

Dorset Domestic Abuse Strategy

2025 - 2028



Dorset
Council

This Strategy has been endorsed by the Dorset
Community Safety Partnership.



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Position Statement

Our Vision

For many years the Dorset Community Safety Partnership (CSP) has been working to tackle issues related to domestic abuse. The CSP believes domestic abuse, in all forms, is completely unacceptable and not to be tolerated. It is committed to tackling it by preventing abuse from happening, supporting victims and survivors, and prosecuting offenders.

Our Priorities

prevention: we want to stop domestic abuse from happening altogether. To do that we will focus on actions and initiatives that are preventative so that fewer people become victims.

victims/survivors: victims and survivors of domestic abuse, whoever they are, will have access to services that keep them safe and prevent further harm.

offenders: offenders will be held to account for their action.

Cutting across all the priorities is '**accessibility**' ensuring that the system and the services that operate within it, are accessible to everyone who needs them.



What is Domestic Abuse?

In April 2021, the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 was passed into law. The Act introduced, for the first time, a [new legal definition for domestic abuse](#).

As described by SafeLives...

'Domestic abuse (sometimes referred to as 'domestic violence' or 'intimate partner violence') can happen to anyone, anywhere, at any time in a relationship.

Domestic abuse isn't always physical. Any type of threatening, controlling or coercive behaviour is abuse – whether it's physical, psychological, sexual, economic or emotional.

Domestic abuse can affect anyone, from any background and of any age. It occurs in a range of relationships, including with an intimate partner, a child, a sibling, an ex-partner, a casual partner or a family member. And it can happen at any point in a relationship, whether you live with the person or not.

There is no shame and no one should live in fear of someone else. You are not alone.

Types of domestic abuse

Domestic abuse takes many forms and can involve a range of behaviour, such as:

- *coercive or controlling behaviour*
- *physical abuse*
- *sexual abuse*
- *economic and financial abuse*
- *psychological and emotional abuse*
- *'honour'-based abuse and forced marriage*
- *stalking and harassment*
- *online and digital abuse*

Coercive and controlling behaviour

Domestic abuse often includes coercive or controlling behaviour. This can happen in many ways and involves things like controlling what someone can do, isolating them from friends and family, constant criticism, threats of suicide or harm, damage to property and abuse of pets.

Coercive control isn't always obvious. And it doesn't necessarily stop when a relationship ends.



Physical and sexual abuse

Domestic abuse may involve physical violence, injury and harm – or the threat of physical harm.

Victims may also experience sexual harassment, assault or rape. They may be coerced or forced into sexual acts. They may be recorded in sexual activity without permission, and this may be shared without consent. They may be prevented from accessing birth control or sexual health services.

Physical and/or sexual abuse may occur once or part of a wider pattern of abuse, and can cause long-term harm to both physical and mental health.

Economic and financial abuse

Economic abuse is a form of coercive control, where money is used as a way to control or cause harm to someone. It includes financial abuse, preventing someone from accessing, using or maintaining money. This might mean limiting your opportunity to work or claim benefits, refusing access to a bank account, dictating how money is spent, stealing money or running up debts. Economic abuse also involves controlling other resources such as housing, food and employment.

Psychological and emotional abuse

Psychological abuse involves the regular and deliberate use of words and non-physical actions to manipulate, hurt, weaken or frighten a person and to distort, confuse or influence their thoughts and actions. Psychological abuse is as harmful as physical abuse, although the effects aren't always visible to others. Nearly all cases of domestic abuse involve some form of psychological or emotional abuse, and it can happen in a relationship where there is no physical violence.

'Honour'-based abuse and forced marriage

'Honour'-based abuse, or 'honour'-based violence (HBV), is used to describe a range of abuse by family, relatives or community members to defend their perceived 'honour' – though there is never any honour in or justification for abuse. Women and girls are particularly at risk of HBV, though men can also be victims. It can take many forms, including 'honour' killings, forced marriage, rape and sexual violence, physical abuse, kidnapping, imprisonment, emotional abuse and coercive control.



Stalking and harassment

Stalking and harassment is any unwanted and persistent behaviour. It is a common feature of domestic abuse, though it also happens in isolation. It includes behaviour such as constant communication, uninvited visits, frequent and excessive contact, loitering and threats to harm and kill. Stalking and harassment can take place in person or online, or a combination of both.

Online and digital abuse

Online and digital abuse, or 'tech abuse', happens when technology is misused to monitor, control, stalk, harass or impersonate a victim or survivor. It may involve controlling social media use or devices, monitoring locations or tracking someone, publishing content encouraging harm, threatening to share confidential, humiliating or embarrassing information online and sending malicious messages.¹

Children are also covered under the new definition of domestic abuse. This includes where a child see's, hears, witnesses or is affected by the abuse.

Domestic abuse is a social problem that cuts across all social, geographic, and cultural groups and has a potentially devastating effect on those impacted by it. This in turn has serious human and financial implications for society as a whole.

¹ [What is domestic abuse? - SafeLives](#)



Domestic Abuse Act 2021

In April 2021, the government passed the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. The measures in the Act aim to:

- **promote awareness:** to put abuse at the top of everyone's agenda, including by introducing a statutory definition of domestic abuse
- **protect and support victims,** including by introducing new Domestic Abuse Protection Notices and Domestic Abuse Protection Orders
- **transform the justice response,** including through helping victims to give their best evidence in the criminal courts via 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 their abuser
- **improve performance:** the new Domestic Abuse Commissioner will help drive consistency and better performance in the response to domestic abuse across all local areas and agencies

Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places a duty on Tier One local authorities, such as Dorset Council, to assess the need for support and prepare strategies for its provision to victims and their children [who need to reside] in relevant accommodation. The Act places a duty on each Tier One local authority in England to:

- Appoint a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board (LPB) which it must consult as it performs functions (below). In Dorset, the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) has adopted the role and functions of the LPB.
- Assess, or make arrangements for the assessment of, the need for domestic abuse support in their area for all victims (and their children) who reside in relevant safe accommodation, including those who come from outside of their area.
- Prepare and publish a strategy for the provision of such support to cover their area having regard to the need's assessment.
- Give effect to the strategy (through commissioning / de-commissioning decisions)
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy.
- Report back annually to central government.

In January 2022, Dorset Council, in conjunction with the Dorset Community Safety Partnership (CSP) released its first Dorset Domestic Abuse Strategy. This revised strategy for 2025-2028 aims to continue the work of the Council and the CSP, setting out the areas it will focus on for the next three years.



Looking Back

Whilst this strategy sets out partners ambitions for the future, it's important to reflect back at the progress made during 2021-2024. This provides partners the opportunity to reflect on areas that have worked well, those that proved particularly challenging, and those that require further work.

Progress against the Dorset Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-2024

The 2021-2024 strategy was created following a thorough assessment of local need. The primary focus of this work was to assess the level of need required to support to victims of domestic abuse, including children, in domestic abuse safe accommodation. However, partners of the Dorset CSP recognised that accommodation-based support was just one part of a much wider response needed to tackle domestic abuse, and that it was necessary to go further and examine the wider needs and issues associated with domestic abuse. Given that, the needs assessment looked at the wider community-based response to domestic abuse, aligning to partners approach to looking at the system as a whole. This broader perspective was incorporated into the resultant strategy.

The recommendations which emerged from the 2021-2024 needs assessment were:

- the Local Partnership Board (LPB) should explore strengthening the sanctuary / target hardening offer, including coordination.
- the LPB should explore giving security to the provision to support children and young people in accommodation-based settings.
- the LPB should explore national innovation and good practice to help inform the local housing offer, including prevention, male provision, and housing options for perpetrators.
- any future needs assessment should consider demand, needs and provision across other counties in the UK.
- commissioners should work together to design services / systems and seek joint commissioning opportunities.
- the LPB should consider the impact of COVID-19.
- the LPB should work to balance the system between prevention, perpetrator offer and reactive services.
- the LPB should adopt an approach that enables people experiencing / who have experienced domestic abuse, their families, and the community to shape provision and the local response.



To date partners have made good progress in delivering against the recommendations. This includes bolstering support for victims (and their children) in safe accommodation, as well as working together on commissioning activities, and carrying out original research into local domestic abuse.

As the strategy comes to an end it's important for partners to reflect on the progress made and to identify lessons that can be taken forward into future versions of the strategy. Key headlines on activity taken from the past three years include:

- bolstered provision for victims of domestic abuse (and their children) in safe accommodation via the Integrated Domestic Abuse Service (IDAS). This has involved:
 - target hardening
 - support for children in safe accommodation, i.e., refuge and properties that have benefited from target hardening
 - specialist domestic abuse housing advice
- investments made in the Dorset Council Housing Service to provide dedicated domestic abuse housing advice.
- strengthening the pathways between IDAS and the Dorset Council Housing Service.
- creating target hardening guidance.
- undertaking extensive research (i.e. annual local profiles) which has helped inform both our local approach and the recommissioning of domestic abuse services.
- worked with regional councils to map demand on safe accommodation, as well as using national findings to support the recommissioning of local services.
- using learning from the COVID-19 pandemic to adapt provision to meet the needs of the local community and to inform future provision.
- engaging with victims/survivors, communities, and providers of domestic abuse, through the Dorset Domestic Abuse Forum, as well as through one off commissioned pieces of work (i.e. SafeLives Public Health Approach review), findings from which have helped shape our local response and recommissioning of local services.
- established a domestic abuse commissioning working group, which has explored and agreed options to align commissioning activity and worked together on system design, with a view to enabling a seamless pathway between services and enabling a balanced system.



- carried out regular awareness raising sessions.
- engaged with regional and national forums to help shape policy, including the office of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner (DAC).

While much of these recommendations were completed, some of the work will continue as core business.

One area highlighted where further work is required is regarding researching best practice for housing options, particularly for those people who find it difficult to access shared refuge provision and for the perpetrators of domestic abuse.



Informing the Strategy

As with the earlier work, this current strategy is supported by an updated Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment. This latest edition of the assessment provides a current overview of the domestic abuse in Dorset. It utilises data provided by several local agencies that are involved in tackling domestic abuse to compile a base of evidence. This includes an analysis of the changing volume in reported abuse, demographic profiles of both victims and perpetrators, and the identification of relative underreporting by certain groups. In addition, it includes a section in which the lived experience of local victims is detailed through a series of quotations.

The Needs Assessment aims to guide the focus of this accompanying Domestic Abuse Strategy, also produced by the Dorset Community Safety Partnership, which will steer the local delivery of domestic abuse services for the three-year period 2025-28.

The principal findings from this needs assessment are listed here:

- reports to the Police regarding domestic abuse in Dorset have increased by 24% in the past four years.
- reports of domestic abuse to both the Police and Paragon show a slight seasonal variation, with more being received during the summer months than in the winter.
- the volume of domestic abuse related adult safeguarding referrals has increased over recent months
- the proportion of all instances where local housing Prevention and Relief Duties were served in response to cases of domestic abuse have increased over the past four years.
- 75% of all domestic abuse related crimes recorded by Dorset Police were classified as violence against the person offence
- two thirds of all violence against the person domestic abuse related offences were classed as assaults...
- ...and a further 15% were classed as stalking offences.
- data from Adult Safeguarding suggests that psychological domestic abuse is more prevalent than inferred from the records held by the Police.
- in Dorset the volume of domestic abuse cases classed as 'high risk' is increasing.
- not all incidences of domestic abuse reported to the local Police involved victims who were Dorset residents. Between 2020 and 2023, 15% of reported domestic abuse had victims who were out of county residents.



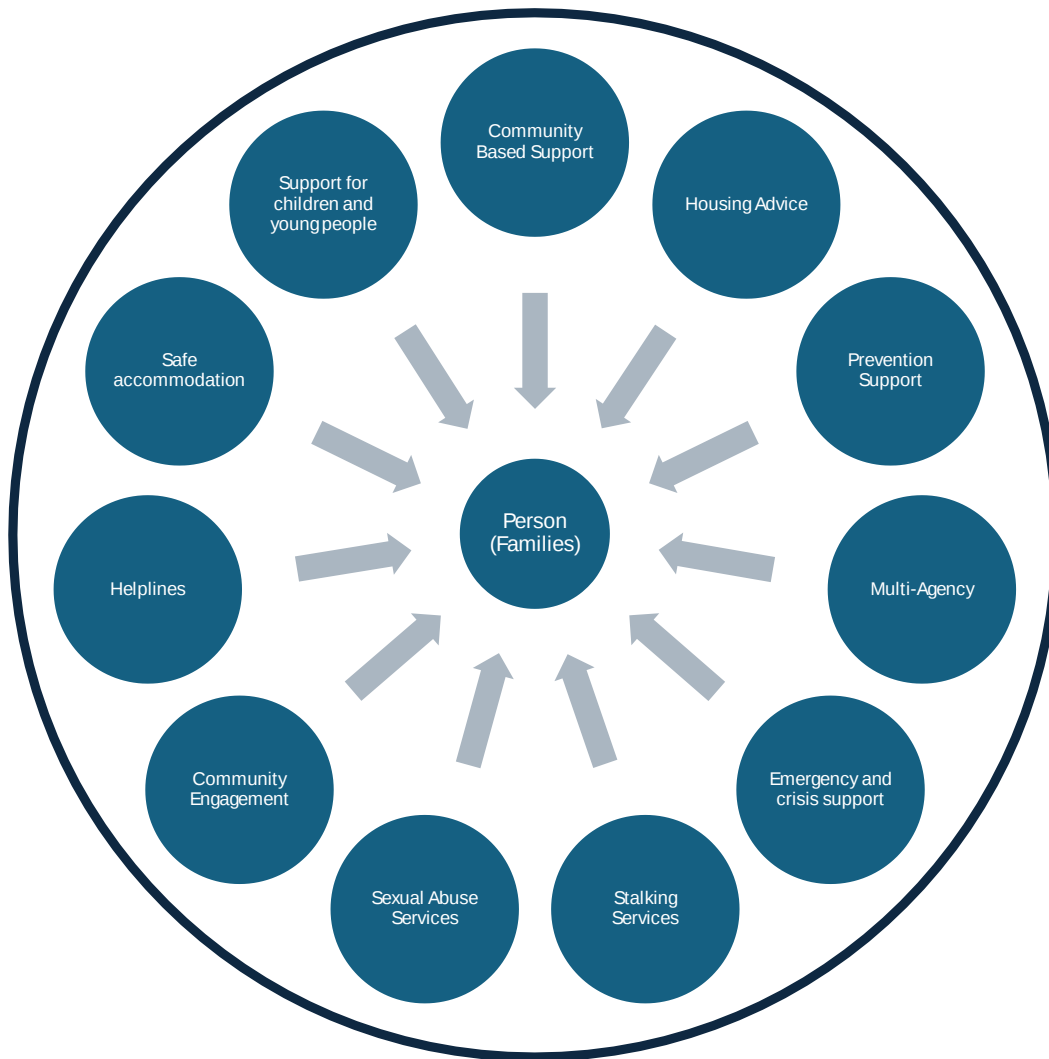
- in Dorset there is a significant underreporting of domestic abuse to the Police among younger males (aged 16 to 25), younger females (aged 16 to 20), and older women (aged over 54).
- there is also significant underreporting of domestic abuse to Paragon, especially from younger and older females, and from male victims (all ages).
- in comparison to those living in urban areas, underreporting is more prevalent among female victims living in rural parts of Dorset.
- victims, of all genders, who live in Dorset's most deprived areas are more likely to contact the Police to report their domestic abuse rather than Paragon. Victims from wealthier areas are more likely to contact Paragon than they are to contact the Police.
- over half (54%) of the domestic abuse cases dealt with by Paragon between 2020 and 2023 came from victims who lived in households with at least one cohabiting dependant.
- a significant minority (27%) of all domestic abuse related reports to Dorset Police involved perpetrators who lived outside of Dorset.
- only two-thirds (67%) of cases reported to Dorset Police involved a Dorset County resident victim and a Dorset County resident suspect.
- a clear majority (73%) of domestic abuse related incidents reported to Dorset Police involved a male perpetrator.
- the majority (53%) of domestic abuse cases recorded by the Police featured suspects – of all genders – that were aged between twenty-five and forty-four.
- just under half (47%) of all known domestic abuse suspects were 'repeat' perpetrators.
- approximately half of all domestic abuse events reported to the Police – and almost two-thirds of those reported to Paragon - involved abuse between former partners. 20% of Police cases, and 10% of Paragon cases, involved intra-familial, often intergenerational, abuse.
- a sizeable proportion of domestic abuse events recorded by the Police involved victims and perpetrators of a similar age, often between twenty and forty years old.



Current Offer

There are a range of support options for people (and families) affected by domestic abuse in Dorset. These range from directly commissioned services, services provided by statutory partners, and services provided through the voluntary and community sector.

Whole System



Community Based Support

Specialist domestic abuse provision that supports people and their families within the community to be safe, build resilience and gain independence.

Housing Advice

Dedicated and specialist domestic abuse housing support to assist people and their families navigate the housing system and to support with housing advice and options. This is provided across commissioned and statutory services.

Prevention Support

A range of interventions to support survivors of domestic abuse, through recovery and therapeutic programs, counselling, and domestic abuse perpetrator programs.

Multi-Agency

High Risk Domestic Abuse (HRDA) multi agency process for high-risk domestic abuse. HRDA is Dorset's version of MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference)

Emergency and Crisis Support

Statutory responses including Police and Safeguarding response. This also includes dedicated specialist Domestic Abuse Advisors (DAAs) who support high risk cases of domestic abuse. DAAs are Dorset's version of Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs)

Stalking Services

Provision to support people who are experiencing stalking through dedicated stalking workers.

Sexual Abuse Services

Provision to support people who have experienced sexual abuse through Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVA), Sexual Abuse Referral Centre, counselling and other therapeutic support.

Community Engagement

Programs and initiatives to raise awareness of domestic abuse within the community. This includes building a network of champions against domestic abuse.

Helplines

Providing help and advice to people experiencing domestic abuse and acting as routes into specialist domestic abuse services for ongoing support.



Safe Accommodation

A range of safe accommodation options for people and their families affected by domestic abuse. This includes refuge, move on accommodation, and supporting people to remain living at home safely, through target hardening measures.

Support for Children and Young People

Supporting children and young people in the community and in safe accommodation through dedicated children and young people workers. Safeguarding Families Together (SFT) offering wraparound support to children and families where there is domestic abuse, substance misuse and mental health, working alongside Children Social Care.

This list is not exhaustive. More details of the services and provision available to people affected by domestic abuse can be found at: [Domestic abuse - Dorset Council](#)



Looking Forward

In response to the issues identified in the needs assessment, and to provide continuity from the last strategy, activity will be channeled through the following three priorities.

Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3
Prevention	Victims/Survivors	Offenders
Prevention activities focus on the development of and continuation of perpetrator programs; ensuring behaviour changing programs are effective; making sure practitioners are skilled in understand domestic abuse issues; early education and intervention (including children and young people); preventing ongoing abuse and/or providing people with the skills to recognise abuse; and working with communities to challenge tolerance of domestic abuse.	The main focus is on continuing to develop the current service offer, ensuring people experiencing/who have experienced domestic abuse, their families, and the community help inform the design and commissioning of services.	Dorset Police already takes a zero-tolerance approach to domestic abuse. This will be supported through public communications campaigns including highlighting key prosecutions.

Golden Thread – Accessibility

There are many factors that can make it harder for people and specific communities to access services. For example, due to someone living in a rural community who might find it harder accessing services, or because of someone's social status, or due to issues specifically associated with a protected characteristic. In response to this, it is essential that accessibility is considered throughout the local response, ensuring that there is a system that is fit for everyone, and accessible to all.

Recommendations and Activity

In direct response to the following recommendations, this strategy will ensure partners activity is focused on:



Recommendations <i>We Should</i>	Activity <i>We Will</i>
Consider the local offer in the context of the predicted increase in demand over the next three years, ensuring it remains accessible and is able to continue to deliver good outcomes to the people who need them.	Seek innovative ways of managing demand safely and sustainably.
Consider ways of improving accessibility in the system so it is available to everyone who needs it. For example, rural communities, younger people, older people, LGBT+, and men.	Develop solutions that enable people who find it harder to access services to find the right support at the right time.
Consider developing the local safe accommodation offer to ensure that the needs of everyone who needs it are met.	Use local learning, national innovation and best practice, to continue to develop the local safe accommodation offer.
Understand the drivers that reduce and stop reoffending, thereby cutting the number of repeat incidents of domestic abuse.	Work with the Police to develop ways to tackle and disrupt repeat offending.
Commissioners should continue to work together to design services / system and seek joint commissioning opportunities.	Review the Dorset (Pan Dorset) Domestic Abuse Commissioning Charter '<i>enabling a whole systems approach to domestic abuse</i>'. Partners will also work with commissioners and partners from outside of Dorset.



Partners should balance the system between prevention, perpetrator offer and reactive services.	Review the Dorset (Pan Dorset) Domestic Abuse Commissioning Charter ' <i>enabling a whole systems approach to domestic abuse</i> '. Use learning from the needs assessment to inform the local offer.
Continue to create approaches that enable people experiencing / who have experienced domestic abuse, their families, and the community to shape provision and the local response.	Further develop our approach to enabling those with lived experience, including children and young people, help shape the local response.
Continue to identify ways of supporting the voluntary and community sector.	Further develop and strengthen our approach to supporting the voluntary and community sector through the Dorset Domestic Abuse Forum.
Recognise the links between stalking, sexual abuse and domestic abuse, using the evidence base to inform services.	Develop ways to strengthen the pathways between stalking, sexual abuse and domestic abuse.

Detailed actions setting out partners work in response to the following recommendations and activity will be captured in delivery plans.

This latest strategy builds on the previous strategy and presents an important opportunity to ensure partners continue to develop a system that not only prevents abuse from happening but also ensures that anyone affected by domestic abuse has access to support, regardless of where they are on their journey.



Monitoring and Evaluation

To support partners in measuring success and to gauge whether this strategy is having its intended impact, a range of performance measures have been created through the Dorset Community Safety Partnerships (CSP) Community Safety Plan.

For the purpose of this strategy, these measures will be used to ensure there is consistency in monitoring performance across the Dorset CSP, and which can be tracked through the quarterly CSP performance updates.

A summary of the measures include:

- a reduction in the annual proportion of all domestic abuse events which have identifiable 'repeat victims'
- a reduction in the number of domestic abuse related stalking crimes reported annually
- a reduction in the percentage of domestic abuse events committed annually by 'repeat' perpetrators

In addition, further pieces of research and performance analysis will be undertaken to either build our understanding of domestic abuse in Dorset, or to measure impact of the action partners have taken, for example:

- regular evaluation and reflection on the effectiveness of our work related to domestic abuse, including data analysis and the voice of those with lived experience.
- modifying our strategies and approaches based on evaluation results, emerging trends and community needs to ensure ongoing effectiveness.

Finally, Dorset Council is required under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 to report back to Government (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) annually on safe accommodation.

Commissioning

In 2021/22 partners came together to create the Dorset (Pan Dorset) Domestic Abuse Commissioning Charter 'Enabling a whole systems approach to domestic abuse'. The charter will be updated alongside this new strategy to reflect current and future ambitions to commissioning domestic abuse services, and to consider any changes and requirements coming from new legislation, for example, Victims and Prisoners Act 2024.



Communication

The Dorset CSP will continue its work to raise awareness of domestic abuse and the services available to people who are affected by it. This will encompass a variety of methods to ensure material is made accessible to everyone in the community. Partners will continue to support national initiatives, using these as a vehicle to raise awareness on this important issue.

Governance

This Strategy has been created and will be overseen by the Dorset Community Safety Partnership (CSP). The CSP is held to account by Dorset Council's People and Health Scrutiny Committee (Designated Crime and Disorder Committee).

The membership of the CSP includes:

- Dorset Council
- Dorset Police
- NHS Dorset
- Dorset & Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Authority
- Probation Service
- Police and Crime Commissioner for Dorset (or their office)
- Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service
- Dorset Domestic Abuse Forum

By adopting the role and functions of the Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board, the Dorset CSP is well placed to ensure the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2025-2028 aligns to other local strategies, including housing, community safety and safeguarding.

A full review of the strategy will take place every three years, with an annual refresh through the Dorset CSP Community Safety Plan.

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Accessing Help

To access information on the support services available in Dorset, please visit: <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/your-community/community-safety/domestic-abuse>

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