

Swale Domestic Abuse Policy 2023

1. Introduction

Swale Borough Council is committed to ensuring the safety of its community. The Council believes that all forms of domestic abuse are unacceptable and this Policy sets-out not only the Council's responsibilities under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, but what further action the Council will take to support domestic abuse victims and their families in partnership with other agencies.

2. Purpose

- 2.1 The purpose of this policy and its associated procedures are to increase the safety of those residents within the Borough of Swale that are affected by Domestic Abuse.
- 2.2 This policy also demonstrates how Swale Borough Council (SBC) will meet its legal obligations and assure victims and survivors of domestic abuse as to what they can expect SBC to do to increase their safety; and how the Council we will work in collaboration with external agencies to do so.

3. Definition of Domestic Abuse

- 3.1 Domestic Abuse is defined as an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violence behaviour. It is between those that are 16 and over and are, or have been in an intimate relationship, family members or have a parental relationship in relation to the same child. For full definition please visit [Domestic Abuse Act 2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk).
- 3.2 Domestic abuse can include, but is not limited to:
 - Coercive control (a pattern of intimidation, degradation, isolation and control)
 - Psychological or emotional abuse
 - Physical or sexual abuse
 - Financial or economical abuse
 - Harassment and stalking
 - Violent or Threatening Behaviour
 - Online or digital abuse
- 3.3 SBC recognises that domestic abuse can be experienced by both women and men, as well as those from the LGBTQ+ community, and we will ensure an appropriate response for all.
- 3.4 The Domestic Act 2021 formally recognised children as victims of domestic abuse in their own right, due to the impact experiencing domestic abuse can have on them. SBC had already understood this impact and had been working with partner agencies to determine what local services needed to be in place for children affected by domestic abuse.
- 3.5 It is also recognised that domestic abuse can be more prevalent within certain groups and that any response must consider those with protected characteristics, but also that they may experience more barriers in accessing support.

4. Swale Context

- 4.1 Domestic Abuse is one of the highest crime volumes in the borough and there has continued to be a steady increase in reported domestic abuse incidents over the last ten years. This is the case nationally. This is in part felt to be due to increase confidence in victims to report concerns, but ultimately is reflective of the high prevalence of these issues.
- 4.2 Annually within Swale, the local domestic abuse picture is captured within the Community Safety Strategic Assessment. Within Kent, an annual Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment is also completed. Both documents show how partners within Kent will work together to tackle this issue.

5. Legal Duties

- 5.1 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 became law on 30th April 2021. It includes:
- A revised legal definition of domestic abuse which recognises children as victims in their own right (as discussed in section 3).
 - Legal duty on Councils to fund support for survivors in safe accommodation
 - New protections in the family and civil courts for survivors
 - A guarantee that all survivors will be in priority need for housing and will keep a secure tenancy in social housing
- 5.2 The Care Act 2014 stipulates how local authorities (in this case Kent County Council) and other parts of the system such as relevant partners (which includes SBC as a district council) should protect adults at risk of abuse or neglect. This includes those experiencing or having experienced domestic abuse.
- 5.3 The Children Act 1989 states that the child's welfare is paramount and that every child has a right to protection from abuse, neglect and exploitation.
- 5.4 The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Section 17 places a duty upon SBC to consider the impact of its functions and decision in crime and disorder within their local area; and to fully cooperate within the local Community Safety Partnership (CSP). Within the Swale CSP, SBC is an active partner and tackling Domestic Abuse is a key priority for the Partnership and has been for many years.

6. Policy Position

6.1 Principles

- 6.1.1 SBC believes that all forms of domestic abuse are unacceptable and is committed to the following principles:
- To work in partnership with external agencies to ensure the most appropriate response is in place as a Borough to victims and survivors of domestic abuse, working towards a Coordinated Community Response.
 - To ensure our staff have the correct skills, tools and knowledge to effectively respond to victims of domestic abuse
 - To ensure that all practice is underpinned by safety led case management
 - That a survivor led approach is taken to all service development
 - To provide inclusive services that are accessible and meet the individual needs of all, including those experiencing domestic abuse within same sex relationships
 - To consider our role in how perpetrators of abuse are held to account for their behaviour and seek to ensure appropriate support services are in place for them

- To actively promote our domestic abuse response
- To have a trauma informed approach to supporting victims and survivors

6.1.2 This policy will be developed and reviewed on a regular basis, with residents, service users and partner agencies affected by domestic abuse. It will be reviewed within three years. Consideration will be given to any changes in legislation or policy.

6.1.3 Should any learning arise from Domestic Homicide Reviews, Serious Case Reviews or Serious Adult Reviews which impact on this Policy and the way in which SBC responds to domestic abuse, the Policy will be revised sooner.

6.2 Scope

6.2.1 This policy covers Swale Borough Council's response to victims and survivors of domestic abuse. It clearly identifies the role of the Council in this agenda and how it will work in partnership with other agencies.

6.2.2 This policy will sit alongside existing SBC Policies including:

- Safeguarding Policy and Procedures
- Community Safety Plan
- Staff Domestic Abuse Policy
- Housing Strategy
- Housing Allocations Policy

6.2.3 This policy will also sit alongside standalone domestic abuse procedures. These will provide a daily framework for staff to enable the right response is given and will focus on identifying individuals/families experiencing domestic abuse; how to respond in a safe way; and recording and sharing information.

7. Responding to Domestic Abuse

7.1 Key Contacts

7.1.1 All Swale based support for victims and survivors of Domestic Abuse can be found at <https://www.domesticabuseservices.org.uk/>.

7.1.2 The Swale Borough Council Safeguarding Team will be the main contact point for all victims and survivors of domestic abuse seeking support from the Council, along with for staff, Members, volunteers and contracted services for advice on domestic abuse cases. They can be contacted on:

- Email: safeguarding@swale.gov.uk
- Phone: 01795 417457

The team will be able to offer support, safety planning and onward referrals to other agencies for dedicated support.

7.1.3 For any concerns outside of office hours, where there is an immediate concern for safety, support can be sought from Kent Police on 999 or 101 or Social Services on 03000 41 91 91.

7.2 Record Keeping

7.2.1 All details of cases will be kept in line with the Safeguarding Policy. The My Concern Safeguarding Database is in place to record and manage all safeguarding concerns, including those for domestic abuse.

7.2.2 It is the responsibility of all staff, Members and volunteers to ensure that they have made the Safeguarding team aware of a disclosure or concern of domestic abuse, so that details of that concern and action taken can be recorded.

7.3 **Risk based process**

7.3.1 All support to domestic abuse victims will be tailored around a risk-based approach. Safeguarding staff and those that are most likely to identify victims of domestic abuse will be required to understand how to risk assess a concern and then take appropriate action.

7.4 **Local Support Services**

7.4.1 SBC does not directly deliver domestic abuse specialist support services. As a result, staff within the Safeguarding team are required to have good knowledge of all local support services for victims and families.

7.4.2 Through the Community Safety Partnership mechanism, regular mapping of local services will take place. SBC will also work with partner organisations to identify any gaps in services needed locally.

7.5 **Tailored Response**

7.5.1 SBC recognises that not all victims/survivors of domestic abuse can access services in the same manner; or at the same point of their journey. Each response given to an identified or potential victim will be tailored to their needs and wishes. This will also include for those with protected characteristics. Referrals into specialist By and For services at either a local or national level will be considered.

8. **Roles and Responsibilities**

8.1 **All Staff, Members, Volunteers:** All are responsible for ensuring that that they are aware of how to identify a victim of domestic abuse and how to direct them for support.

8.2 **Senior Management Team (SMT):** SMT are responsible for ensuring that this Policy and related procedures are implemented, monitored and regularly reviewed.

8.3 **Community Safety Manager:** The Community Safety Manager will be responsible for ensuring that this policy and associated procedures are implemented. This role will also be the main link for all partnership related activity.

8.4 **All Service Managers:** All service managers (and contract managers responsible for contracted services) must ensure that they and their staff have received the appropriate training and are confident to identify victims of domestic abuse and signpost accordingly.

8.5 **ASB and Vulnerability Team Leader/Safeguarding Officers:** These posts will be responsible for implementing this policy and associated procedures on a day to day basis. They will be the main point of contact for all other staff/Members/volunteers that have identified a victim of domestic abuse and will ensure that an appropriate response is in place.

8.6 Domestic Abuse Advocates will be introduced into customer facing teams. These roles will be a voluntary and provided with additional levels of training. They will be the first point of contact within teams for those seeking advice on any identification of domestic abuse concerns.

9. Training

9.1 SBCs Safeguarding Policy details training required by staff across a range of safeguarding subjects including domestic abuse. Training required varies depending on the level of contact by roles with vulnerable adults, children and families, with those with the greater level of contact required to complete face to face/virtual training. Those staff with less contact will need to complete an e-learning module.

9.2 The Safeguarding Policy and Training Plan are reviewed annually, and this is where all domestic abuse related training will be captured.

9.3 Staff training compliance is monitored on a quarterly basis.

9.4 Specialist staff, including those within the Safeguarding Team will also consider enhanced domestic abuse training.

9.5 All domestic abuse training will be delivered by a domestic abuse specialist agency.

9.6 Staff will need to have the confidence to identify, respond to, support, refer and record domestic abuse in a way that is appropriate to their role. Specialist staff will also be required to use risk identification and assessment, information sharing and general safeguarding.

9.7 Training will also be made available to elected Members.

10. Partnerships

10.1 SBC is an active partner within the Swale Community Safety Partnership (CSP), for which domestic abuse remains a priority and has been for over ten years. It contributes to the development and delivery of any associated actions within the Swale Community Safety Plan relating to domestic abuse, including chairing the Swale Domestic Abuse Group, which is a sub-group of the CSP. The Community Safety Plan is reviewed annually, taking into account current threats and risks as part of the community safety agenda, including for domestic abuse. SBC works closely with other local partners to understand any gaps in services and how these can be addressed.

10.2 SBC is also an active partner within the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Partnership and the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board.

10.3 SBC also works closely with the Kent Safeguarding Children Multi-Agency Partnership and the Kent Safeguarding Adults Board.

11. Publicity/Awareness Raising

- 11.1 SBC will ensure that information on accessing domestic abuse support is available on its website, signposting to appropriate local support services.
- 11.2 SBC is committed to working alongside the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Partnership on all publicity and awareness raising work. This will include:
- Promotion of the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse website which holds comprehensive information on all local support services
 - To be an active participant in the national '16 days of action' campaign and other localised communications campaigns.
- 10.3 SBC will work closely with other local partners to ensure there are a variety of mechanisms in place locally, including face to face, for victims to access support and advice.
- 10.4 SBC will continue to promote the White Ribbon Campaign, hosting local Ambassadors to spread the message that Violence Against Women and Girls will not be tolerated.
- 10.5 Any communication will be tailored to different audiences to ensure messaging is inclusive and that victims from all groups are able to access support.

12. Prevention

- 11.1 SBC will consider what preventative action it can take through its partnership working, to seek to prevent domestic abuse occurring in the first place.
- 11.2 This will include through engagement with schools and young people to promote what a healthy relationship looks like and where to go if they are experiencing issues themselves. Although the Council will not directly deliver this support, it will work closely with partners to ensure that such support is available

13. Perpetrators

- 13.1 Throughout this policy, SBCs response to supporting victims and survivors of domestic abuse has been discussed, but it must be recognised that perpetrators of abuse must also be identified and held to account for their behaviour.
- 13.2 SBC will work in partnership with other local agencies to ensure that a holistic response is in place for tackling perpetrator behaviour.
- 13.3 When staff identify perpetrators of domestic abuse, information sharing with appropriate agencies will take place to ensure that appropriate action can be taken to safeguard the victim and ensure the perpetrator can be held to account for their behaviour.
- 13.4 SBC will work alongside partner agencies to ensure that there is adequate local provision in place for perpetrators to access to address their behaviour or other needs. Staff will seek to promote these services to perpetrators as appropriate.