Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent **Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-2024**

Breaking the cycle of Domestic Abuse

The delivery of this strategy is supported by organisations across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

City of Stoke-on-Trent

STAFFORDSHIRE COMMISSIONER
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Staffordshire County Council

CONTENTS

FOREWORD 3

WHAT IS DOMESTIC ABUSE? 4

OUR AIM 5

NATIONAL CONTEXT 6

LOCAL CONTEXT 7

OUR APPROACH 9

OUR PRIORITIES 10

MEASURING OUR IMPACT 13

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP 13

IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY 14

OUR SUPPORT MODEL 14

FOREWORD







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Domestic abuse (DA) is a national and local priority due to its prevalence and impact. It has a devastating effect on the lives of individuals, families and communities. It can affect anyone and occurs across all of society, regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, geography or wealth.

Whilst progress has been made in recent years, there is still much more to do to tackle DA. Every man, woman and child, regardless of their gender, ethnicity or beliefs has a right to a life free from abuse.

As such, we have developed a local, multi-agency strategy, informed by national and local evidence and need to prevent and address DA; where agencies, communities and businesses harness their collective efforts to make a positive difference. It sets out our joint aim and approach to addressing DA, and the outcomes we expect to see as a result. It provides a framework for local partnership activity and demonstrates our joint commitment for action.

This strategy will help prevent DA in the first place, identify it sooner where it does happen, ensure more agencies, public and otherwise recognise the warning signs and if abuse does happen, help all involved get their lives back on track. We are keen to ensure that those who need support have timely access to good quality services, able to help them to cope and recover. Importantly, we are also seeking to stop offending behaviour, offering rehabilitative interventions, whilst also ensuring that justice is done.

The governance and oversight to make sure this works will be through a Domestic Abuse Commissioning and Development Board (DACDB), supported by local organisations and experts who will ensure effective delivery of services and will also drive future development and strong accountability.

WHAT IS DOMESTIC ABUSE?

As defined by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021:



DA includes:
"any incident or pattern of incidents between those aged 16 or over who are personally connected and the behaviour is abusive. The abuse can encompass physical or sexual abuse, violent or threatening behaviour, controlling or coercive behaviour, economic, psychological, and emotional or other abuse".



Controlling Behaviour includes:
"a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and / or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour".



Coercive Behaviour includes:
"an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish or frighten their victim".

Personally Connected includes: "two people who are or have been married or civil partners with each other, two people in an intimate personal relationship with each other, two people who are relatives, two people who each have had a parental relationship to the same child"

Children includes: "a person under the age of 18 years"

Safe Accommodation includes: "refuge accommodation, specialist safe accommodation, dispersed accommodation, sanctuary schemes, move-on and / or second stage accommodation and other forms of domestic abuse emergency accommodation (i.e. a safe place with appropriate support)"

Note:

- Whilst the above definition applies to individuals aged 16 and above, children related to the two people involved in DA, who see or hear or experience the effects of the abuse are deemed as victims of DA;
- These definitions apply to those married, cohabiting and partners not living together and includes Female Genital Mutilation, honour based violence, child on parent or sibling violence and elder abuse;
- Potential victims / victims can be either children or adults as can potential perpetrators / perpetrators. It is also acknowledged that, on occasion, some victims can also be drawn into offending behavior;
- The Statutory Duty under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 extends to service provision within safe accommodation settings and the DACDB acknowledges direct linkages of such support with the availability and provision of bricks and mortar services (i.e. provision of accommodation spaces) for those affected by DA. With governance for the provision of accommodation spaces residing in other forums across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, the DACDB commits to support co-ordination of activity across these two aligned areas through its Safe Accommodation Delivery Working Group.

OUR AIM

We aim to:

"Prevent domestic abuse from happening and to respond appropriately and effectively to those vulnerable to, or affected by, domestic abuse to enable them to move forward, living safe, fulfilling and independent lives."

By doing this:

- Parents, carers, partners, communities, businesses and professionals will be able to prevent and protect young people and adults from DA;
- Victims and their families will feel more confident in reporting DA;
- Perpetrators of DA will not continue their abusive or violent behaviour;
- Victims will have confidence that the police and justice system will meet their needs;
- Victims of abuse and their families will be able to reside in safe accommodation settings with access to local community-based support;
- Victims of abuse will be empowered to move on independently, living safe and fulfilling lives.

NATIONAL CONTEXT

- In 2016/17 the total socio-economic costs of DA were estimated at £66 billion for the 1,946,000 estimated number of victims identified in England and Wales (this equates to about £74 billion today). Of that, the largest component was physical and emotional harms incurred by victims (£47 billion), particularly the fear, anxiety and depression experienced by victims (Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2021);
- During the financial year 2019-20, the Crime Survey of England and Wales (CSEW) indicated there were 758,941 DA crimes and 529,077 DA incidents reported nationally;
- It is recognised that the Coronavirus pandemic has had a significant impact on the severity of risk and the complexity of cases affected by DA (New York Times & NSPCC Reports September 2020);
- Approximately 42% of all DA crimes and incidents are unreported and remain hidden (CSEW, 2019-20);
- 5.5% of adults aged 16-74 had been victims of DA in the last year (equivalent to 2.3 million victims). This equates to 7.2% of women and 3.7% of men (CSEW, 2019-20);
- In most medium risk cases, it can take up to three years for a DA victim to seek support ('How long do people live with DA and when do they get help?' SafeLives.org.uk/policy-evidence);
- The most vulnerable to DA are children and young people, the older cohort, those in rural communities, the less abled, BAME and LGBTQ+ cohorts (CSEW, 2019-20);
- Estimates show that over 400,000 DA Stalking and Harassment related offences took place during 2019-20 (Victim prevalence estimates from CSEW compared Police Recorded DA Crime and Incidents in 2019-20 & ONS Release: DA Prevalence and Characteristics);
- In 2019/20, 34% fewer DA cases were prosecuted compared to 2014/15 (Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, 2021);
- Based on the number of refuge spaces available on 'Routes to Support' directory, national Women's Aid estimate that all refuge services in England supported 11,489 women during the year, and that 64% of all refuge referrals had to be declined.
- In 2021, the DA Act was introduced to provide an improved national response. It provides further protections to those who experience DA, as well as strengthening measures to tackle perpetrators. It sets out a detailed definition of DA and ensures children experiencing or witnessing DA are recognised as victims.
  The Act places a statutory duty (Safe Accommodation Duty) on upper tier local authorities to assess the need for accommodation-based DA services; develop, publish and implement a strategy to provide this support (by commissioning / decommissioning of services); monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy; and to report progress nationally and locally;
- In 2021, the Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy was published whilst a national DA Strategy and a refresh of the 2019 Men and Boys Position paper, are awaited;
- Other key legislation supporting DA victims includes the revised Victims of Crime Code of Practice 2021, the Stalking Prevention Act (2019), the introduction of Stalking Protection Orders (SPOs), and the Police Crime Sentencing and Courts Bill, currently passing through Parliament.

LOCAL CONTEXT

A comprehensive domestic abuse needs assessment completed in 2021 shows:

- **The number of domestic abuse (DA) cases visible to services is rising and unlikely to fall;**
- **In 2020-21, there were 28,931 domestic crimes and incidents recorded by Staffordshire Police**. This represents a **2% increase in recorded incidents compared to the previous year** (2019-20 28,395);
- Recognising that DA exists in every part of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, the highest prevalence of identified DA victims resided in **Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle, Cannock and Tamworth**;
- Local Police data aligns **the gender of distinct victims identified in 2019-20 with national data, being 71% female and 29% male**;
- **Recognising the challenges bought about by the pandemic, DA service providers reported a 36% increase in calls for support in the 12 months to July 2021**, compared to the previous 12 months. Referrals received in this period are reported as being of higher risk and greater complexity than previously experienced.
- **DA can affect anyone**, regardless of any personal or protected characteristics; **however young women in lower-income urban areas are significantly over represented**;
- **Male victims and victims residing in rural areas, particularly older adults, are less likely to report DA**;
- Whilst DA **male victims** are in the minority, they are **considerably less likely to report DA to the Police when it does occur, or to seek help** from support services;
- **DA service providers reported a 36% increase in calls for support in the 12 months** to July 2021 compared to the previous 2 months. Providers report that **referrals are increasingly involving cases of higher risk and greater complexity**;
- **Most victims have children who also need support**. Around three in four victims accessing services have children living with them, and half of these have more than one child living in the home. DA is one of the most prevalent issues in relation to 'Looked After Children' and is therefore a **significant issue in respect of safeguarding children and young people**;
- **Hidden DA remains high, estimated at 40% locally** despite a focus, particularly during the pandemic, on awareness raising and maximising publicity of support services available;
- **MARAC data for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent suggests that as a minimum, 1 in 10 cases of DA is likely to be high risk**;
- **Domestic Homicide Reviews** (DHRs) undertaken locally include cases affecting people of a range of ages, ethnicities and sexual orientation and victims have been both male and female. DHRs have also included those with disabilities and incidents between family members;
- **73% of police recorded stalking offences** in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent are the result of DA;
- **Recorded numbers of Honour Crimes are relatively low in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent** (less than 300 April 2016 – March 2020). However, where such crimes do occur, victims are substantially more likely to be aged 18-29 years and of Asian ethnicity;

- In 2019-20, there was a **44% increase in requests made under the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme known as Clare's Law** (255 in 2018-19 compared to 311 in 2019-2020);
- **Charging levels for police reported DA at around 8%** is similar to that seen nationally; however more than half of DA cases recorded by the police both nationally and locally see the investigation end with the victim not supporting further action;
- **Of the Staffordshire DA cases prosecuted, around 80% result in conviction**; however prosecutions brought about by the Crown Prosecution Service have reduced by around a third in the last six years;
- **There are less than 100 Safe Accommodation spaces within Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent**;
- **Those in Safe Accommodation account for around 4% of all victims in receipt of specialist support**;
- **55% of those in Safe Accommodation move into the local area from elsewhere**, with victims from Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent also moving to outside the geography;
- **Amost all those accessing Safe Accommodation in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent in the last two years have been women**, with very few male victims seeking safe accommodation or presenting to the Local Authority housing as homeless;
- **It remains challenging to accommodate large families or those with complex housing histories (rent arears or evictions) in more settled accommodation**;
- Victims moving into Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent from outside the area and needing accommodation can often present without 'a history' (without recorded information from other services who have worked with the victim previously, which means that the victim has to tell their story again); **cross-border information sharing is currently limited**;
- **There are a number of people accessing refuge spaces who have limited written and spoken English language** and require support with interpretation and translation, with 13% whose first language is not English and 5% requiring an interpreter for support;
- **DA is identified as a local priority**, and is recognised within the local strategies of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, Community Safety Partnerships, Local Authorities and in many multi-agency strategies such as the Serious Violence Strategy;
- This is an **agreed multi-agency DA Strategy**, overseen by an established, board and supportive commissioning function.

OUR APPROACH

We will:

- Have a **multi-agency strategy**, supported by **strong partnership** arrangements, together with **aligned budgets, resources and service delivery**;
- Provide **effective leadership and governance** identifying and ensuring that relevant partners are involved and **accountable** for their contribution to the shared vision;
- **Understand the risk and profile** of DA within our communities; identifying, recognising and addressing vulnerability;
- **Base** our **interventions** on this **knowledge**;
- **Understand and address the root-causes** of DA to **break the cycle** of DA within families;
- **Jointly commission** a comprehensive and consistent range of evidence-based **DA services (including safe accommodation)**, from committed providers in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent;
- Maintain a **model** that includes **prevention, early intervention, targeted support, specialist provision, recovery, and enforcement** activities / services;
- Have **DA services that are flexible, able to meet local needs and adhere to relevant quality standards**;
- Ensure **fair and equitable access** to services for all, irrespective of where they live, their age, gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation;
- Promote a **whole system approach**; with clear **referral processes / integrated pathways** between universal and specialist services;
- Maintain an **individual or family-based approach, where appropriate** to address the needs of potential victims / victims, potential perpetrators / perpetrators (children, young people, adults, families) with the aim of **empowering and building resilience**;
- Involve **communities, service users, service providers, professionals** (in the voluntary, community and public sectors) **and businesses** in shaping and delivering responses to DA and continuous service improvement;
- Promote the **safeguarding** of vulnerable individuals, families and children, **seeking and listening to the voice of the child**;
- Implement **workforce and community development**;
- Adopt **robust performance management** arrangements;
- Ensure synergies with **related strategies, to avoid duplication and maximise efforts**;
- **Keep up-to-date** with changes in legislation.

OUR PRIORITIES

To deliver our strategy, we will foster robust partnership working to deliver four priority areas:

1



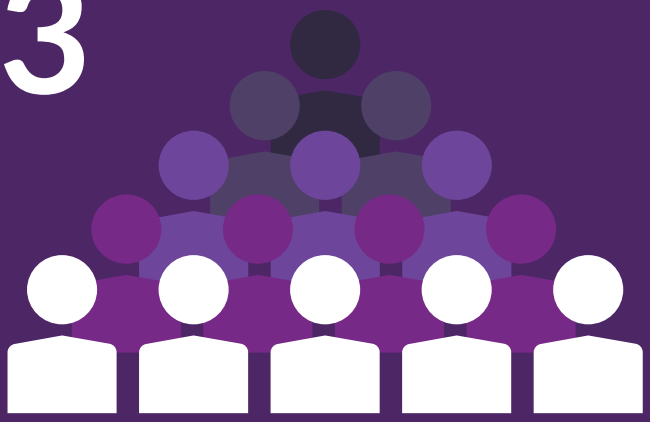
Preventing Violence and Abuse

2



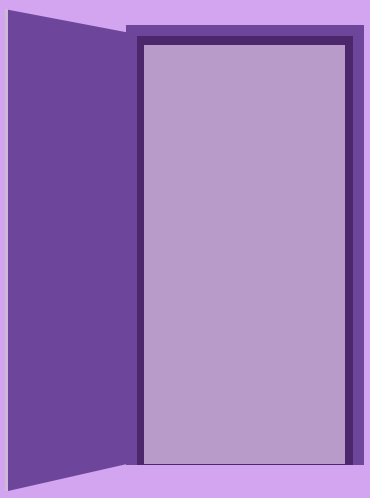
Provision of Services

3



Perpetrators

4



Provision of Safe Accommodation



Preventing Violence and Abuse

preventing DA from happening in the first place by challenging the attitudes and behaviours which foster it and intervening as early as possible.

We will achieve this by:

- Recognising DA as a shared strategic issue and priority;
- Ensuring relevant agencies share timely information to understand and respond to local needs and prevent DA;
- Developing robust referral and information sharing protocols;
- Maximise opportunities to safeguard and work with children and families before issues arise and when they do arise, responding in a swift and coordinated way;
- Ensuring DA is included within locally developed risk assessment tools;
- Developing and delivering a strong and consistent approach to education / prevention programmes, including DA awareness and healthy relationships, across all schools and other educational establishments;
- Developing and delivering targeted education / prevention programmes, support and diversionary activities to those considered more vulnerable to DA-related issues;
- Supporting the development of peer mentoring and encouraging people who have previously accessed DA services to become mentors;
- Providing awareness raising sessions for parents, businesses, and communities so they are able to identify and signpost those affected by DA;
- Ensuring relevant agencies (including health / GPs and social care professionals) and their frontline workforce have the skills and confidence to identify and respond to DA (responding to individuals and families);
- Ensuring DA training is integrated into core training for staff within partner agencies (including identification, assessment, safeguarding, taking the voice of the child into account and referral pathways);
- Implementing a broad-reaching communication strategy, with a targeted approach to more vulnerable or at-risk groups;
- Championing the DA agenda;
- Advocating the role of everyone in preventing DA.



Provision of Services

coordinating of effective, joined up DA related services able to meet the needs of potential victims, potential perpetrators, victims, perpetrators (children, adults and their families) regardless of tenure.

We will achieve this by:

- Understanding and responding to local needs;
- Ensuring a comprehensive range of services are available to meet all levels of DA related needs;
- Regularly monitoring the delivery of services against agreed frameworks;
- Engaging with service users to further improve services;
- Enhancing services to meet emerging needs such as support for victims of stalking and harassment;
- Promoting integrated pathways into support services; ensuring those with additional needs such as mental health, substance misuse, counselling, financial or legal, are able to access the support they need;
- Overseeing the management of high-level risk, including effective use of the local Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) processes;
- Supporting criminal justice partners to improve their service provided for those affected by DA.



Perpetrators

holding perpetrators of DA to account and preventing future offences.

We will achieve this by:

- Ensuring partners are knowledgeable about the programmes available for perpetrators;
- Ongoing development of integrated pathways into perpetrator support programmes;
- Ensuring commissioned services challenge inappropriate behaviour and attitudes;
- Ensuring that appropriate Out of Court Disposal options are available;
- Understanding the rehabilitative needs of perpetrators, ensuring linkages with appropriate support services;
- Ensuring perpetrators' victims and families are appropriately supported and safeguarded whilst perpetrators are participating in rehabilitative programmes;
- Maximising use of tools and powers to protect victims of DA;
- Strengthening the approach to managing perpetrators through MARAC's;
- Supporting the police to undertake enforcement action and innovative practice to tackle emerging or persistent DA;
- Maximising all enforcement opportunities through effective partnership work across the Criminal Justice System and through Integrated Offender Management, prisons and probation.

Safe Accommodation

ensuring the availability of safe, secure, community-based accommodation and the provision of support within those settings for those affected by DA abuse.

We will achieve this by:

- Understanding the needs of victims and their families in relation to safe accommodation,
- Participating in and coordinating joint activity to support the provision of sufficient safe accommodation (bricks and mortar) to meet identified needs;
- Ensuring that support within safe accommodation is relevant, timely accessible, equitable and meets the needs of diverse communities (adults and children);
- Identifying and removing barriers preventing access to safe accommodation and support;
- Developing seamless pathways into and out of safe accommodation;
- Ensuring service user voices and experiences are heard in service provision, planning and review (including those who have accessed or who need to access safe accommodation);
- Ensuring support provided within safe accommodation meets relevant quality standards, as defined by the Safe Accommodation Duty.

MEASURING OUR IMPACT

A performance framework relating to the strategy will be developed, including a mixture of inputs, outputs and outcomes to be measured.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

We recognise that some of the actions taken to prevent and address DA may overlap with other related agendas (such as drugs and alcohol, mental health, violence etc). As such, we will seek to coordinate, support and complement, rather than duplicate, existing activity and align with related strategies/plans operating nationally and also locally across the geography.

IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY

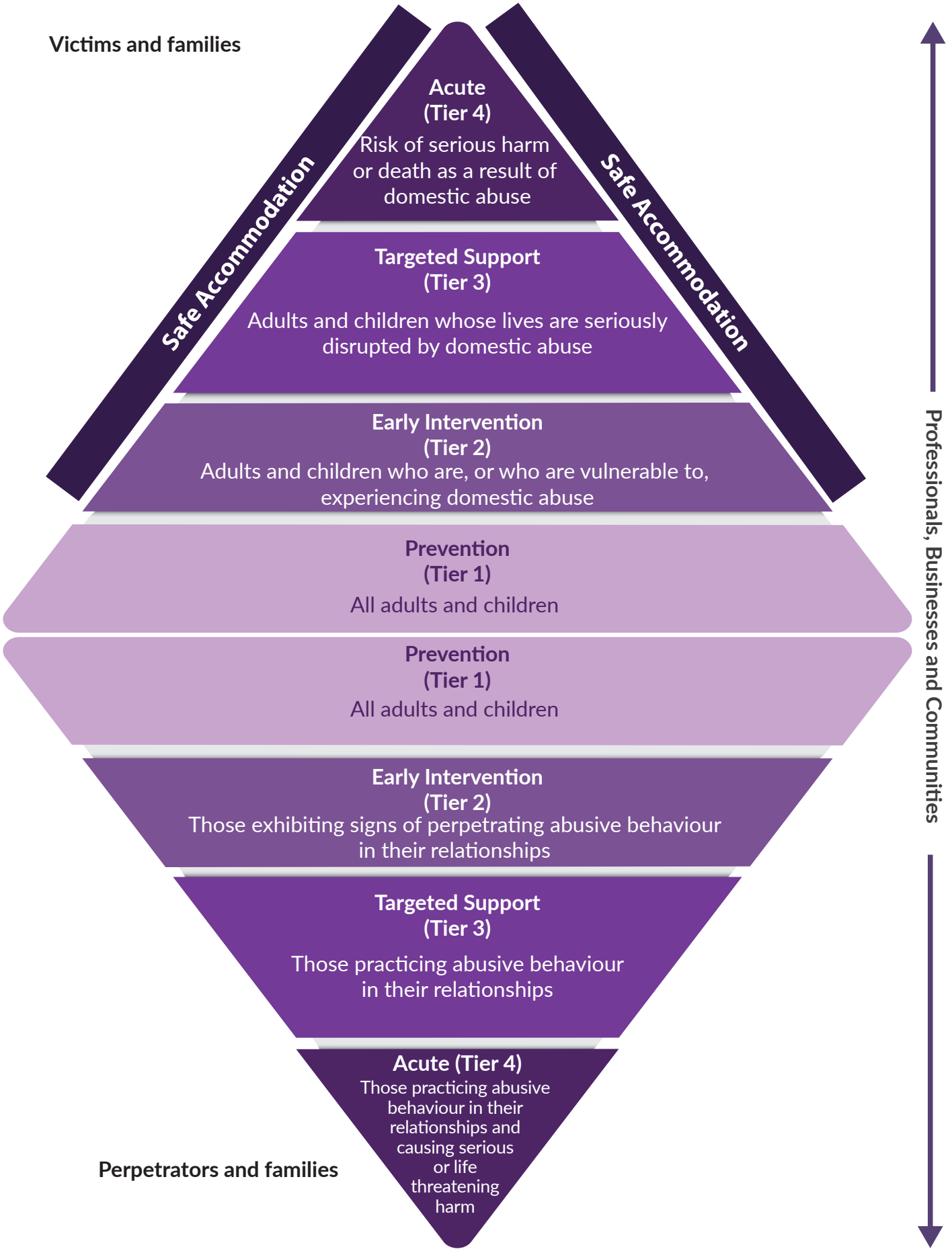
Implementation of the strategy will be overseen by a multi-agency board, who will ensure that planning and programmes are delivered effectively. It will govern the agenda, align commissioning intentions, challenge and manage performance, share good practice, champion achievements and identify and manage risks.

OUR SUPPORT MODEL

Our model represents a joined-up approach to DA provision, recognising that often people have a range of complex or multiple needs. Services are tailored, follow-the person and meet individual needs. There are seamless pathways between the tiers of intervention as well as robust links with generic and other specialist services.

Safe accommodation provision across the geography is aligned to specialist service provision, in line with legislative requirements.

OUR MODEL


Victims and families
Acute
(Tier 4)
Risk of serious harm or death as a result of domestic abuse
Safe Accommodation
Safe Accommodation
Targeted Support
(Tier 3)
Adults and children whose lives are seriously disrupted by domestic abuse
Early Intervention
(Tier 2)
Adults and children who are, or who are vulnerable to, experiencing domestic abuse
Prevention
(Tier 1)
All adults and children
Prevention
(Tier 1)
All adults and children
Early Intervention
(Tier 2)
Those exhibiting signs of perpetrating abusive behaviour in their relationships
Targeted Support
(Tier 3)
Those practicing abusive behaviour in their relationships
Acute (Tier 4)
Those practicing abusive behaviour in their relationships and causing serious or life threatening harm
Perpetrators and families
Professionals, Businesses and Communities

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