

# REPORT FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

8 November 2023

## Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence

### 1. Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy 2023 to 2030

The new DASV Strategy “Breaking the Chain” was approved in March 2023 following a public consultation. It was informed by a comprehensive strategic review of the domestic abuse response in Torbay undertaken in 2021/22.

The review incorporated:

- A review of the effectiveness of the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC - *a collaborative multi-agency process to improve the safety of victims of domestic abuse at risk of serious harm and homicide*)
- The Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment as required by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (DAA21)
- A lived experience listening exercise.

The focus and direction for the response to sexual violence was informed by:

- The findings from a 2021 pan Devon project into understanding the needs of those experiencing sexual violence (The Call to Action project) involving people with lived experience, Torbay, Devon, Plymouth, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, the then Devon CCG and the Innovation Unit consultancy;
- A local position statement on sexual violence in Torbay using prevalence data and demand for sexual violence services.

The Strategy has five Pillars of activity:

- a) Embedding Lived Experience and Co-Production
- b) Preventing Harmful Behaviours
- c) Identifying Harmful Behaviours
- d) Disrupting Harmful Behaviours
- e) Developing Data and Understanding

It aims to:

- Elevate responses to sexual violence to achieve parity with domestic violence over the lifetime of the Strategy
- Ensure that all victims disclosing Domestic Abuse and/or Sexual Violence feel that they are believed
- Hold those who harm accountable and not their victims
- Change the narrative and address myths and victim blaming language and practice
- Embed trauma informed practice and improve understanding of how trauma frames victims’ responses
- Develop a robust evidence base and consistent monitoring
- Broaden knowledge and understanding of what constitutes domestic and sexual violence and abuse both in the workforce and across the general public, framed in the context of relationships.

The Strategy is overseen by the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group (DASVEG), a multi- agency partnership including representatives from the Community Safety

Partnership, Devon and Cornwall Police, Probation, NHS Devon, Adults and Childrens Services, and domestic abuse and sexual violence service providers. The DASVEG reports into the Community Safety Partnership Board and also links across to the TSCP Board. There is an active DASV Network attended by operational staff from statutory, provider and voluntary agencies across the Bay where policy, learning and good practice is shared.

The Delivery Plan that sits below the Strategy will necessarily be a multi-agency, partnership document and is in the process of being developed with a number of engagement exercises scheduled for November. In keeping with the Strategy principles it will be co-produced with people with lived experience as well as services and practitioners working with people experiencing domestic abuse and sexual violence.

The Delivery Plan is expected to be presented to the DASVEG for approval in January 2024.

The Strategy can be found at:

<https://www.torbay.gov.uk/safer-torbay/domestic-abuse-and-sexual-violence-strategy-2023-to-2030-1/>

## **2. MARAC Review**

A key part of the Disrupting Harmful Behaviour pillar of Delivery Plan is to deliver the recommendations of the MARAC review. The MARAC Steering Group (MSG) oversees the effectiveness of the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC). The MSG recently reconvened with refreshed representation and with the benefit of the independent report to guide the focus of the action plan. The recommendations of that report included a review of the MARAC operating protocol (MOP) and the information sharing agreement, improved governance around partner agency participation, a review of our rates of repeated domestic abuse and ensuring that all partner agencies are training their workforce to be able to properly identify and refer in appropriate cases.

The MSG now has named primary and deputy representatives. The MSG is currently reviewing the first draft of a new MOP and this is due for ratification at the DASVEG in January 2024.

## **3. Domestic Abuse Act 2021 – Safe Accommodation Duty**

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 received Royal Assent in April 2021. Part 4 of the Act established a new duty upon Tier 1 local authorities in England, including Torbay, to provide support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other safe accommodation. This is referred to as the Safe Accommodation Duty, although the duty itself is not a requirement to provide “safe accommodation”, but instead to assess the needs of and provide support to victim survivors and their children within safe accommodation. The Act sets out definitions of what is meant by the terms “safe accommodation” and “support”.

It is important to note that, for the first time, the Act defines children who witness or experience domestic abuse as victims in their own right.

Under the new duties, every three years Torbay Council must prepare and publish a local domestic abuse support in safe accommodation strategy based on a robust needs assessment. The first needs assessment, looking at what is available in Torbay, what is needed, and informed

by the experiences of people who have used domestic abuse services in Torbay, was carried out during the summer of 2021.

The Safe Accommodation Strategy was published in January 2022 and sits beneath the broader DASV Strategy outlined above. It can be found at:

<https://www.torbay.gov.uk/council/policies/community-safety/safe-accommodation-strategy/>

The Act also requires us to have in place a Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board to oversee the delivery of the Safe Accommodation Strategy -this function is exercised by the existing DASVEG as outlined in 1.above.

#### **4. Working with NHS Devon and the Peninsula to Improve the Wider System Response**

NHS Devon's strategy on domestic abuse and sexual violence has led to work in Primary and Secondary care in Torbay.

The Interpersonal Trauma Response Service (ITRS) for GPs has been commissioned by NHS Devon for 5 years from April 2023, building on the evidence base created by a pilot project (IRIS) that was trialled in Devon and Torbay. This new service will provide Torbay GP surgeries with training for their whole team on identification of adults affected by domestic abuse, sexual abuse or sexual violence, children affected by domestic abuse and adults causing harm. The service will also support patients identified as well as staff who have experienced abuse. The service will support where abuse is non recent, or where risk is low or medium levels which provides a resource that is otherwise missing in our system response to DASV.

More information on the Interpersonal Trauma Response Service can be found at:

<https://www.fearfree.org.uk/itrs-for-professionals/>

<https://www.fearfree.org.uk/itrs-for-clients/>

TSDFT is piloting an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) role within Torbay Hospital to support patients and staff affected by domestic abuse. The model was first piloted by the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital in North Devon over a decade ago and is now recognised nationally as best practice for NHS Trusts. The model has been evidenced to reduce injuries, use of health care, readmissions and supports NHS Trusts with discharge arrangements. The role is hosted by Torbay's commissioned domestic abuse service.

Since the Covid pandemic and the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act, partnership working between Torbay and its neighbouring Peninsula Authorities and other key agencies has strengthened immeasurably, with Torbay now an active participant in a number of regional groups and initiatives. Collaborative work includes co-ordinating a regional response to the Domestic Abuse Act, pooling training, joint funding bids and sharing knowledge, experience, and good practice. The work of the Peninsula Group has been noted by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office as an example of good practice.

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