homicide-project

¹⁸ <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a78be6ee5274a2acd18974b/DHR-guidance.pdf>

¹⁹ www.rbwm.gov.uk/community-and-living/domestic-abuse/information-professionals/domestic-homicide-reviews

- Specialist one-to-one work from a domestic abuse worker for victims/survivors of abuse and their children
- The Freedom Programme groupwork for victims/survivors
- Safe! Project, who offer:
 - The Support After Crime Service, providing support for children and young people affected by crime, including domestic abuse
 - The Building Respectful Families service; providing support to families experiencing Child and Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse (CAPVA)
- The BREATHE Programme; a recovery programme for children affected by domestic abuse, run in collaboration between The Dash Charity and Achieving for Children.
- BRAVE (Building Resilience and Valuing Emotions); which is a psychologically informed recovery programme offering a range of ways to engage, including groupwork, and a peer support service called BRAVE EMBRACE. BRAVE Too is a service for men.
- The Sanctuary Scheme, which offers target hardening and home adaptations so survivors can remain safely in their own homes.

Perpetrators of domestic abuse can access the national Respect helpline. Those known to Children's Social Care may be referred to the Achieving for Children's 1:1 Domestic Abuse Intervention Programme or the Promoting Positive Relationships Programme (PPRP) group work (delivered by existing staff).

Safe accommodation

RBWM does not have a refuge facility²⁰ or access to specialist accommodation within the Borough. This is an historic situation and is possibly connected with RBWM being a non-stock holding authority. Developing such a facility would be challenging in the current financial climate, but the intention is to explore the prospect with our housing association and neighbouring local authority partners. Even with sufficient capital and revenue funding, the development of a refugee facility may not be viable from an opportunity cost perspective. An alternative option which will also be pursued, is to contribute to an existing facility operated by a neighbouring borough.

The accommodation used by RBWM tends to be generic temporary accommodation procured from the private sector. Procurement of temporary accommodation is proving to be a challenge because of supply and demand issues, but RBWM has a programme in place to both increase the stability of this supply and its flexibility. Temporary accommodation is provided to meet the needs of an individual household. DA issues would form part of the assessment process and an offer of accommodation made accordingly. The specialist

²⁰ It should be noted that a domestic abuse refuge within RBWM would accommodate and support those fleeing abuse from elsewhere, not existing residents of the Royal Borough.

support required would be provided by the Dash Charity. The procedures and referral routes required to make this arrangement fully effective also need to be improved and embedded. A policy position also must be adopted with respect as to how the costs of temporary accommodation are to be recovered or treated by RBWM.

The sanctuary scheme is operated by RBWM. Further work however is needed to ensure that the process is fully tenure neutral and is available across consistently across all registered providers working within the borough.

Agency responses

RBWM's agency responses include:

- MARAC, the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference which addresses high risk domestic abuse cases through a multi-agency meeting sharing information in order to put in place a risk management plan to increase safety for the victim (and their children).
- MATAC, the Multi-Agency Tasking and Coordination approach which identifies domestic abuse perpetrators through a recency, frequency, gravity and serial score, as well as through multi-agency referrals where professionals have concern for victims. The approach supports perpetrators to engage with services which can help to mitigate the risks of their behaviour and engender behavioural change, or otherwise to adopt a criminal justice response to maximise opportunities to disrupt their behaviour.
- Operation Encompass²¹ is delivered by Thames Valley Police who ensure schools are notified when they attend domestic abuse incidents where children are present or known to reside, so that appropriate safeguarding or welfare support can be provided.

The domestic abuse needs assessment (2023)

The refreshed needs assessment identified some key features of RBWM's population:

- Increasing and aging population
- 31st most densely populated in the Southeast
- 51% females, 49% males (no trans or non-binary data given)
- 79.8% White
- Higher than average house prices
- 66% owner-occupier, 13% social rent, 21% private rent

²¹ www.operationencompass.org

- 64% economically active, 32.5% inactive
- 55.2% self-report very good health

In terms of domestic abuse in RBWM, the needs assessment highlights the numbers of domestic abuse crimes and non-crimes reported to the police from within RBWM over recent years (p.12, above), and the gender split for victims and survivors of domestic abuse (p. 12 above). It also identifies the prevalence of domestic abuse amongst people approaching the Housing Needs service for relief or prevention of homelessness (p. 4-5 above).

After examining the current services and other agency responses to domestic abuse in RBWM, the needs assessment makes the following recommendations:

1. Ensure that RBWM complies with the relevant legislative framework on domestic abuse and examine governance of groups including DAEG, MATAC, MARAC and the Domestic Abuse Forum and associated strategies are fit for purpose.
2. The Domestic Abuse Executive Group (DAEG) consider and interrogate all data they have at their disposal from member organisations to create a picture to develop a firm understanding of the complexities of domestic abuse for their area and thereby commission services, training and partnerships to meet all and emerging need.
3. Explore the use of management transfers in social housing (or the lack of) for domestic abuse and examine the over reliance on victim-survivors being directed via a homeless route to seek housing solutions when escaping domestic abuse. Ensure section 79 of the Domestic Abuse Act, 2021 is being adhered to and explore opportunities to work with social landlords to examine potential for dispersed / move on accommodation. Explore Housing related issues via the Housing IDVA role and use this information to inform RBWM Housing and Homeless strategies.
4. Consider national good practice in relation to perpetrators of domestic abuse and how RBWM / DAEG can build an effective perpetrator response as part of a coordinated community response to domestic abuse.
5. Utilise RBWM wide data to explore how the complexity of domestic abuse intersects with other data across the borough. An analysis of data gaps would highlight any gaps in knowledge for the area. This also reflects recommendation 2. The Safe Accommodation Strategy and DAEG have the responsibility to consider the safe accommodation need is for all victim-survivors across RBWM. In conjunction with recommendation 3, strengthen partnership working to explore how this can be analysed and responded to for the Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment.
6. Undertake a county-wide survey on domestic abuse to inform the upcoming domestic abuse strategy and the commissioning of services for victim-survivors and perpetrators. This information could also provide important insight to inform training content for professionals.

7. Explore information sharing agreements and ensure that all partners are aware of processes. Review the issues in seeking information on 'medium' and 'standard' risk victim-survivors from Police. Deliver and disseminate actions from the ongoing MARAC review to all partners.
8. Monitor the effectiveness of programmes for victim-survivors and explore and how to develop a community awareness raising programme across RBWM to inform residents of the nature and extent of domestic abuse and how to access support routes available. Measure impact via self-referrals to specialist support agencies, website monitoring and increases in reporting of domestic abuse to agencies via DAEG annually.
9. Develop a Mandatory Training Programme across Agencies in RBWM. Ensure mandatory training with sign up from agencies across RBWM so that all customer facing roles such as Housing Options and Housing Provider customer facing staff undergo training on domestic abuse (including responding to victim-survivors and perpetrators) over an agreed timescale. Measure training numbers, understanding of domestic abuse and impact (in terms of referrals to specialist agencies, MATAAC, MARAC and homeless presentations and acceptances; for example) at DAEG annually. Ensure that any non-attendance is overseen by DAEG, and agencies challenged. There is scope within this training to ensure that all parties have a clear understanding of information sharing protocols and agreements.
10. Introduce a Domestic Abuse Behaviour Change Programme that all partners can signpost and make referrals to. Ensure that the programme is utilised as part of MATAAC and training on the purpose and content of the programme (including making referrals) is cascaded to professionals across the borough. Measure the impact of the programme from a partnership perspective with data from agencies the subject interacts with. Consider how post-programme engagement will operate for the those who have completed it.
11. Ensure there is a 'golden thread' approach to domestic abuse in the borough's strategies (such as housing and homeless strategies) and that domestic abuse is not merely a stand-alone strategy with no connection to other strategies. Ensure the Domestic Abuse Strategy and Accommodation Strategy include perpetrator responses and that all agencies feed into them.

Our strategy

Golden threads

Through our ongoing, dedication to tackling domestic abuse in RBWM, and through stakeholder engagement to prepare this strategy, we have identified the core concerns outlined below. Through this strategy, it is our intention to ensure these matters form

'golden threads' which sit with and strengthen our strategic priorities for responding to domestic abuse:

- **Survivor voice** – we assert that those who have lived through domestic violence and abuse are best placed to understand their own situation and have knowledge which is essential to building better responses and services. This includes children and young people.
- **Use of active phrasing** – we assert the need to discuss domestic abuse in active rather than passive terms, identifying the role of the perpetrator within the abuse to ensure we are always reminded that the focus of stopping and preventing abuse lies with the perpetrator, not the victim/survivor.
- **Domestic abuse as gender-based violence** – we recognise that domestic abuse is a form of violence against women and girls. This means we acknowledge that women (and their children) are more likely to be victimised whilst recognising that people of all genders can be victims/survivors of domestic abuse. For other genders the causes, motivations and dynamics can be different to those for violence against women and girls, and so responses need to take account of this.
- **Children and young people as victims of domestic abuse** – we acknowledge the distinct impacts on, and needs of, children as victims of domestic abuse, and we recognise the need to amplify children's voices in the conversations and responses to domestic abuse.
- **Intersectional identities and marginalised groups** – we recognise that those from marginalised groups and/or with protected characteristics need distinct and bespoke services which are competent to meet their unique specific needs in relation to domestic abuse.
- **Relationship context** – we recognise that domestic abuse is perpetrated within a range of different relationships (intimate partner, child to parent etc.) and that victims and survivors require responses and services which recognise the distinct dynamics of the abuse in these different contexts.
- **Strengths and needs versus risk** – we acknowledge the need to focus on the needs and strengths of victim-survivors, so we address the gaps left by systems which focus solely on risk.
- **Suicide** – we recognise an emerging picture and growing understanding of the link between domestic abuse and suicide. We, therefore, acknowledge the need to plan and deliver services in a way that raises awareness to this addresses the relevant priority areas for action in the Berkshire Suicide Prevention Strategy 2021-2026.
- **Trauma** – we assert that all victims-survivors of domestic abuse will experience trauma and aspire to all front-line services being able to work in a genuinely trauma-informed way.
- **Data** – we recognise the need to collect and interpret relevant data in order to understand the prevalence and impacts of domestic abuse in RBWM, and to plan

effective, coordinated service responses, including in respect of all of the foregoing golden threads.

What we have achieved so far

RBWM has made good progress against the previous strategy. Much of the work here is routine ongoing activity, such as engagement with MARAC and MATAAC, monitoring partnership data to understand the patterns and needs within RBWM. This includes data around key issues such as police reporting, MARAC, repeat victimisation, numbers of Domestic Abuse Prevention Notices/Orders, as well as performance data for commissioned services.

Other work includes some impactful highlights such as:

- The introduction of a Housing IDVA within the RBWM Housing Services team
- Starting the BREATHE programme²² for young people in RBWM who are, or have been, affected by unhealthy, conflicting and abusive behaviours in parent and carer relationships
- Implementation of the Drive Project²³
- An active calendar of domestic abuse awareness raising campaigns and events
- Delivering domestic abuse awareness training to 63 professionals across eight organisations, and MARAC and DASH²⁴ training to 59 across 15 organisations in the year 2023-2024
- The Dash Charity have also delivered Healthy Relationships Workshops in schools across RBWM and embedded the Older persons IDVA work
- Regular updating and sharing of newsletters and other resources with a wide range of agencies

Whilst our previous strategy and action plan identified the need to engage with and understand survivor voices, this work remains a key priority for us going forward. We continue to recognise the need for work addressing behaviour change with perpetrators.

Other relevant strategies

RBWM works to other strategies and procedures which have important impacts relating to our strategic priorities for domestic abuse. These are:

²² rbwm.afcinfo.org.uk/pages/community-information/information-and-advice/family-hub-service/support-for-children-and-young-people/programmes-to-support-children-and-young-people/breathe-programme

²³ <https://drivepartnership.org.uk/about-us/the-drive-project>

²⁴ The DASH risk indicator checklist (Domestic Abuse, Harassment and Honour-Based Abuse) is a tool for indicating the level of domestic abuse risk a victim/survivor is subjected to.

Berkshire Suicide Prevention Strategy (2021-2026) and the RBWM Local Action Plan

- Promote the need for clear pathways and knowledge exchange between domestic abuse and mental health services.
- Provide information to domestic abuse services on how to respond to concerns where clients may be self-harming or considering suicide (whether the client is a victim, survivor, perpetrator or child or young person).
- Collect comprehensive data on suicides related to domestic abuse (victim or perpetrator).
- Include domestic abuse survivors as a particular vulnerable group in the development of an RBWM Adult Postvention Protocol.

Serious Violence Strategy 2024-2027²⁵

- Develop an impact assessment framework with agreed associated datasets to enable effective oversight of the work being undertaken to prevent and tackle serious violence.
- Develop an agreed analysis of the drivers and causes of serious violence in RBWM.

Safeguarding Partnership Strategy 2024-2026

- Ensure a Think Family model is implemented across the Partnership to address domestic abuse, looking at impacts, especially on children and vulnerable adults.

Housing Strategy 2021-2026²⁶

- Promote Health & Wellbeing.
 - Assess the need for supported accommodation, including Extra Care, and review our supported accommodation provision to ensure we are able to offer accommodation to support better health and wellbeing outcomes²⁷
- Support vulnerable residents to obtain and sustain appropriate accommodation.
 - Create a coalition of temporary accommodation landlords to provide sustainable, reliable, cost-effective temporary accommodation to support homeless households into long-term solutions
 - Strengthen working relationships with existing partner organisations and seek to develop new relationships in order to increase support provision to our residents
 - Consider the purchase of units of quality temporary accommodation to replace those leased from the private sector and ensure value for money

²⁵ Available at: www.rbwm.gov.uk/community-and-living/community-safety-and-crime/crime-and-disorder

²⁶ Available at: www.rbwm.gov.uk/housing/housing-strategy

²⁷ This should include Safe Accommodation as outlined in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 for the purposes of linking with this strategy.

- Optimise revenue available to create new services by monitoring funding opportunities and bidding for funding where this could fill gaps in service provision
- Use technology to improve access to services and clearly demonstrate outcomes
- To improve access to the private rented sector for households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness
- Explore and optimise opportunities to support vulnerable residents in maintaining accommodation and reduce instances of repeat homelessness

Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023²⁸

The Homelessness Strategy is due to be refreshed, and the Domestic Abuse Executive Group will ensure that it incorporates the relevant priorities around domestic abuse, particularly in relation to RBWM's duty around domestic abuse safe accommodation.

- Reducing the numbers of people becoming homeless.
- Reducing the numbers of households in temporary accommodation and improving the quality of that accommodation.
- Supporting people into good quality, affordable and sustainable accommodation options.
- Reducing rough sleeping and supporting those who find themselves on the street.
- Improving the customer service provided to people approaching housing services.

RBWM Council Plan 2024-2028²⁹

- A cleaner, greener, safer and more prosperous borough.
- Supporting children and young people to live safe, happy and healthy lives, and developing resilience for families.
- People living healthy and independent lives in supportive communities.
- Listening to local people, strengthening partnership work with VCS and statutory bodies, transparency and accountability, and empowering our workforce.

Community Safety Plan

RBWM's Community Safety Plan is being developed at the time this strategy was finalised. The Domestic Abuse Executive Group will ensure that the plan incorporates the relevant priorities around domestic abuse in line with this strategy.

²⁸ Available at: <https://www.rbwm.gov.uk/housing/homelessness>

²⁹ Available at: <https://www.rbwm.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/strategies-and-policies/council-plan>

Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead's Safeguarding Partnership Procedures³⁰

The manual provides a set of chapters which comply with Working Together to Safeguard children which explain the actions that must be taken when there are concerns about the welfare of a child.

Berkshire Safeguarding Adults and Procedures³¹

To support staff to respond appropriately to all concerns or neglect they encounter, providing a consistent response across the county.

Strategic priorities for 2024-27

We recognise we have reached some important milestones in delivering our current overarching Domestic Abuse Strategy and Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy via their action plans, but the 2023 needs assessment and recent engagement with stakeholders and findings from the Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group has highlighted gaps in provision and that there is still work to be done to embed, strengthen and further build on previous achievements. We want to keep the same strategic focus, looking at the same priority areas. We want to make these priorities stronger and more relevant to our local area, through a refreshed action plan, by thinking about the golden threads for each of them and embedding relevant priorities from other strategy areas, too. We will integrate safe accommodation priorities into the provision of services for victims/survivors.

Strategic Priority	Outcomes (What do we want to achieve)	Outputs (How will we realise this agenda)
PRIORITY 1: Prevention and early intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is clear and consistent information available to the public and staff on domestic abuse including the nature and extent of domestic abuse and how to access support routes available.• Agencies are consistent, appropriate and effective in responding to domestic abuse including recognising and identifying risks associated with domestic abuse.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Educational programmes are available for children and young people focusing on healthy relationships and developing resilience to help prevent future abusive behaviours.• Organisations have clear and easily accessible policies on domestic abuse to support their employees.• Work undertaken to focus on supporting positive mental wellbeing to help prevent self-harm and suicide related to domestic abuse.

³⁰ Available at: <https://berks-windsormaidenhead.trixonline.co.uk>

³¹ Available at: www.berkshiresafeguardingadults.co.uk

<p>PRIORITY 2: Provision of services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RBWM has support services that are accessible and meet the needs of victim/survivors, which are delivered safely, reduce risk and are in partnership with other agencies. This includes support in safe accommodation. • Victims / survivors with additional vulnerabilities and complex needs or protected characteristics can access specialist support. • There is specific support available for children and young people affected by domestic abuse. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agencies and organisations work in a collaborative way to provide a range of safe accommodation options for victims/survivors and their children whilst maintaining support networks, where possible. • Experiences of victims/survivors of domestic abuse are used to help improve and enhance service provision.
<p>PRIORITY 3: Pursuing perpetrators</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen links between services to ensure perpetrators are proactively challenged, effectively managed and held to account in a consistent and appropriate way to support behaviour change. • There is a quality assured offer of support for children and young people causing harm to prevent this behaviour escalating. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a range of enforcement powers available to the partnership in order to protect victims/survivors wherever possible.
<p>PRIORITY 4: Working in partnership</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To have a clear understanding of the complexities of domestic abuse and the level of need. • Improved multi-agency responses to domestic abuse and prevention of future domestic abuse related deaths, including suicides. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further strengthen reporting structures an oversight for the RBWM Domestic Abuse Strategy and Action Plan. • Commission services, training and form partnerships to meet the existing and emerging level of need. • MARAC is an effective risk management process and is quality assessed regularly.

Delivering the strategy

Implementation of the RBWM Domestic Abuse Strategy relies on a robust governance structure led by the RBWM Domestic Abuse Executive Group (DAEG). This group brings together senior managers from statutory and voluntary agencies working to address domestic abuse in the borough who all contribute to delivery of actions within the strategy action plan.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places a duty on the local authority to form a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board which it must consult as it performs certain specified functions including: assessing the need and demand for accommodation-based domestic abuse support for victims and their children in safe accommodation; preparing and publishing a strategy for the provision of such support; giving effect to the strategy (through commissioning/decommissioning decisions); monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the strategy; reporting back annually to central government. The RBWM Domestic Abuse Executive Group fulfils this duty.

The DAEG will hold accountability for delivery of the Strategy as per the requirement of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, but report regularly to the RBWM Community Safety Partnership, Health and Wellbeing Board and Safeguarding Partnership. This reflects our commitment to tackling domestic abuse within a broader community, health and safeguarding agenda.

Glossary

BAME – Black And Minority Ethnic

BRAVE – Building Resilience And Valuing Emotions

CAPVA – Child and Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse

CSP – Community Safety Partnership

DAEG – Domestic Abuse Executive Group

DAPN – Domestic Abuse Protection Notice

DAPO – Domestic Abuse Protection Order

DASH Risk Indicator Checklist – Domestic Abuse, Stalking, Harassment and Honour Based Abuse

DHRs – Domestic Homicide Reviews *now called DARDRs – Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews*

DLUHC – Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities *now called MHCLG - Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government*

IDVA – Independent Domestic Violence Advocate

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

MARAC – Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference

PPRP - Promoting Positive Relationships Programme

RBWM – the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead

The Dash Charity – domestic abuse stops here

VAWG – Violence Against Women and Girls

VCS – Voluntary and Community Sector

WHA – Whole Housing Approach