

# Breaking the Chain Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy

2023 – 2030



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Warning - this document contains references and quotes that may be triggering for some people.

## Foreword

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Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence have devastating impacts for individuals, families and communities, which is why this Strategy is so important to the Council and our numerous partners committing to breaking the chain.

There has been significant progress throughout the delivery of the previous Strategy, which has put Torbay in a much stronger position to be even more ambitious in tackling these massive issues. We are pleased to adopt a Strategy that is and needs to be ambitious, committed to long term change and absolutely focussed on responding to people experiencing domestic abuse and sexual violence. What sets this approach aside is how it has been developed with people sharing their lived experience – of their trauma, aspirations, things that have helped and where they have felt let down. These stories are the motivation and insight that will drive action forward and help the right responses to be delivered at the right time in the right way.

There can be no hiding from the fact that the prevalence of and response to sexual violence remains unacceptable, a national problem. It is necessary that this Strategy recognise this fact and address it as a priority, putting into purposeful use the Devon-wide sexual violence Call to Action, which again was informed by people with lived experience.

This Strategy aims to be responsive to all people experiencing domestic abuse and sexual violence and challenge all those who cause harm, but in doing so we recognise the disproportionate experience of women and girls as victims of male behaviour. Torbay will not shy away from bold conversations where they need to be had, or innovation where needed.

Our heartfelt thanks go to all the people who have take their time to relay their experiences, no matter how difficult, to help develop this Strategy and improve our response for others now and in the future. We shall not stop listening, learning and striving for better – this Strategy is our commitment to that.

Councillor Christine Carter, Cabinet Member for Equality & Diversity and Corporate and Community Services

# Introduction

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“it definitely started off completely mental, not physical, but it was just literally putting me down all the time. Keeping me in my place. Making sure I was where I was supposed to be”

Domestic abuse survivor, Torbay

Since our last Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence Strategy, which was launched in 2018, there have been a number of significant events and policy changes which have brought the emotive subjects of domestic violence and abuse (DVA) and sexual violence (SV) to the forefront of our attention.

Firstly, the Covid-19 pandemic led to an almost overnight change in the way front line domestic abuse and sexual violence services were delivered. Virtual (online) support, which had previously been unthinkable, became the norm. Practitioners and support workers had to develop skills in using unfamiliar technology to ensure they could still see clients face to face and keep them safe. Forensic services for victims of sexual violence had to find ways to continue to safely provide forensic examinations whilst keeping victims and their staff protected from the virus. Strategic partnerships between local authority domestic abuse and sexual violence commissioners, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon and Cornwall (OPCC) health colleagues in Devon and Cornwall Clinical Commissioning Groups, as well as Devon and Cornwall Police, became stronger and more robust. New relationships were forged as together we worked through the pandemic to listen to and learn from our services and communities to ensure victims and survivors of domestic abuse and/or sexual violence were able to access and receive support.

In 2021 the Domestic Abuse Act came into force, and amongst a range of measures - for the first time - a statutory duty was placed upon local authorities to provide support to victims of domestic violence living in what is defined as "safe accommodation" (such as a refuge). Importantly, the Act provides for children to be recognised as victims of domestic violence in their own right.

The same year brought the terrible crimes of sexual violence and murders of Sarah Everard and Sabina Nessa, and closer to home of Bobbi-Anne McCleod in Plymouth; and the advent of the "Everyone's Invited" campaign. Ofsted carried out a themed inspection of sexual harassment and abuse in schools. The Home Office produced its End to End Rape Review. Torbay undertook a Multi-Agency Case Audit of harmful sexual behaviour across Torbay.

Torbay's Partnership commitment to addressing DVA and SV has remained steadfast throughout the events and change of this period, with much progress being made in developing and expanding our response. Some key activities have included:

- Expanding the number of Independent Domestic Violence Advocate roles, including within Torbay hospital, sexual health services and for the LGBTQ community
- Specialist roles within Children's Services

- IRIS pilot established sensitive clinical enquiry enabling identification of domestic abuse and sexual violence in primary care
- White Ribbon re-accreditation
- Standing Tall DASV CVS Partnership developed and delivering support within the community
- Numerous training opportunities, webinars and awareness campaigns delivered
- Meeting statutory requirements of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- Part of the NHS England Peninsula Sexual Violence Trauma Pathfinder with Peninsula Authorities, NHS Devon and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner

Torbay Council has procured a new Alliance of services that will work together - comprising the domestic abuse service, homeless hostel and adults' drug and alcohol services. These services, which go live in 2023, will work collaboratively with the Council as equal partners to provide trauma informed, integrated and holistic support for people experiencing a range of challenges in their lives. Instead of having to move around between different services and organisations, people can engage with one service that will work with them to address the underlying causes of their issues and support people in the way that best works for them.

"We need services to talk and listen to us rather than talk at us"

Domestic Abuse survivor, Torbay

Our understanding of the issues around domestic violence and the partnerships in which we work have matured considerably since the last Strategy was written. Sadly however, the same cannot be said of sexual violence. Sexual violence remains a taboo subject for general discussion, cloaked in discomfort and shrouded in prejudicial myths that are systemically prevalent. We have found there is an inadequacy of support for victims of sexual violence and assault, particularly if a criminal justice response is not wanted or is not successful. The rates for successful prosecution are low nationally and regionally.

In this Strategy we aim to elevate the issue of sexual violence and our systemic response to it so that it becomes equal to that of domestic violence. That is not to say that we will not continue to address and improve our response to domestic violence; instead that we approach this work in the knowledge that those experiencing sexual violence in Torbay receive limited support, unequal to the support received by those who experience domestic violence and abuse.

"It's a cultural thing. As soon as you say: 'I've been in a domestic violence relationship.' 'What did you do to deserve it? Or what did you do to annoy them' as if that makes it all okay"

To aid understanding and avoid stigmatisation we look to frame our conversations and language around relationships as this is the enduring context of most domestic abuse and sexual violence. We fully acknowledge that DVA & SV is perpetrated against women and girls and is rooted in gender based patriarchal, misogynistic, historic, and cultural norms. However, we want to make our response as inclusive as possible in consideration of the broader nuances of violence and abuse within relationships and in keeping with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 definition of DVA, as well as gender identity and sexual orientation. As Torbay works to become a more trauma informed Council, we want to consider the impacts of trauma not only on victims and survivors of domestic and sexual violence and abuse, but also on those who are causing these harms; whilst still holding them fully accountable for their actions.

This Strategy is aligned to the **Council Fit for the Future** and **Thriving People** objectives set out in Torbay Council's Community and Corporate Plan, working in partnership to promote community resilience, promote good mental and physical health, and protect our children and young people.

## Legal Framework and Definitions

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“...I didn't see that I was in an abusive relationship because it wasn't physical”

Domestic abuse survivor, Torbay

## Legal Framework

The list below sets out the key legislation, national policies and strategies relating to domestic violence and abuse and sexual violence:

Domestic Abuse Act 2021

National Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2021

End to End Rape Review 2021

Crown Prosecution Service Rape and Serious Sexual Offences Strategy (RASSO) 2020

The Victims Code (2020)

Victim's Bill 2022

Police Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 - Serious Violence Duty

Serious Crime Act 2015

Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act (2004)

The Care Act 2014

The Children Act 1989

Police Response to Violence Against Women and Girls Final inspection report -Her

Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (September 2021)

Violence Against Women and Girls National Statement of Expectations - Home Office (March 2022)

“A Patchwork of Provision– How to meet the needs of victims and survivors across England and Wales” - Domestic Abuse Commissioner’s Office (November 2022)

## Regional and Local Strategies

The following regional and local strategies are relevant:

Torbay Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021 to 2024

Devon Clinical Commissioning Group Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence GP Policy

Devon & Cornwall Police Violence Against Women and Girls Delivery Plan 2022/2023

## Definitions

The World Health Organisation defines **sexual violence** as:

“Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments, or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting including but not limited to home and work.”

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 defines **domestic violence and abuse** as follows:

Behaviour of a person (“A”) towards another person (“B”) is “domestic abuse” if:

A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and the behaviour is abusive.

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

“Economic abuse” means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on B’s ability to:

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

For the purposes of this Act: A’s behaviour may be behaviour “towards” B despite the fact that it consists of conduct directed at another person (for example, B’s child).

## Abbreviations and terms used in this document

<b>Bystander Training/Approach</b>	For the purposes of this document this refers to active bystander training in the community, whereby a person observes abusive or disrespectful behaviour, knows it is wrong and intervenes safely to prevent the situation escalating or to disrupt the situation.
<b>Coercive Control</b>	An act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse carried out by the abuser that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim in the context of people in or who have been in an intimate relationship.
<b>Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (DAA21)</b>	Legislation enacted in 2022 that created a new definition of domestic abuse, defined children as victims in their own right, and created a statutory requirement upon Tier 1 (county/unitary) Local Authorities to develop a Safe Accommodation Strategy overseen by an accountable Local Partnership Board.
<b>Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Operational Group (DASVOG)</b>	Multi agency group comprising representatives from Torbay Council community safety and children’s services, housing, domestic abuse services, sexual violence services, Devon and Cornwall Police, MARAC (as below), Health, community, and voluntary sector organisations. This operational group works on activities as directed by the DASVEG.
<b>Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group (DASVEG)</b>	Multi agency group comprising senior managers from Torbay Council community safety and children’s services, housing, domestic abuse services, sexual violence services, Devon and Cornwall Police, MARAC (as below), Health and community and voluntary sector organisations. This strategic group is responsible for the delivery of the statutory duties set out in the Domestic Abuse Act, takes the role of the local domestic abuse partnership board, and drives the activities needed to implement the DASV strategy
<b>DA Champions</b>	People who have undertaken Domestic Abuse Champions Training run by the organisation Reduce the Risk. Champions act as an access point in their workplace to provide guidance on domestic violence and signpost to appropriate services.
<b>DVA/DA</b>	Domestic Violence and Abuse – as defined in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 above.
<b>Health and Wellbeing Board</b>	A partnership between the Local Authority and NHS overseeing the plans to improve the health and wellbeing needs of the local population.
<b>Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA)</b>	IDVAs are specially trained to work with the highest risk cases to address the safety of victims and their children within a multi- agency framework, acting as the victim’s primary point of contact. Their tasks include risk assessment, safety planning and implementing actions from the MARAC (see below).
<b>Independent Sexual Violence Advocate (ISVA)</b>	ISVAs provide advocacy and support to victims and survivors of recent and non-recent rape, sexual abuse, and sexual assault. The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner separately commission them.
<b>Lived Experience</b>	Personal knowledge of someone who has direct experience of domestic violence or abuse and/or sexual violence.



<b>Multi –Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)</b>	The Domestic Violence MARAC is a meeting where a range of agencies discuss the risk of future harm to people experiencing domestic abuse and draw up plans to help manage that risk
<b>NHS Devon</b>	A partnership of health and social care organisations working together with local communities across Devon, Plymouth, and Torbay to improve people’s health, wellbeing, and care.
<b>Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon and Cornwall (OPCC)</b>	The Police and Crime Commissioner is an elected representative who makes sure that local police meet the needs of the community.
<b>Person displaying harmful behaviour/person causing harm</b>	These terms are what we prefer to use to describe those perpetrating DVA or SV – otherwise known as perpetrators
<b>Safe Accommodation Strategy</b>	The Strategy required by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 which sets out how victim and survivors of domestic abuse will be supported in safe accommodation (such as refuge or safe houses
<b>Safety Planning</b>	A personal safety plan is a way for a person experiencing domestic violence or abuse to protect themselves and their children in the event of future abuse
<b>Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC)</b>	Provides specialist medical and forensic services for anyone who has been raped or sexually assaulted in a safe, private, and comfortable environment
<b>Sexual Assault</b>	Sexual assault is any act of physical, psychological, and emotional violation in the form of a sexual act, inflicted on someone without their consent. It can involve forcing or manipulating someone to witness or participate in any sexual acts
<b>Sexual Violence (SV)</b>	Sexual violence is any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting
<b>Torbay Children’s Safeguarding Partnership (TSCP)</b>	The TSCP is comprised of the statutory Safeguarding Partners; Police, Clinical Commissioning Group and Local Authority, who work in close collaboration with other identified agencies to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children and young people in Torbay
<b>Torbay Community Safety Partnership</b>	Also known as Safer Communities. Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) exist by law and their job is to bring agencies and people together to reduce crime and disorder and make areas safer.
<b>Trauma Informed(Approach)</b>	Where the signs and symptoms of trauma in people using services is recognised and understood. The service response takes into consideration the trauma that a person has experienced/ may have experienced in the past and how this may continue to affect them. TIA keeps an awareness of the effects of trauma at the forefront of the approach to providing support and seeks to avoid re-traumatization.
<b>Victim Support (VS)</b>	Charity supporting victims of crime in England Wales. In Devon and Cornwall, VS is the Strategic Delivery Partner of the Police and Crime Commissioner and is

	responsible for commissioning victim support services across the Peninsula including some domestic abuse and sexual violence services.
<b>White Ribbon Ambassadors</b>	Men (usually) who act as formal representatives of White Ribbon UK, part of a global movement to prevent men's violence against women and girls. They are positive role models taking a stand against all male violence against women and girls and encouraging other men and boys to do so too.
<b>Whole Family Approach</b>	Where the needs of all the individuals in the family are taken into consideration when carrying out support assessments and developing support plans. (In this context in relation to people using domestic abuse and sexual violence services and their children).

## Data on Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence

### National Data

Sources: Crime Survey of England and Wales (CSEW) 2020; Office of National Statistics (ONS) 2020

- **74%** of victims of DVA crimes recorded by police In the year ending March 2020 were female
- In the year 2020 to 2021 unwanted sexual touching was **the most common type** of sexual assault experienced by both men and women
- Of sexual offences recorded by the police in the year ending March 2020, the victim was female in **84%** of cases. This is a prevalence rate of approximately 3 in 100 women and 1 in 100 men (ONS 2020)
- In **57%** of all adult rape cases the victim feels unable to pursue the case
- **One-third** of all female SV victims were aged under 15 years old
- More than half (**55%**) of all male victims were aged under 15 years.
- Adults with a disability **are more likely** to have experienced DVA in the last 12 months than non-disabled people (CSEW 2020)
- People from black and minoritised ethnic communities suffer DVA for **1.5 times** longer than those with White British or Irish backgrounds (Safelives 2020)
- LGBT+ victims of domestic abuse are more likely to be abused by multiple perpetrators - **15%** compared to **9%** of non-LGBT+ victims (Safelives 2018)
- Adults are **six times** as likely to experience rape or assault by a partner or ex-partner than a family member (ONS 2020)

“ ...constantly having to, like, justify everything because your abusers of the same sex, and it's really, really difficult. Because it's like 'oh a woman is capable of doing

that?.' It's like 'yes, they're very capable.' A man is capable, a woman is capable, it doesn't matter. If somebody wants to be abusive, they're going to be abusive"-

Domestic Abuse survivor, Torbay

"we're not just talking about t-shirt sizes, it doesn't fit all, genders don't fit all, religion, doesn't fit all, you know, and trauma doesn't feel, it's all different and we all come out of it differently"

Domestic Abuse survivor, Torbay

## Torbay Domestic Abuse Headlines

- There were **2,005 police incidents** of domestic abuse in Torbay in 2020/21.
- Domestic abuse accounts for **22% of all crimes** in Torbay.
- **217** Marac referrals in 2020/21
- **72%** of victims reporting to the police over the past 3 years have been female (2018-21)
- **84%** of domestic abuse offenders were male in 2020/21
- **126** Domestic Violence Protection Orders were granted in 2020/21
- Almost a quarter (**24%**) of DVA related crimes are for stalking and harassment.
- **80%** of DVA incidents are assessed as being standard or medium risk.
- **113** Victims of domestic abuse presented as homeless in Torbay in 2020-21
- It is projected that **30%** (667) of referrals to Children's Services in 2020/21 had domestic abuse as a factor. **40%** of these came from the police.
- **164** children became looked after where domestic abuse was a factor over the three years 2018-2021
- Almost half (**47%**) progressed to a Child Protection Plan
- It is estimated that only **33%** of people experiencing DVA in Torbay are known to services

## Torbay Sexual Violence Data Headlines

The data below is sourced from:

- First Light Independent Sexual Violence Advocate (ISVA) service data 2021/22
  - Devon and Cornwall Police data provided to Torbay Council Community Safety Team
  - Devon Rape Crisis service data
  - Torbay Council online Are You OK survey 2021
- 
- The police received **166** reports of rape in the year ending March 2022
  - There were **264** sexual offences reported to the police in 2021/22
  - **41.2%** of all ISVA referrals in 2021/22 were from Devon (including Torbay)
  - In **81%** of cases, the person causing the harm was known to the victim

- In **43.5%** of cases the person causing harm was a family member, relative, or partner/ex-partner
- In 2021/22 **31%** of referrals to Devon Rape Crisis were self-referrals, **36%** were from mental health providers
- **More than half** of females responding to the Are You OK survey who had experienced sexual abuse/violence, said they had been raped
- **More than half** of both males and females survey respondents who had experienced sexual abuse/violence reported they had experienced inappropriate touching.
- **97%** of those whose drinks had been spiked or thought they probably had been spiked were female
- **41%** of survey respondents did not recognise it as sexual abuse or violence at the time and **13%** were not sure.

Estimated of Proportion of Adults in Torbay who have experienced recent rape and/or sexual assault in the last 12 months, since the age of 16, or in childhood (based on self-reporting module of the CSEW<sup>1</sup> and MYE Population 2019):

	Males	Females
<b>Since the age of 16</b>	2,085	11,164
<b>Last 12 months</b>	406	1,542
<b>In Childhood</b>	1,655	5,613

“I thought it was you know, husband and wife or living partners. I didn't really think that domestic abuse applied to boyfriend and girlfriend”

Domestic abuse survivor, Torbay

## Developing our strategy

“So it was controlling, it's like walking on eggshells. You just, you know, something flared up, you kind of try and diffuse a situation as quickly as you can”

Domestic abuse survivor

<sup>1</sup> Local Authority Population Estimates MYE 2019 - <https://tinyurl.com/ybzvaomb>

“This needs some sophisticated, cutting edge thinking and not the usual. While "dealing with" episodes of sexual violence is essential, it will not change anything. Finding the way to change is at least an equal priority.”

Respondent to public consultation on draft Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy

In 2021 the Torbay Community Safety Partnership commissioned a strategic review of the system response to domestic violence in Torbay. The result was 241 pages of analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, and identifiable areas for change across the system’s responses. It produced 44 recommendations of how and where improvements could be made, with further recommendations from accompanying reports. This work also incorporated:

- a review of Torbay’s Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC),
- the Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment as required by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (DAA21)
- a lived experience listening exercise
- analysis of the responses to the Council’s online Are You OK? Survey conducted in late 2021.

The draft Strategy was published for public consultation during October and November 2022. Responses and suggestions have been incorporated into this final version.

The findings and recommendations from all of these activities have been collated to inform the direction and focus of this new Strategy and will be directly referenced in its Delivery Plan.

The Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021 (required by the DAA21) sits beneath this Strategy.

Torbay Council also participated in the Call to Action sexual violence project with Devon County Council, Plymouth City Council, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, the Devon Clinical Commissioning Group, and the Innovation Unit. This included a mapping exercise of the support available to victims of sexual violence across wider Devon, and a listening exercise with people who have experienced sexual violence and abuse and practitioners working with them. The aim was to develop an understanding of what support victims and survivors want and need to help them recover and make sense of what has happened to them. The findings from this project have provided the strategic direction for sexual violence. In addition data about sexual violence services and demand has been gathered to inform a local position statement on sexual violence in Torbay.

There are some areas of DVA & SV activity which, out of necessity and pragmatism fit more appropriately with, for example, the children’s safeguarding arena. This Strategy aims to consider DVA & SV in the context of a whole system response across the life course. There is a risk that the exclusion of some areas of work could lead to fragmentation and poor oversight of the overall strategic response. This risk will be addressed through the oversight and governance structures in place, ensuring connectivity and line of sight between the main DVA & SV strategy and related

strategies or workstreams. Changes to the strategic direction or areas of focus resulting from legislative or policy changes will be incorporated into reviews of the strategy.

## Scope of the Strategy

The scope of this Strategy includes adult victims of domestic abuse and violence (i.e. those aged 16+) and adult victims of sexual violence (including historic child sexual abuse).

The DAA21 statutorily defines children and young people as victims in own right. For the purposes of this Strategy the scope includes children and young people who are victims of domestic violence and abuse and who are occupying safe accommodation with their parent/carer as part of the DAA21 duties, as well as the wider needs of children and families experiencing DVA. We know that we need to better understand the profile of children and families who experience domestic violence and abuse in order to improve and mature the system response.

..it takes a while to get into and realise 'oh I can have a phone. I can wear t-shirt in the sun. I can put makeup on'

Domestic Abuse survivor, Torbay

## Out of scope

There are number of areas that are out of the scope of this Strategy because they require a specialist response and/or because the safeguarding of children is involved. By separating out these different issues, the protection of children is ensured and the complex and specialist nature of subjects like child sexual abuse and exploitation can be addressed in detail. Overlaps and alignment of activities will be identified during the development of the Strategy Delivery Plan.

Issues which sit alongside but which are out of the scope of this Strategy are:

- Child Sexual Abuse – this is within the remit of Torbay Safeguarding Children's Partnership (TSCP)<sup>3</sup>
- Child Sexual Exploitation – this is included in the TSCP Exploitation Strategy<sup>4</sup>
- Child against Parent Violence and Abuse (CAPVA) – this is within the remit of Children's Services; except for those aged 16 and over which can be raised at MARAC where risk level indicates it is appropriate to do so
- Peer on Peer abuse – this is in the remit of Children's Services except where both parties are aged 16 and over and there is evidence of coercive control. These will be raised at MARAC where risk level indicates.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://torbaysafeguarding.org.uk/cyp/cse/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://torbaysafeguarding.org.uk/cyp/cse/>

- Human Trafficking – this is within the remit of the Devon and Torbay Anti-Slavery Partnership<sup>5</sup>
- Prostitution – this within the remit of the Devon and Torbay Anti-Slavery Partnership<sup>6</sup>

## What people have told us

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“... people need to be carried. Because you don't have the, just don't have the will to walk anymore. And for some of them, absolute horror, some of them don't have to will to live anymore”

Domestic Abuse survivor, Torbay

“We need the voices of children, young people, communities and people with lived experience to inform us about what activity we should take”

Call to Action project participant

People don't always know that what they have experienced is domestic violence or sexual assault. This might be because they are not living together (so it's not “domestic”), it's not physical violence but coercion and control, or a rape took place within marriage. Some said that they did not feel what had happened was sufficiently serious to report to the police, many felt that they would not be believed.

Many described negative experiences of the system when they did report domestic violence or abuse to the Police, and Children's Services becoming involved having been alerted by the Police. Women spoke of feeling that they were being held accountable for the behaviour of the person causing the harm, because they had to take all the responsibility for protecting their children. Meanwhile the person who had harmed them was ignored or “invisible.” Many felt that professionals did not understand how domestic abuse affected their ability to take action, nor of how the Family Court system re-traumatises the victim survivor and their children and allows the person who caused the harm to continue to exercise control over them.

“... I'd call the police. They said, 'don't open the door,' but that's okay when they tell you not to open the door, but what they do is, they report it to social services. And social services then say that you're not protecting your kids. But you tell me

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.aspartnership.org.uk/devon-and-cornwall>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.torbaysafeguarding.org.uk/media/1483/tscp-business-plan-2021-2024.pdf>

how that works, if you phone the police and the police come and you've obviously phoned the police to get them removed and they removed them, how's that not you protecting your kids?"

Domestic Abuse Survivor, Torbay

"when you leave the abusive relationship that escalates the domestic violence more. But what people don't understand is it escalates even more four years, five years down the line. They get really, really bitter. And that's when they fight and they'll fight until they're blue in the face"

Domestic Abuse Survivor, Torbay

Those people who left their abusive relationships spoke of the difficulties finding somewhere to live and of navigating the rehousing process with the Council.

"the one thing that seems so hard at first was actually housing. It was literally one thing is you have nowhere to go. And first, obviously when I walked down that road, the first day, the hardest bit was walking and realising my children were still there. And so it was 'where am I gonna go?'"

Domestic Abuse survivor, Torbay

People feel guilt and shame about what has happened to them. This is reinforced by the prevailing myths and negative stereotyping surrounding rape and sexual assault, which hold the victim responsible for their attack because they were out late/drinking/of what they were wearing and so on. This is compounded by negative national media about the police – including sexual offences carried out by serving officers – the low conviction rate, the time it takes to progress to court (if the case does go to court), and the re-traumatisation of the court proceedings for what is often an unsuccessful outcome.

We heard that sexual violence is complex, often taking place in an intra-familial context, with patterns of behaviour repeating into the next generation. Victims and survivors of sexual violence suffer trauma long into adulthood – the stories we heard, information from Devon Rape Crisis, and the feedback in the Are You Ok survey show that many victims of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) don't disclose their experiences until many years after the event/s occurred. People are holding years of unresolved trauma that can present in a number of ways – through poor mental health, physical illness, or self-medication in the form of substance misuse for example. When a number of these factors co-exist, we see people who might be rough sleeping, some being coerced into prostitution by drug dealers in order to feed their habit; adding to their sense of shame and poor self-worth.



“some people are so traumatised, that it’s hard for them to reach out for help. It doesn't mean that they don’t want help, it just means that person is a bit more fragile..... Spend time and I’ll open up with you and you’ll see that I’m not that person and I need more help than what I ever let onto”

Domestic Abuse survivor, Torbay

Practitioners working in a range of support services – not specialist rape and sexual assault services and including the community and voluntary sector – spoke of the challenges in trying to help victims who disclose sexual violence during support. The fragmented funding and commissioning arrangements for sexual violence services mean that there is a “postcode lottery” of support with very limited support in Torbay itself, making it difficult for both victim survivors and practitioners to navigate. The services that exist tend to be in Exeter or Plymouth and have long waiting lists. This sometimes leaves practitioners who are not trained in working with victims of sexual violence and trauma, “holding” the person because there is no specialist support immediately available to them. This is risky for both the practitioner and the individual.

Examples have been provided that demonstrate the “silo” nature of working in the system, with sexual violence victims being referred to mental health services because of their trauma, only to be referred on to a sexual violence service – there is limited recognition of the long term impacts of trauma. As the Chief Executive of Devon Rape Crisis told us:

“people are being referred to [Devon Rape Crisis] if they have any history of sexual violence or abuse, regardless of whether this is causing the most difficulty for them or not.”

When support is obtained, it is often constrained by time or a restricted number of support sessions is available. Victims of sexual violence may not want a criminal justice response and just want to be listened to by someone who understands their experience. Some may want to follow the criminal justice process a period of time after the incident/s, others want to be able to access support at different points of the process but don’t have the choice.

“I think I would have found it easier if I was talking to somebody else who had been through it, rather than somebody who hadn't.”

Domestic Abuse survivor, Torbay

There is limited availability of targeted support for victims and survivors of sexual violence in Torbay. Much of what is available is not directly funded or commissioned by statutory agencies and is instead reliant on non- recurrent short term grant arrangements, or in some cases “topped up” with grant funding. This means that the support provision is insecure and therefore unstable.

Finally, loud concerns were voiced around the role of pornography on social media and how this is impacting on the attitudes and behaviours of children and young people. The suggested solutions to this were several and wide ranging – and cannot be solved through the Relationships and Sex Education curriculum in isolation.

“Schools work is vital - with teachers, pastoral care and students”

Respondent to public consultation on draft Strategy

We did also hear stories that were positive and complimentary about the support people had received, including praise for individual workers, organisations, and agencies. Those that shared their stories with us wanted to make sure that their experiences were used to make things better for others.

## Summary of our Findings

While some of the quotes below are from survivors of domestic abuse, the underpinning narrative of lack of belief, victim stereotyping and re-traumatisation are equally as applicable to people who have experienced sexual violence:

“...they just need to believe the person that’s sat in front of them. That’s all anybody needed to do for me, and nobody did it. Nobody believed me”

Domestic Abuse survivor, Torbay

“You hear this criticism all the time about ‘Oh, why did she go back to him?’ It’s very obvious why women go back, because they’re convinced that it’s their fault, that they deserve to be mistreated and it’s so bloody difficult to get away. It’s so hard”

Domestic Abuse survivor, Torbay

“I was a person that was middle age by that stage. I did have a disability and I was challenged because people often discriminated against me because of my race.”

Domestic Abuse survivor, Torbay

“Feels like the system is organised to support perpetrators not victims.”

Call to Action project participant

"The onus is on you to get out and escape, it kind of enables the abuser, doesn't it?"

Domestic Abuse Survivor, Torbay

"The whole court scenario is just horrendous. Family court is just the worst experience anyone could ever go through ever. So you go through all this horrible abuse, you try to come the other side and then you have to face family courts, where they tear you and your children apart in front of you..."

Domestic Abuse survivor, Torbay

Many consistent messages have been heard from the feedback that people have given us. These can be summarised as follows:

- Victims don't report because they think they won't be believed
- Victims are not always sure that what they have experienced is DVA/SV
- Victims are fearful of repercussions if they report, especially they fear statutory interventions (e.g. having their children removed) because the police inform Children's Services when they receive a report
- Victims who do report have negative experiences
- The impact on children and young people as victims is not being addressed
- The system focuses on the victim rather than placing accountability on the person who harmed them
- Victims find it difficult to find a safe place to live if they choose to leave
- System responses are not trauma informed - instead they re-traumatise
- Risk management by the MARAC could be more effective
- Culture of victim blaming and myths evident within parts of the system
- Limited or no understanding of the needs of victims from minoritised communities, or those with multiple and intersectional needs
- Lack of consistent and coordinated data recording – the strategic response is not always evidence based
- Response to sexual violence is limited and immature despite having a high public profile
- Voice of victims is unheard in strategic response
- People feel shame, guilt, blame and anger
- Victims and survivors of sexual violence feel let down by those supposed to help them and that their experiences are minimalised or not believed
- People want choice around when and how they access support.

## What needs to change

“...I wasn't listened to, I was belittled. Can you imagine being stood in a dock with no, you've got no legal representation. Yet you've been told by judges and told by social services that the domestic violence isn't an issue now, because you're not in it. Now, my child is now suffering. He has a tracker on his phone when he's with me. So I'm being trapped when my son's with me. There's nothing I can do. I can't afford to go to court and if I could go back in time, I'd stay with him, I wouldn't have left him. I wouldn't. Because there's no ongoing support”

Domestic Abuse Survivor, Torbay

“Our society doesn't want to talk about sex so to talk about sexual abuse and intrafamilial harm is an underlying issue to address - we all need to feel confident to do this.”

Call to Action project

Based on all of the information collected, the following areas for change have been identified:

- We must listen to the voices of those with Lived Experience if we want to design services and responses that will effectively address DASV
- Understanding and addressing Sexual Violence must be brought to the forefront as it is the poor relation to DVA
- We need more focus on the impacts on children and young people as victims
- We must manage risk more effectively BUT
- We must stop holding the victim responsible for the behaviour of the person harming/who has harmed them
- We must believe victims and validate them to build trust and safety
- The system must stop re-traumatising victims
- We must address the fear of reporting - otherwise we will not address the causal link between high levels of DVA and the fear of statutory interventions
- We must better understand the needs of minoritised groups and those with intersectional needs so we can respond to them
- We need to understand the different drivers and typologies of DA & SV
- Professionals and practitioners must understand the dynamics of power and control - and the power they hold as actors within the system
- We must accept discomfort in order to challenge cultural norms and attitudes in the system

- We must accept that not all victims and survivors want a criminal justice response
- We must collect consistent, meaningful data and use it to inform and develop the system response.

## Our Strategy

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".. So, if you had somewhere where, you know, people that have been victims in the past could help people that were victims now, then that would be amazing because I don't think anybody else would believe it."

Domestic Abuse survivor, Torbay

"Dig deeper into the cultural imbalance of services and how to equalise it."

Respondent to public consultation on draft Strategy

We have built a strong base of evidence of the need to strengthen the strategic response to domestic and sexual violence and abuse in Torbay that will inform our work over the life course of this Strategy.

We want to:

**Work in partnership with individuals, communities, and organisations to break the chain of domestic abuse and sexual violence in Torbay, to enable our residents to live safely and to thrive.**

To achieve this:

- Support for victims and survivors and their families must be **trauma-informed**
- We must **prevent harm** in the first place whilst **disrupting harmful behaviour**
- We must **hold those who harm accountable** for their actions
- We must ensure that know they are **believed**
- We **address** victims and survivors **fears about system generated reprisals**
- We **recognise that sexual violence is the poor relation** to domestic abuse in terms of the strategic response and take bold steps to **address the imbalance**
- We must ensure we **support children and young people** as victims in their own right

# Our Principles

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We will work to the following principles and will proactively encourage and challenge others to do so:

1. Connect different parts of the system together to create a coordinated community response to domestic abuse and sexual violence
2. Hear and learn from people with lived experience
3. Be trauma informed and shame sensitive
4. Make the best use of existing resources and assets
5. Elevate, develop, and improve our responses to sexual violence.

When working with families, including those who are causing harm, a whole family approach will be taken to address the needs of each individual in the household.

## What We Want to Achieve

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From what people have told us, and the areas that have been highlighted for change, we have identified the outcomes that we want to achieve over the short, medium, and long term:

### Short term outcomes

- People understand that domestic abuse is not just physical and can occur in any intimate relationships
- People understand consent, and that rape and sexual assault can occur in intimate relationships.
- Victims and survivors know that they will be believed
- Victims and survivors know how and where to get advice on their options in a range of ways, that responds to what they say they need at the time
- The response to domestic and sexual violence and abuse is designed with victims and survivors, and informed by their lived experiences and needs

### Medium term outcomes

- Victims and survivors receive peer support and advice before, during and after their experiences to help them recover
- People who harm others by using domestic and/or sexual violence and abuse are identified and disrupted
- Professionals understand the impacts of DVA/SVA and trauma on victims and survivors and/or their families and the coping mechanisms they use to keep themselves and their children safe

- Professionals and statutory agencies understand the range of ways that people who harm use and continue to use coercive control and harassment to continue to abuse long after relationship has ended
- Professionals understand that coping mechanisms may be maladaptive and that someone choosing to remain in an abusive relationship does not mean they are complicit in the abuse

## Long term outcomes

- A greater range of local support is available for victims and survivors of sexual violence
- A coordinated system response is in place that breaks the cycle of abuse
- Support and interventions are provided via a mixed market of statutory and voluntary sector organisations
- Services and interventions are informed by a developing evidence base supported by robust data and monitoring of trends; including understanding why people who harm do and the typologies of harmful behaviour.
- The strategic system response to sexual violence is prioritised and continually evaluated to achieve parity with the DVA response

## Delivering the outcomes

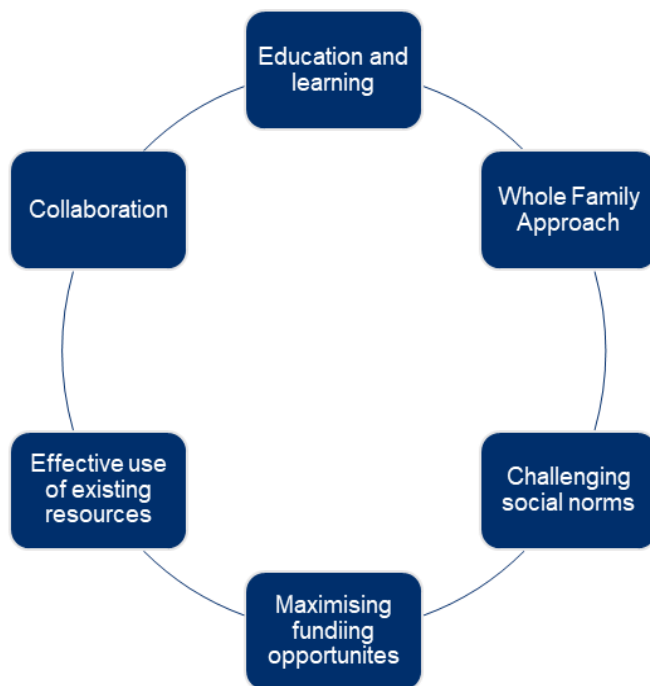
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“Be compassionate and hold people safely when they disclose”

Call to Action Project participant

Our outcomes are ambitious and challenging, particularly in view of the resource and capacity pressures that exist in our systems in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. However the impact of Covid-19 and other external factors that are influencing our economy will also be affecting people living with, and those who carry out, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

Investment in services alone will not address the fundamental issues that lie behind sexual violence and domestic abuse. Changing the way people think will, however this change in culture and beliefs will be slow and difficult. Central to our approach will be the following:



These fundamentals will flow through the five key activities that we will undertake to meet the outcomes we want to achieve:

1. Embed lived experience and co-production
2. Prevent victimisation and harmful behaviours
3. Identify victimisation and harmful behaviours
4. Disrupt harmful behaviour
5. Develop data and understanding

These key activities will form the basis of a Strategy Delivery Plan, which will be co-produced with multi-agency partners, services, and people with lived experience. Beneath each activity there will be a range of actions and workstreams designed to deliver the outcomes over the life course of the Strategy.

## Activity 1- Embed lived experience and co-production



We will:

- Develop mechanisms to hear and learn from people with experience of DA&SV, including children and young people
- Ensure contributions are recognised, valued, and appropriately reimbursed
- Utilise and build upon existing community assets



## Activity 2 - Prevent victimisation and harmful behaviours

We will:



- Grow the Healthy Relationships Education offer in schools
- Implement the findings from the Harmful Sexual Behaviour Project
- Frame awareness raising and communications in the context of relationships
- Develop and deliver the Bystander training offer across Torbay
- Increase the pool of DA Champions and White Ribbon Ambassadors
- Implement relational approaches across the system
- Challenge cultural norms and attitudes in respect of victims of sexual violence and domestic abuse

## Activity 3 – Identify victimisation and harmful behaviours

We will:



- Exercise belief and let victims know they will be and are believed
- Identify early people who harm others and work with them to address their behaviour
- Develop a skilled workforce that are confident in handling disclosures of DVA &/or SV and know what to do next (competency framework)
- Ensure that people working with victims and survivors of DVA & SV have an understanding of trauma (including the judiciary)
- Ensure that children and young people are recognised as victims and receive specialist support
- Ensure that services are inclusive and understand how DVA &SV may present differently amongst minority communities
- Establish simple pathways that easily connect services
- Ensure compliance with statutory requirements

## Activity 4 - Disrupt harmful behaviour

We will:



- Implement the MARAC review recommendations
- Establish pathways to support for those who harm others
- Ensure effective safety planning with focus on the person causing the harm
- Ensure a co-ordinated approach to disrupt the person causing harm whilst supporting the victim survivor and any children as part of a Whole Family Approach

- Focus on the person who harms, not the victim
- Develop peer support and recovery options in the community for victims and survivors including children and young people

## Activity 5 - Develop data and understanding



We will:

- Develop wider understanding of the different types of behaviour and motivations of those who harm to improve our system response to them and better protect victims and survivors
- Establish consistent data collection and monitoring including for protected characteristics and people with intersectional needs
- Establish a baseline dataset and evaluation to check how we are doing
- Consider a systems/case management system to improve reporting
- Develop a quality assurance approach to ensure the system response meets the needs and aspirations of all victims and survivors

## Monitoring and Oversight

The Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group (DASVEG) will be responsible for strategic oversight of this Strategy and delivery of the action plans. This group also acts as the statutory Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board for the purposes of the Domestic Abuse 2021 Part 4 and the delivery of the associated Safe Accommodation Strategy.

The Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Operational Group (DASVOG) will be responsible for undertaking the work required in the Delivery Plan. This includes connecting with other agencies and practitioners and involving them in specific workstreams.

DASVEG reports into Torbay Community Safety Partnership, Torbay Children's Safeguarding Partnership, and the Health and Wellbeing Board.

## Review

The Delivery Plan will be kept under review to ensure that we are achieving our outcomes. As part of that review, consideration will be given to whether this Strategy remains fit for purpose. This will include consideration of the impact of any significant change in legislation or policy.

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