

Southwark Domestic Abuse Strategy 2015-2020

Domestic abuse affects thousands of people in Southwark every year. It is often hidden but its impact spans generations. Despite the successful work already undertaken in Southwark, there is a strong case for change and there is evidence that we can do better, using a wider range of support in the health and community sector.

Definition

The definition of domestic abuse is: *any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality.*

The abuse can include, but is not limited to:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional

Our strategy's key principles are:

- A clear statement of intent that abuse is not acceptable
- Challenging the normalisation of domestic abuse
- Ensuring that those who have experienced abuse can take control of their lives by providing support for those who need it, in the settings where they feel most comfortable seeking it
- Taking tough action on those who perpetrate abuse
- Ensure agencies work together to get it right first time

Why we need a domestic abuse strategy

- The development of a domestic abuse strategy is one of the Fairer Future commitments of the council
- Southwark has one of the highest levels of reported domestic abuse to the police in London, with an average 2,200 - 2,400 recorded incidents a year
- Women in intimate partner relationships are significantly the highest proportion of victims and male partners, ex partners or boyfriends the highest proportion of perpetrators, however abuse can also affect men and be perpetrated by women
- People who have experienced domestic abuse are more likely to have long term health problems, including mental health, depression and suicidal tendencies
- Two out of three people who have experiences of domestic abuse had children living with them that regularly witnessed the abuse. Children exposed to domestic abuse are more likely to develop long term health problems such as depression and carry out violence themselves in adolescence and adulthood
- For many people the emotionally abusive or controlling acts have the most long term impact and accounts for 50 per cent of abuse experienced by those accessing our main support service
- Those experiencing or witnessing domestic abuse on a daily basis see it as something that is normal, in some cases a part of a "loving" relationship
- The number of people aged 16 to 18 or 71 or older accessing our main support service has increased.

The law

Domestic abuse is not a criminal offence; it is an aggravating factor for other types of crime. However the Home Secretary recently announced plans to create a new domestic abuse offence of coercive and controlling behaviour. The maximum penalty will be five years imprisonment and a fine. The new law will help protect people by outlawing sustained patterns of behaviour that stop short of serious physical violence, but amount to extreme psychological and emotional abuse.

The strategy's key recommendations include

Prevention and awareness

- 1** Aim to "get it right first time" by providing support and clear referral pathways for friends and families, including the expansion of existing Domestic Abuse Champions in community, faith and work based settings
- 2** Establish a wide ranging education and support programme for young people
- 3** Greater support for the LGBT community, people with disabilities and those from the diverse range of communities in the borough, through an awareness raising programme.

Early identification and support

- 4** Achieve a greater balance between criminal justice, health and community support by establishing a health based intervention model
- 5** Establish an integrated support service for complex cases of domestic abuse
- 6** Work with the Mayors Office for Policing and Crime to establish a consistent pan-London approach to addressing domestic abuse.

Enforcement

- 7** Take action against persistent perpetrators by establishing a multi agency enforcement approach
- 8** Improving the criminal justice process including, lobbying for a domestic abuse specialist court in Southwark
- 9** Carry out an annual needs assessment review of domestic abuse.

Accessing services

To view the full strategy or if you are seeking advice or help on domestic abuse, there is more information on the services and support available at www.southwark.gov.uk/domesticabuse

