

**Essex
Domestic Abuse
Commissioning
Strategy
2025-2030**



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Foreword

Nationally, a domestic abuse related call is made to the police every 30 seconds, yet approximately less than 24% of domestic abuse crime is reported to the police. It is estimated that nationally, 1 in 5 adults experience domestic abuse during their lifetime, this equates to 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men; and that every year 2.4 million adults and 800,000 children are affected by domestic abuse ([National Centre for Domestic Violence](#)).

Tackling the impact of domestic abuse has long been, and continues to be, a priority of Essex County Council (ECC). [Everyone's Essex](#), our organisational strategy, makes a commitment to improving the safety of Essex residents, including addressing domestic abuse.

Listening to and engaging with those with lived experience of domestic abuse has been vital to the development of this strategy. Through our Essex Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board (ELDAPB) and wider forums we have worked closely alongside partners such as police, health, social care, Essex Cities, Districts and Boroughs and voluntary and community organisations.

Alongside our partners, we look forward to ensuring the commitments set out in this strategy turn into actions and make a real difference to people with lived experience of domestic abuse.

1 in 5

adults experience
domestic abuse
in their lifetime.



Introduction

This strategy sets out the statutory duties of ECC and our commissioning intentions for victims and survivors of domestic abuse across the County of Essex. It has been informed by a range of research, a comprehensive needs assessment and engagement with our partners, front line workers, and most importantly people with lived experience of domestic abuse.

We are ambitious to go beyond delivering our statutory duties alone and have set out how we also aim to tackle domestic abuse earlier through a range of delivery, including, whole family working, and engaging with perpetrators.

Working in partnership is crucial to delivering our commitments to those affected by domestic abuse. The ELDAPB will have oversight of this strategy, monitoring the delivery of the commitments. We will also continue to be a key partner within the Southend, Essex and Thurrock Domestic Abuse Board (SETDAB) and its vision to work together across Greater Essex to enable everyone to live a life free from all forms of domestic abuse.

Our approach to commissioning domestic abuse services is underpinned by our collaboration with partners, including Southend-on-Sea City Council, Thurrock Council and the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner. Together we have entered into a formal agreement to set up the Pan Essex Domestic Abuse Commissioning Collaborative (PEDACC) building on our partnership successes to date. The PEDACC will work together to commission, facilitate, and co-ordinate equitable and consistent domestic abuse offers of support across Greater Essex.

Our strong working relationships with Essex City, District and Borough Councils is key in terms of continuing to work together to develop local housing solutions that best meets the needs of people impacted by domestic abuse and that those affected are supported by services. The SETDAB Whole Housing Subgroup will continue to be the forum to strengthen this work.



Background to Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse does not discriminate and affects people regardless of gender, biological sex, age, ethnicity, socio economic status, sexual orientation, or background. It can have a devastating impact on physical and mental health, emotional wellbeing, housing, finances, work, and education.

Domestic abuse can also result in people having to move away from their homes, local communities, and local support networks to be safe and at worst, domestic abuse sadly can result in death, leaving devastating impacts on victims' families and friends.

Domestic abuse is defined as 'occurring where the victim and the perpetrator are aged over 16 years of age, are 'personally connected' as: intimate partners, ex-partners, family members or individuals who share parental responsibility for a child'. (The Domestic Abuse Act 2021).

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**
- **psychological, emotional or other abuse**

Whilst both men and women can be affected by domestic abuse, **women are disproportionately victims**. For every three victims, two are female and one is male (ONS data 2022).

Nationally in the year ending March 2023, **2.1 million people aged 16 years and over (1.4 million women and 751,000 men) experienced domestic abuse.**

(Crime Survey for England and Wales).

Domestic Abuse Duties

The prevention of domestic abuse and the protection of all victims lies at the heart of the [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) (the Act). The measures in the Act seek to:

Promote awareness - putting domestic abuse at the top of everyone's agenda, by introducing a statutory definition which includes economic abuse and recognising children as victims in their own right.

Hold perpetrators to account - extending the controlling/coercive behaviour offence, extending the offence of disclosing private sexual photographs and films, creating a new offence of non-fatal strangulation or suffocation of another person.

Transform the justice response - helping victims to give their best evidence in the criminal courts through the use of video evidence, screens and other special measures, and ensuring that victims of abuse do not suffer further trauma in family court proceedings by being cross-examined by the perpetrator.

Improve performance - driving consistency and better performance in the response to domestic abuse.

Protect and support victims - establishing in law the office of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, introducing greater powers to the Police and Courts to protect victims and placing a new duty on tier one local authorities (Essex County Council) to provide accommodation-based support to victims including children. This includes support to those residing in the following types of safe accommodation:



Refuge accommodation

Single gender or single sex accommodation. Accommodation may be shared or in self-contained housing.



Specialist safe accommodation

Single gender or single sex accommodation which is tailored to support those who share protected characteristics and/or vulnerabilities. Accommodation may be shared or in self-contained housing.



The support set out in The Act aims to build the resilience of those who have experienced domestic abuse to recover from the trauma it causes and start to rebuild their lives.

Support to victims of crime is also included in the [Victims and Prisoners Act 2024](#) (Section 13) where there is a duty for relevant authorities within a police area to collaborate with each other regarding victim support functions. In practice this will see ECC working with PEDACC and SETDAB partners to fulfil its duty and work together to support those impacted by domestic abuse.

Dispersed accommodation



Self-contained accommodation. May be more suitable for victims who are unable to stay in accommodation with communal spaces.

Sanctuary schemes or similar



Enhanced security measures put in place to support victims to remain in their own home, where it is safe for them to do so, their choice and where the perpetrator does not live in the accommodation.

Move on/Second stage accommodation



Accommodation temporarily provided to victims before they move to fully independent and settled accommodation.

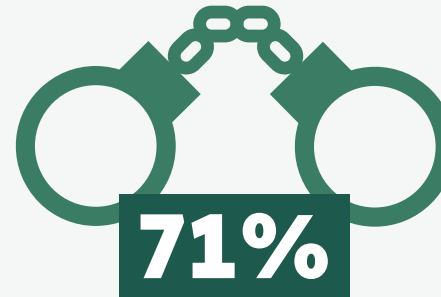
The Local Picture

People in Essex who have experienced domestic abuse can access support through [Compass](#); the dedicated Essex domestic abuse central point of contact.

Compass provides information, advice and guidance and where needed, will refer onto one of the Essex specialist domestic abuse services, which offer outreach support in the community and/or support in safe accommodation. Where domestic abuse risks have been assessed as high, support from an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) is also available.

For high-risk domestic abuse cases, a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) is held between organisations including the local police, probation, health, children and adults statutory services, housing and IDVAs. The primary focus of the MARAC is to safeguard the victim.

In Essex between April 2021 and September 2023:



99,199 domestic abuse incidents were recorded by Essex Police, of which **71,578** were found to have been a **crime**

At least 3,481 victims approached Local Housing Authorities as a result of domestic abuse



21,567 calls were made to **Compass**



6,349 adult victims

were supported by **specialist domestic abuse providers** in the community, of this:



60%

3,803 (60%) are aged 26 – 45 years



60%

3,786 (60%) had one or more children



1,114 (18%) are from the global majority¹



4%

246 (4%) are male



186 (3%) are LGBTQ+

In Essex between April 2021 and March 2023:

9 domestic abuse related homicides

recorded, making up **23%** of the total number of homicides which occurred in the county

3,891 high-risk

domestic abuse cases were heard at Essex MARAC

Further information can be found in the [2024 Essex Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment](#)

¹ Global Majority is a collective term which refers to people who are Black, Asian, Brown, dual-heritage, indigenous to the global south, and or have been racialised as 'ethnic minorities' (Campbell-Stephens 2020)

Progress since 2021 Domestic Abuse Commissioning Strategy



Objective 1: Children and young people residing in safe accommodation can access support that meets their needs

Between April 2021 and September 2024, **1,076 children and young people** in refuge safe accommodation received support, which included: counselling, play therapy, healthy relationships work, access to positive activities, access to education and parent/child relationship work.

“I like it here because it helps me stay safe, be protected and cared for. The teachers (staff) help us.”

Between April 2023 and September 2024, **over 2,000 children and young people** living at home with additional safety/security measures and the non-abusing parent received emotional wellbeing support in the form of 1:1 work and group work programmes.

“You really made me understand that I am (my daughter’s) one constant safe space and I will cherish that for ever as our relationship as mother and daughter has grown.”

“I felt listened to, for the first time.”

Children and young people **felt safer** and **better equipped to remain safe**, were able to develop healthy coping strategies, improve their mental and physical health, and emotional wellbeing and parents/carers were better able to repair bonds with their children and support them in their recovery moving forward.

2

Objective 2: Victims and survivors of domestic abuse can access support to improve their psychological and emotional wellbeing and recover from trauma

Between April 2021 and September 2024, **1,358 adults** in safe accommodation received a variety of support, including counselling, engagement in positive activities (sports, arts/ crafts, self-care sessions) to help them recover from the trauma they had experienced.

“It was a safe space to share experiences and you could talk if you wanted to.”

Between September 2023 and September 2024, **173 people** with lived experience of domestic abuse who had also experienced sexual assault and/or rape were supported by specialist rape and sexual abuse counsellors.

“Using this service has helped me to connect some of the dots as to why I think and feel at times. It’s a day-to-day battle managing my mental health, I’m grateful for the support I have received through this service.”

In February 2024 we piloted **self-help materials in 12 Essex libraries**, alongside library staff who completed **J9 training**. The aim of the pilot was for people with lived experience of domestic abuse to access books and resources independently for their recovery journey and wellbeing, as well as signposting to domestic abuse services.

“People who have checked out the books at the desk have commented how nice it is to have these sorts of books, also the subtle information that’s nearby.”

People who experienced domestic abuse felt safer and better equipped to remain safe, had **improved mental and physical health, and emotional wellbeing** and were able to build the resilience needed to recover from the trauma of domestic abuse.

3

Objective 3: Victims and survivors of domestic abuse will have improved access to safe accommodation through good quality information advice and guidance

Between February 2022 and September 2024, Domestic Abuse Housing Navigators in the Essex Cities, Districts and Boroughs supported **437 of their staff** with domestic abuse **information, advice and guidance**, which in turn enabled housing support to people experiencing domestic abuse.

“Client expressed her gratitude for not being judged, for being able to take her own path.”

Between October 2023 and October 2024, **387 households with lived experience** of domestic abuse received support through Essex Safe Start Fund (ESSF). **70% of the households included children**. The ESSF provides funding and resources to people who need to seek or sustain safe accommodation.

“I feel less anxious now, as every time the doorbell goes, I can now check if it is him or not before opening the door. I am less jumpy now and it’s made me feel safer in my own home with 2 young kids.”

People who experienced domestic abuse were supported, where appropriate, to **stay in their own home safely** and where needed were accommodated in alternative safe accommodation.

4

Objective 4: Victims and survivors of domestic abuse will be better informed of their legal options

We worked with partners and people with lived experience of domestic abuse to better understand what is currently available, and what the benefits and challenges of this are. There are a variety of options available including: self-serve information online, civil advocates in domestic abuse services and free legal clinics. Recommendations have been built into the new victim service specification.

“There is so much information out there, it can be confusing and would help if everything was in one place and also have people to go to for help.”

5

Objective 5: Victims and survivors of domestic abuse will play their part in the co-design and decisions on provision and influence the wider domestic abuse agenda in Essex

We completed research with 35 people with lived experience to help us **understand how to engage better** and the types of opportunities for sharing views and ideas and working alongside us as collaborative partners.

“By being involved, I would like to think my input will be taken seriously and for me as a survivor, if I can help others have a better experience coming out of an abusive relationship and after leaving an abuser, then it reinforces my worth and that my misfortune is being used for something positive.”

We facilitated an ECC domestic abuse lived experience group who worked with commissioners on the development of the safe accommodation specification, Essex safe start fund specification, sexual abuse specification and the libraries self-help pilot.

“Being a part of this group has helped me give something back, I didn’t realise how much work goes in to funding the right services and how important my views are.”

Over **200 young people engaged in an Essex wide ‘Listening Project’** to better understand young people’s views on healthy and unhealthy relationships between adults in the home environment and where they would seek support if needed.

“I don’t mind where we access support as long as it is isolated from your parents finding out.”

218 people with lived experience of domestic abuse **engaged in the research programme** and the 2024 Essex Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment. This ensured the design of the new Domestic Abuse Model being launched in April 2025 was influenced by people with lived experience of domestic abuse.

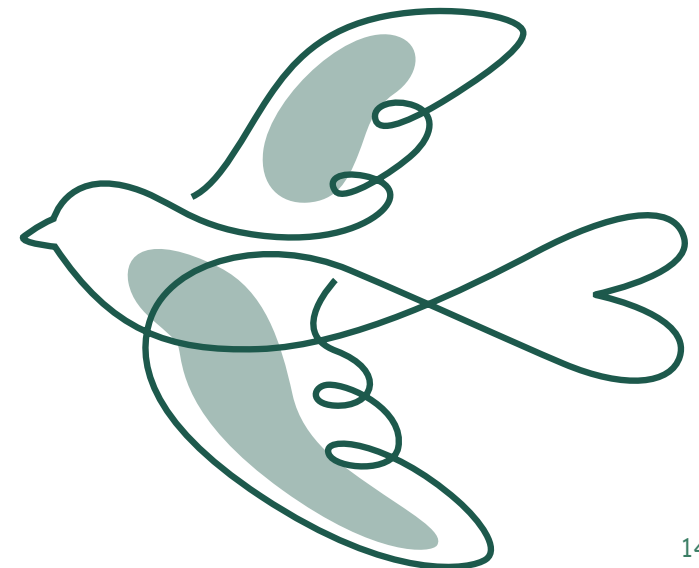
“The ability for professionals to support victims long term. Our trauma doesn’t heal on a timeline.”

People with lived experience worked with commissioners on the development of the Domestic Abuse Model service specifications, developed questions for the tender and were key members of the evaluation panels. When exploring and agreeing the overarching outcomes one person said that as long as an individual has a support network, that's everything and

“you can't do it all, you have to do it yourself, need the support but you have to do it yourself to make yourself stronger.”

Young people co-produced a healthy relationships animation to support the early help healthy relationships work. The animation is shared across social media platforms to raise awareness with young people regarding what a healthy relationship is and where to seek further help if needed.

“I learned so much doing this project, story boards, design, music and speaking to other young people and getting their thoughts on the animation.”



Research and Insight

In 2022, SETDAB partners commissioned TONIC to conduct research to provide a deeper understanding of the experiences of people who have been affected by domestic abuse. This included what currently works well and could be improved in our offer of support for both victims and perpetrators. The research engaged over 300 people from across the system, including those with lived experience.

Following that, in excess of 300 stakeholders, again including those with lived experience, engaged with the findings to consider the research recommendations and begin co-designing what a future support offer would look like.

Alongside the research programme, ECC conducted its statutory **2024 Essex Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment**. Some of the key findings from the needs assessment include:

- **Demand** – a year-on-year increase of people with lived experience of domestic abuse accessing specialist domestic abuse services
- **Housing** – increase in people with lived experience of domestic abuse approaching housing authorities and feeling unsafe in some of the temporary accommodation. This increase has also been seen in people seeking refuge safe accommodation

- **Complexity** – more people with complex needs are seeking support. Examples of this includes a high prevalence of mental health needs, families with one or more children, access to education for children, support for people regarding visas or as a refugee
- **Underrepresented cohorts** – some cohorts of people are underrepresented in domestic abuse services, this includes men, older people, and LGBTQ+

With domestic abuse impacting people across Essex communities, we need to ensure regardless of their background that people are made aware of available support, and it is accessible and appropriate for their needs.

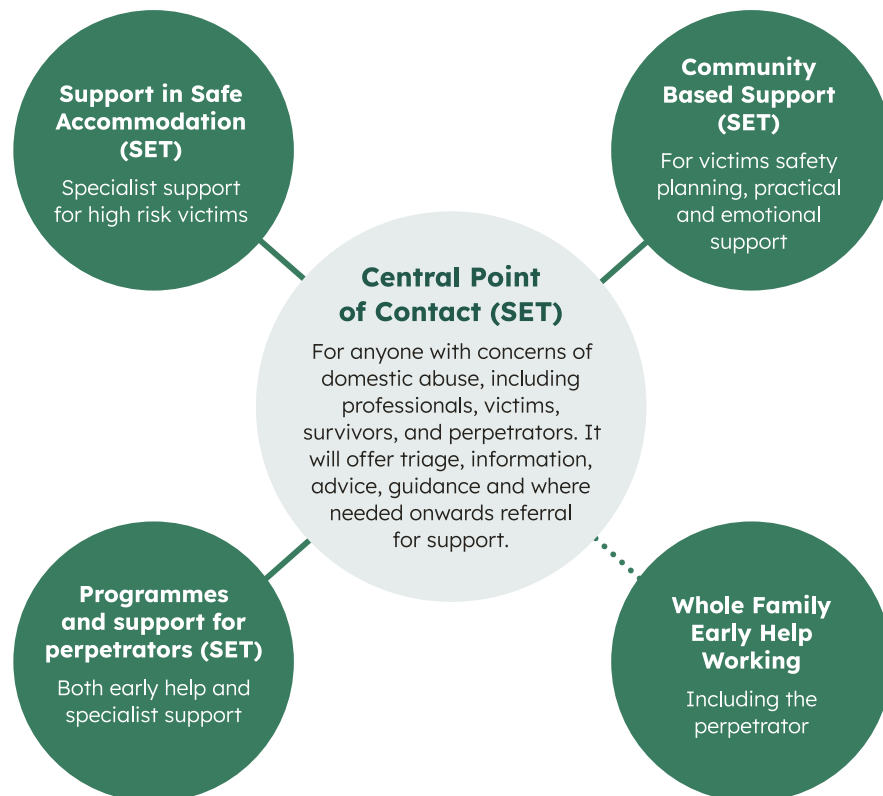
The research indicates there is still more work to be done in terms of organisations being well connected so people accessing domestic abuse support have consistency and are not repeatedly resharing traumatic experiences.

Both the TONIC research and the Essex Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment have provided insight through a range of data and research with people with lived experience of domestic abuse and wider partners. They have been key in informing this strategy, in particular the commitments and domestic abuse model.

Vision and Ambitions

In response to the research and insight, a new, co-designed domestic abuse model for Pan Essex has been developed and will be commissioned by PEDACC. This integrated approach to commissioning aims to ensure equitable, consistent, quality support and coordination of services for anyone impacted by domestic abuse in Greater Essex.

The co-designed model for Pan Essex



The model builds on the strong tradition of PEDACC partners working together and includes the following service offer that has been developed through co-design with partners:

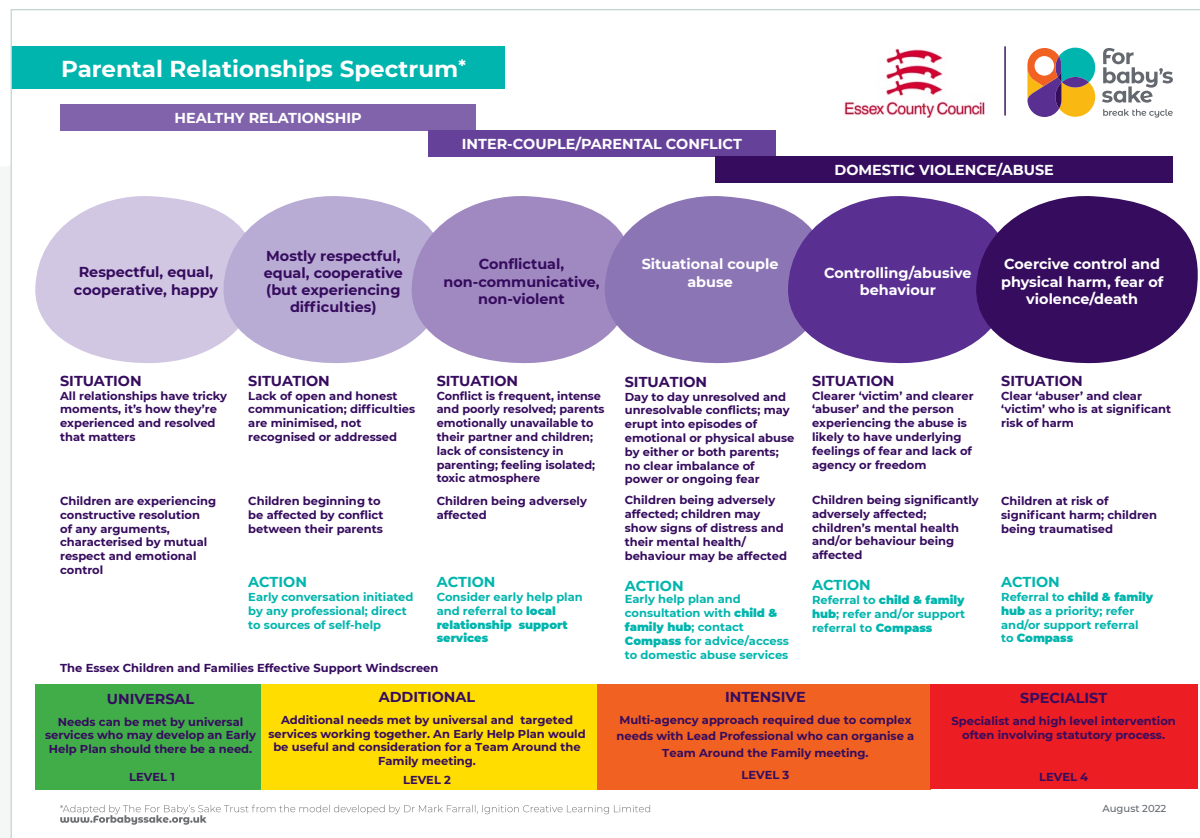
- The Central Point of Contact will continue to be known as Compass and build on the strengths of the brand and the existing referral routes and structures. The Compass brand, telephone number and website are fully embedded across the pan-Essex systems and was seen as a priority to keep when designing the new model. It will expand from a victim focussed point of access, to include perpetrators and people concerned about their own behaviour.
- There will be enhanced support within both safe accommodation and community-based support. People who experience domestic abuse, including children, will be able to access local services to meet their needs. This will include support in their local community and where needed access to supported safe accommodation. The pan-Essex model provides improved coordination of services and flexibility to meet needs, specifically where safe accommodation is required.
- A dedicated perpetrator programme across pan-Essex with a focus on early help and behaviour change will enhance this area of domestic abuse work and will also provide a pathway of support for people accessing Compass.
- The Whole Family Early Help work is a new development for Essex and will include support for perpetrators, victims, survivors, and relevant people within the family composition. Partners and people with lived experience wanted a whole family approach included in the new model. With limited research in this area, we will work alongside an innovation partner to co-design, develop and deliver a whole family approach to domestic abuse for families in Essex.

Domestic Abuse and Early Help

In Essex, our early help offer is well established and aims to support family stability through effective relationships, positive behaviour and social connectedness. Our early help approach to domestic abuse recognises healthy relationships as integral to prevention and where needed change.

Whilst unhealthy relationships such as parental conflict do not always lead to domestic abuse, it does play a part within the context of early intervention and healthy relationships. We have

a systemwide approach to our healthy relationships work, which encompasses training, workforce development, peer support groups and interventions. We have embedded reducing parental conflict work across our systems, including training and toolkits for practitioners and resources, and online digital programmes for parents. We will continue to embed this work to strengthen our early help offer. Our strategic approach to family conflict includes a Relationships Spectrum, which helps to distinguish between harmful conflict and domestic abuse.



Our 2025-30 Commitments

1

We will ensure you have access to domestic abuse information, advice and guidance

We will:

- continue to provide the central point of contact (Compass) for anyone with concerns of domestic abuse, including victims, survivors, perpetrators, wider family members and professionals. Compass will provide domestic abuse information, advice and guidance and where needed refer or signpost to other appropriate services
- continue to work with SETDAB partners to raise awareness of domestic abuse support
- ensure domestic abuse information, advice and guidance is accessible across Essex communities. We will develop and form partnerships with local 'by and for' organisations, target those groups currently underrepresented in domestic abuse support, produce accessible promotional materials, and provide access to interpretation and translation when required

2

As an adult experiencing domestic abuse you will receive an offer of support that meets your needs

We will:

- work with you, in both safe accommodation and community settings, to assess your needs and then offer you the relevant support leading to positive outcomes
- enable you to access additional information and guidance for non-domestic abuse support you may require
- consider your future planning and follow-up support before the completion of any service

3 As a child experiencing domestic abuse you will receive an offer of support that meets your needs

We will:

- work with you, in both safe accommodation and community settings, to assess your needs and then offer you the relevant support leading to positive outcomes
- enable you to access additional information and guidance for non-domestic abuse support you may require
- ensure continuity of education is prioritised as part of your support plan
- consider your future planning and follow-up support before the completion of any service

4 We will support your wellbeing and safety, be it in your own home, outside the home, or in arranged safe accommodation

We will:

- work with partners to grow and develop the range of housing options which supports your safety
- coordinate the Essex Safe Start Fund, providing flexible funding to support you to seek and sustain safe accommodation
- support you to stay in your home where this is safe to do so and your choice, or secure new safe accommodation

5 We will work with organisations and help them to recognise and respond to your needs

We will:

- continue to collaborate with partners to enhance domestic abuse support and strengthen pathways. We will do this by exploring joint commissioning opportunities, agreements between organisations, and exploring new funding opportunities
- further improve our understanding of domestic abuse in Essex by creating a shared data standard and improving the consistency and accuracy of different domestic abuse data
- ensure services link more effectively together so you do not have to keep repeating your story





You will be the experts that influence and shape the decisions related to domestic abuse

We will:

- ensure there are regular coproduction and engagement opportunities, so you are involved and influencing decisions related to domestic abuse
- capture your feedback on the service you have received and use this to develop and make improvements where necessary
- ensure your experiences are captured when completing the Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment and other related research
- keep you informed of progress and activity in relation to domestic abuse services in Essex



We will ensure support is available earlier where individuals and families need this

We will:

- invest in support programmes for young people experiencing or at risk of entering unhealthy relationships
- expand our self-help domestic abuse and healthy relationship resources in community settings
- co-design a whole family early help approach for families in Essex
- continue our programme of work to address adolescent to parent violence and abuse, through non-violent resistance (NVR) training for practitioners and voluntary and community organisations

Principles

People with lived experience of domestic abuse have shared the attitudes, skills and behaviours they want from the workforce.

These are the principles that we will work to:



an understanding that people may not view themselves as a victim or as a perpetrator



actively listening, showing empathy, being believed and being non-judgemental



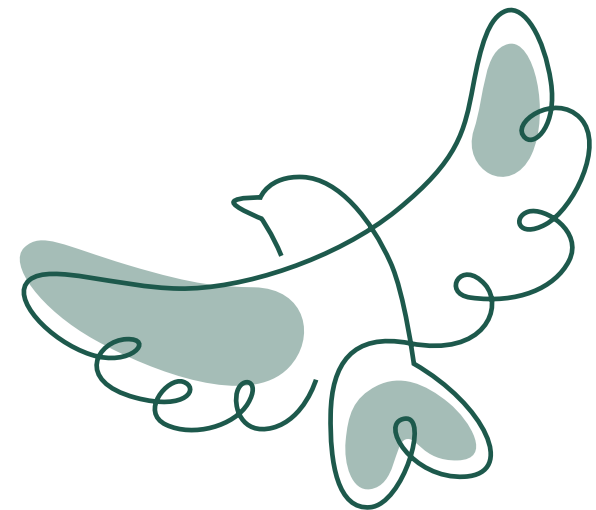
having good communication skills, using language that is understandable and letting the person with lived experience lead the conversation



the skills to help set goals and plan for the future



not making decisions for them, being inclusive in all discussions



Outcomes

People who have been impacted by domestic abuse will:



feel and be safer



have improved health, physical and emotional wellbeing



have improved education, financial and economic wellbeing



have increased resilience, self-esteem and confidence



have improved relationships and engagement with personal networks, local communities and support



benefit from positive behaviour change



have access to assessment and support in a way that is inclusive and considerate of their unique characteristics and needs

We will ensure a range of monitoring and evaluation measures are put in place for domestic abuse services you receive. This will allow us to make sure you are receiving positive outcomes, and the service is meeting your needs.

Governance

The Essex Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board (ELDAPB) is responsible for supporting ECC in meeting its duty under part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act.

Through a strategic approach the ELDAPB works together to support, advise, and work in partnership with ECC to ensure victims of domestic abuse within safe accommodation have access to adequate and appropriate support.

The commitments within this strategy are wider than the domestic abuse duties and the remit of the ELDAPB. The following groups are part of the strategic response to domestic abuse in Essex and are key to the work of this strategy:

- Southend, Essex and Thurrock Domestic Abuse Board
- Pan Essex Domestic Abuse Commissioning Collaborative
- Essex Safeguarding Adults Board
- Essex Safeguarding Children Board
- Safer Essex Partnership

Related strategies

The following strategies are interconnected with this commissioning strategy and the work tackling domestic abuse:

- [SETDAB Strategy 2020-2025](#)
- [Everyone's Essex 2021-2025](#)
- [Essex Police and Crime Plan 2024-2028](#)
- [Essex Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2026](#)
- [Essex All-Age Carers Strategy 2022](#)
- [Essex County Council Housing Strategy 2021-2025](#)



Monitoring progress

1

Year 1

- January 2025 - 5 year strategy published
- Whole Family Early Help Strategic Innovation Partnership launched
- New DA Model goes live
- Annual DA duties report to MHCLG
- Needs Assessment refresh

2

Year 2

- Whole Family Early Help approach piloted
- Annual DA duties report to MHCLG
- Needs Assessment refresh

3

Year 3

- Whole Family Early Help approach delivery and scaling up
- Annual DA duties report to MHCLG
- Comprehensive Needs Assessment
- Strategy Review

4

Year 4

- Annual DA duties report to MHCLG
- Needs Assessment refresh

5

Year 5

- Review and new Strategy activities
- Annual DA duties report to MHCLG

Glossary

ECC

Essex County Council

ELDAPB

Essex Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board

SETDAB

Southend, Essex and Thurrock Domestic Abuse Board

PEDACC

Pan Essex Domestic Abuse Commissioning Collaborative

DAPN

Domestic Abuse Protection Notice

DAPO

Domestic Abuse Protection Order

MARAC

Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference

ESSF

Essex Safe Start Fund

NVR training

Non-violent resistance training

NRPF

No Recourse to Public Funds

By and For Organisations

Organisations run by and for the users and communities they aim to serve

Global Majority

Global Majority is a collective term which refers to people who are Black, Asian, Brown, dual-heritage, indigenous to the global south, and or have been racialised as ‘ethnic minorities’ (Campbell-Stephens 2020)

IDVA

Independent Domestic Violence Advisor

MHCLG

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

SET

Southend, Essex and Thurrock

DA

Domestic Abuse

This information is issued by:
Essex County Council Children and Families

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