



Swindon Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2024-2027

'Our vision is to end domestic abuse, to make every family safe. To do this we need to listen to survivors, be guided by the evidence of what works and make domestic abuse everybody's business.'

Adapted from SafeLives – Whole Picture Strategy

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1. Defining Domestic Abuse

This strategy adopts the government definition of Domestic Abuse, as outlined in The Domestic Abuse Act 2021. The Act states that domestic abuse covers a wide range of behaviours that are used to control, threaten or intimidate victims.

Behaviours could be considered domestic abuse if:

- Both the individuals are over 16 years of age
- Both the individual are 'personally connected' to each other and the behaviour is abusive

Behaviour may be considered abusive if it consists of one or more of the following:

- physical or sexual abuse
- psychological or emotional abuse
- coercive or controlling behaviour – intimidation, threats, humiliation that is used to punish, harm, isolate a victim and prevent them from enjoying life
- Economic abuse – any behaviours that prevents a victim having the ability to acquire, use or maintain money or obtain goods or services.

The DA Act recognised Children as victims in their own right. This came into statute in January 2022

For the full definition, please see Appendix 1

Use of Language in this Strategy

Victim/Survivor

These terms can be used interchangeably throughout this strategy to refer to people who have or are currently experiencing domestic abuse.

Perpetrator/Displaying Harmful Behaviours

This term is used throughout to refer to the person using abuse.

Lived Experience/Authentic Voice

This term refers to individuals who share their expertise and knowledge based on their first-hand experience of domestic abuse, including controlling or coercive behaviour, economic abuse, psychological or emotional and/or physical and sexual abuse.

Specialist domestic abuse service

This term refers to organisations/services independent from the state (i.e. third sector), whose core business is to support victim/survivors and/or perpetrators and/or children and young people impacted by domestic abuse and other forms of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) - including sexual violence, forced

marriage, so called 'honour based' violence, female genital mutilation (FGM), sexual exploitation.

2. The Prevalence of Domestic Abuse

Domestic Abuse can happen to anyone regardless of age, gender, sexuality, socio-economic background or profession.

One in four women and 1 in 6 Men will experience domestic abuse at some point in their lives.

On average two women are murdered every week by a partner or ex-partner because of domestic abuse.

The NSPCC reports that 1 in 5 children may be exposed to domestic abuse within their family.

Domestic Abuse is one of the leading causes of homelessness.

3. The Local Picture

In 2020/2021

- 5,540 reports of domestic abuse were received to Wiltshire Police of these:
 - 2854 were crimes
 - 2686 were incidents
- 488 cases were referred to MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences)
- 651 children lived within those households

*(NB. Some victims may be heard at MARAC more than once)

In 2022 -2023

- 5427 reports of domestic abuse were received by Wiltshire Police of these:
 - 2860 were crimes
 - 2567 were incidents
- 475 cases were referred to MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference).
- 845 Children lived within those households

*(NB. Some victims may be heard at MARAC more than once)

In 2023- 2024

- 5152 reports of domestic abuse were received by Wiltshire Police of these
 - 2447 were recorded as incidents
 - 2795 were recorded as crimes

- 471 cases were referred to MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference)
- 571 children lived within these households

*(NB. Some victims may be heard at MARAC more than once)

4. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021

Overview of the Act

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (“the Act”) came into force in April. The Act has overhauled the response and support offered to victims, survivors and children and young people affected by domestic abuse with changes in protection, legislation and a new definition of domestic abuse that includes economic abuse and that now recognises children and young people as victims in their own right.

The Domestic Abuse 2021 Act aims to:

- ❖ Protect and support victims – to enhance the safety of victims and the support they receive
- ❖ Transform the justice process – to provide support to victims throughout the justice process and an effective response to perpetrators to end the cycle of abuse
- ❖ Improve performance – to drive consistency and better performance in the response to domestic abuse; and
- ❖ Promote awareness – put domestic abuse at the top of everybody's agenda

5. Local Authority Statutory Housing Duty

Part 4 of the Act sets out the Statutory Housing Duty that all Local Authorities need to provide safe accommodation and support to victims and to disrupt perpetrators.

Part 4 of the Act placed the following duties on Swindon Borough Council:

- ❖ Set up a Multi- Agency Local Partnership Board (LPB)
- ❖ To undertake a needs assessment to map the needs of victims and their children to ensure safe accommodation offers them the services they require. This includes victims from out of the area.
- ❖ Develop and publish a safe accommodation strategy based on the needs of victims in the area.
- ❖ Implement the strategy through a commissioning or decommissioning process Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy.
- ❖ Report back annually to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) on progress.

To fulfil the role of the LPB the existing Domestic Abuse & Violence Against Women and Girl Board took on the role adopting the new Terms of Reference as set out by the Statutory Housing Duty Guidance.

This second strategy will continue to set out and deliver Swindon's overall and holistic approach of a rounded offer of support to victims in safe accommodation.

Meeting the housing needs of victims is a priority within this strategy and equally as important is the offer of support when placed in safe accommodation.

The definition of Safe accommodation was, and is intended, to be broad based and to recognise the wide diversity of safe accommodation that domestic abuse victims and their children may live in or choose to live in, including:

- Refuge accommodation
- Specialist safe accommodation
- Dispersed accommodation
- Sanctuary Schemes
- Move on or second stage accommodation

The Act states that the local authority, a private registered provider of social housing or a registered charity whose objectives include provision of support to victims of domestic abuse or accommodation and access to the Sanctuary Scheme can provide this accommodation.

Safe Accommodation should not be bed and breakfast or mixed hostel settings.

6. The Definition of Support

The aim of the duty is to provide a range of support that includes

- Advocacy Support** – development of safety plans. Working with other services for example GPs, Social Workers, Welfare Benefit providers, Hospital Trust.
- Domestic Abuse Prevention Advice** – supporting victims to recognise the signs of abuse an abusive relationship to help them break the cycle of domestic abuse... Advice on keeping safe including staying safe online.
- Specialist support for those with Protected Characteristics** – including mental health advice and support, drug and alcohol advice and support. Immigration Advice.
- Support for Children and Young People** – to include advocacy, and age appropriate therapy.

The Part 4 duty should not be applied in isolation. Amendments to the Homelessness and Secure Tenancy legislation means that a coordinated approach should follow the victim/survivors housing journey. For example, when a victim / survivor presents as homeless and are considered priority need, they should be able to access quality assured safe accommodation and be provided specialist support within these settings. Equally, where a victim/survivor is leaving refuge and moving on into the community,

they should be able to access support within these and still have access to services to help maintain secure tenancies when applicable.

7. Current Safe Accommodation provision in Swindon

Following the Needs Assessment in 2021 and information gathered by the DA & VAWG Board, the provision of safe accommodation and support was extended. New 'Safe Places' were commissioned and were available In October 2021 and April 2022 to complement the existing refuge accommodation

The new accommodation includes:

- Four additional properties available for anyone unable to access traditional refuge. i.e. males, victims with pets, victims in full time employment, larger families and victims with disabilities
- A three-bed property to provide a 24 hour staffed refuge for women with complex needs, which offers tailored support and programmes to enable them to address their needs

In addition, the following support has been commissioned until December 2025 unless otherwise noted:

- Additional funding for the Sanctuary Scheme
- A Move on Fund available to those in Safe Accommodation to help with costs associated with them being accommodated and moving on to new properties
- Two Specialist Domestic Abuse Housing Options Officers to provide support and guidance to anyone presenting to Swindon Borough Council with issues of domestic abuse. They also deal with referrals into the additional safe places accommodation.
- A Domestic Abuse Project Officer who will engage with victims and survivors to ensure that their voices are heard in all future commissioning and strategy development. The longer-term aim is that we have the Authentic Voice of victims and survivors represented at the DA & VAWG Board. (Commissioned until March 2025)

The Safe Accommodation and additional support compliments the services already available in Swindon:

1. Swindon Refuge offers accommodation to female victims and their families. In 20 self-contained flats and 2 additional emergency rooms. There is a range of support services available to residents including The Recovery Toolkit and Route 66 a programme to help survivors back into work.

2. Sanctuary Scheme - victims who wish to remain in their homes are offered additional security measures through the Council's Homelessness team. This is also be offered to victims when they move into a new property.
3. Existing move on arrangements from the refuge to Council or Housing Association properties already exist.
4. Refuge Support Workers support victims living in the refuge
5. Children's Workers support children and young people living in the refuge and those accessing support through the community outreach service
6. IDVAs (independent Domestic Violence Advisors) support victims in the Community – those victims living in their own home/tenancy, in Great Western Hospital, and at 14 GP Surgeries across the Borough
7. 24 Hour local helpline available to victims. Survivors, friends and family.

Jenni's Place - Swindon Women's Refuge

In 2021- 2022 the Refuge supported:

- 107 women accessed refuge accommodation
- 217 children were accommodated
- 27 women were unable to access refuge due to lack of space
- 20 women could not be accommodated, as the refuge could not meet their needs.
- 31-35 years of age were the highest age range accessing the refuge
- 17 women exited the service – 6 as planned exits. The rest were unplanned including returning to the abuser

In 2022 – 2023, the Refuge supported:

- 125 women accessed refuge accommodation
- 164 children were accommodated
- 21 women were unable to access refuge due to lack of space
- 29 were unable to access accommodation, as their needs could not be met.
- Women aged 26-40 years were the highest age range accessing refuge
- 45 women left the service – 25 as planned exits and a further 10 left for other reasons including returning to the abuser

In 2023 – 2024, the Refuge supported:

- 30 women accessed refuge accommodation
- 48 children were accommodated
- 19 women were unable to access refuge due to lack of space and a further 11 whose needs could not be met

- Women aged 31-35 years were the highest age range accessing refuge
- 29 women left the service – 19 as planned exits and a further 10 left for other reasons included returning to the abuser

Safe Places

Since October 2021 Safe Places have supported

- 11 victims, who could not access traditional refuge
- Those supported included male victims, victims with pets, larger families and victims with disabilities. 8 victims have been re-housed through the local authority Housing Department

Complex Needs Accommodation

The Complex Needs Refuge has, since April 2022, supported

- 9 women
- 3 have been re-housed by the local authority Housing Department
- 1 accessed residential support for their substance use and 1 has successfully re-gained access to her children since her recovery.

Therapeutic Support for Adults

Willows Counselling Service have provided therapeutic support to adults since November 2021 and have supported 29 (needs to be checked) adults in that time

Sanctuary Scheme

The Bobby Van Trust delivers the Sanctuary Scheme in Swindon. This was already operating prior to the Statutory Housing Duty funding. However, since 2021 they have provided additional security for 46 victims and installed 5 Safe Rooms. Additionally, funding is available to provide CCTV and panic alarm systems for high-risk victims to enable them to remain in their property and feel safer.

DA Housing Options Officers

The two Housing Officers are the first point of contact for anyone fleeing or wishing to flee domestic abuse and who require assistance with housing. There were the following approaches:

2021/22

- 383 approaches, of which 92% were women, 7.4% were men and 0.6% identified as other gender.
- Of these approaches:
- 73 returned to accommodation with safety measures in place

- 22 accessed refuge accommodation in Swindon and 26 were accommodated in refuge out of area. 100 people were placed in emergency and other accommodation.

The remainder were given advice, information and signposting to appropriate services

2022/23

- 249 approaches, of which 86% were women, 20% were men and 3% identified as other gender
- Of these approaches:
- 35 returned to accommodation with safety measures in place
- 7 accessed refuge accommodation in Swindon and 19 were accommodated in refuge out of area. 64 people were placed in emergency and other accommodation.

The remainder were given advice, information and signposting to appropriate services

2023/24

- 227 approaches, of which 88.75% were women 10% were men and 5% identified as other gender.
- Of these approaches:
- 23 returned to accommodation with safety measures in place
- 4 accessed refuge accommodation in Swindon and 22 were accommodated in refuge out of area. 85 were placed in emergency and other accommodation.

The remainder were given advice, information and signposting to appropriate services

8. Consultation with those with Lived Experience

Since April 2023, a Project Officer has been working to engage with victims and survivors to ensure their views and needs are considered in future commissioning rounds and in shaping the new Domestic Abuse & Violence Against Women & Girls Strategy.

In August 2023, a Lived Experience survey was distributed widely across the Borough and a series of focus groups were held to consult with victims and survivors. There were eighty-three responses to the survey, telling us of their experiences, what they felt should and could be improved, and what they saw as the gaps in provision. Subsequently a consultation group has been established and contributed to the Needs Assessment, the new DA & VAWG Strategy and the new specification for the Swindon Domestic Abuse Support Service. Moving forward there are plans to develop a mechanism for victims and survivors to meet together to decide if they would like a peer support group or a Forum. The survey will be an annual event from September 2024.

9. Needs Assessment 2023

Swindon Borough Council Public Health Team, have reviewed and updated the 2021 Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

The following recommendations are included (not in order of priority):

- Improve data flow and collection by service providers to develop a more exhaustive and detailed picture of the type of population experiencing domestic abuse and violence in Swindon.
- Strengthen early and preventive interventions to better identify children and young people at risk of domestic abuse and implement effective programmes to reduce the impact of domestic abuse on children and young people.
- Include an intersectionality approach to ensure that high risk and vulnerable groups, including people from BME groups, LGBTQ+ people, people with learning disabilities and older adults have access to specific and tailored services by upskilled and trained staff.
- Develop safe alternative and innovative reporting systems for service users with the implementation of digital technology to increase accessibility and improve support.
- Ensure services take into consideration and develop strategies to address domestic abuse and violence against men.
- Ensure that the lived experience of survivors and perpetrators is regularly collected and used to inform service planning, evaluation and delivery.
- Increase the type (long and short-term) number of specialist accommodation spaces locally, taking into consideration the different risk factors and needs of different population groups.
- Define clear and agreed referral pathways between partners to ensure that safe, timely, effective and appropriate services are offered to victims, survivors and perpetrators.
- Increase general awareness about domestic abuse both in specialised and community settings in order to reduce social and cultural stigma, ensuring that people feel confident to report domestic abuse and violence.

10. Future Intentions for provision of safe accommodation and support

Domestic abuse presentations to Housing in 2023-2024 continue to outweigh provision and has resulted in victims being placed in short term hotel accommodation.

In 2024/25 the Integrated Domestic Abuse Service – SPIDAS (Swindon Paragon Integrated Domestic Abuse Service) has been commissioned. In addition, the following services are to be considered for commissioning:

- A BAME Support worker working within a local By and For organisation
- Tailored therapeutic support for Children & Young People, delivered within two age groups 5-11 and 12 – 16 years
- Resources to support the establishment of a Co-Production group of victims and survivors

In addition, the following provision is being considered:

- Additional Safe Places to meet demand – extending the number of units of accommodation to support victims unable to access traditional refuge
- Step Down Accommodation – to support women who have completed their therapeutic group work programme within the Complex Needs accommodation and who are awaiting allocation of their new property.

11. Governance Structure

The Domestic Abuse & VAWG Board reports to the Swindon Community Safety Partnership Executive. This Board is responsible for delivery of the Statutory Housing Duty and the wider Multi-Agency Domestic Abuse Strategy and action plans attached to them and the development of a performance dashboard. The Board is also responsible for the review and management of the Safe Accommodation contracts and will report to the Community Safety Partnership Board on a quarterly basis and be responsible for reporting back to the DLUHC on an annual basis. The Terms of Reference and the membership will be reviewed and updated on an annual basis.

12. Wider Context to this Strategy

This Strategy compliments the new 10 year Swindon Multi Agency Domestic Abuse & VAWG Strategy 2024 - 2034. The requirements of the Statutory Housing Duty is only one part of the response to domestic abuse in the Borough. Consideration will be given to the wider context of the response both nationally and locally including:

- The National Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2021
- The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill 2021
- The Wiltshire Criminal Justice Board Victims and Most Vulnerable Witness Group
- The OPCC Police & Crime Plan
- The National Perpetrator Strategy (when published)
- The Victims and Prisoners Bill 2023

13. How will we know we have made a difference?

- Reduced the number of victims who are housed temporarily in unsuitable accommodation
- Improved and increased housing options for victims: including safe accommodation for those unable to access refuge, remaining in their own home and provision of move-on/step down accommodation.
- Improved access to different levels of support identified by the victim and/or their children including therapeutic support.
- Further developed the mechanisms for seeking the views of victims, survivors and perpetrators to inform future service development.
- Increased the number of victims accommodated in safe accommodation and refuge including victims with complex needs and multiple disadvantage.
- Reduction in the number of victims re-presenting at Housing Options for accommodation.
- Reduced the number of repeat victims of domestic abuse due to the increase in the options of interventions and support.
- Improved Knowledge and understanding of referral pathways to specialist support services – a no wrong door approach

Appendix 1

Part 1 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021

Definition of “domestic abuse”

1. This section defines “domestic abuse” for the purposes of this Act.
2. Behaviour of a person (“A”) towards another person (“B”) is “domestic abuse” if—
 - (a) A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and
 - (b) The behaviour is abusive.

3. Behaviour is “abusive” if it consists of any of the following—

- (a) Physical or sexual abuse;
- (b) Violent or threatening behaviour;
- (c) Controlling or coercive behaviour;
- (d) Economic abuse (see subsection (4));
- (e) Psychological, emotional or other abuse;

And it does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.

4. “Economic abuse” means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on B's ability to—

- (a) Acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or
- (b) Obtain goods or services.

5. 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).

6. References in this Act to being abusive towards another person are to be read in accordance with this section.

7. For the meaning of “personally connected”, see section 2.

2 Definition of “personally connected”

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 (see subsection (2));
- (g) They are relatives.

2. For the purposes of subsection (1) (f) a person has a parental relationship in relation to a child if—

(A) The person is a parent of the child, or

(b) The person has parental responsibility for the child. 3. in this section—

“child” means a person under the age of 18 years;

“civil partnership agreement” has the meaning given by section 73 of the Civil Partnership Act 2004;

“parental responsibility” has the same meaning as in the Children Act 1989 (see section 3 of that Act);

“Relative” has the meaning given by section 63(1) of the Family Law Act 1996.

3 Children as victims of domestic abuse

1. This section applies where behaviour of a person (“A”) towards another person (“B”) is domestic abuse.

2. Any reference in this Act to a victim of domestic abuse includes a reference to a child who—

(a) Sees or hears, or experiences the effects of, the abuse, and

(b) Is related to A or B.

3. A child is related to a person for the purposes of subsection (2) if—

(A) The person is a parent of, or has parental responsibility for, the child, or

(b) The child and the person are relatives.

(4) In this section—

“child” means a person under the age of 18 years;

“parental responsibility” has the same meaning as in the Children Act 1989 (see section 3 of that Act);

“Relative” has the meaning given by section 63(1) of the Family Law Act 1996.

Appendix 2

DA & VAWG Multi Agency Strategy

[Swindon multi-agency domestic abuse strategy | Swindon Borough Council](#)

DA Needs Assessment

[Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment 2024](#)

Final