

**Preventing and tackling violence against women and girls,
domestic abuse, and sexual violence – Brighton & Hove
City Council’s Strategic Direction 2024-2028**

Contents

Executive Summary (p. 3)

1. What is violence against women and girls, domestic abuse and sexual violence? (p.5)

2. Background (p. 6)

3. What does the data tell us? (p. 7)

4. Our strategic approach (p. 12)

5. Next steps (p. 14)

Appendix 1: Legal definitions (p. 16)

Appendix 2: Glossary (p. 18)

Executive Summary

Purpose

This document sets out the council's approach to preventing violence against women and girls, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWGDAV) in Brighton & Hove. The data and learnings set out here will inform our forthcoming strategy (Winter 2024).

The Council Plan outcome 2, prioritises a fair and inclusive city where people feel safe and welcome. This report directly contributes to achieving outcome 2 for the city. Following feedback from the Equality, Community Safety and Human Rights Committee in October 2023, a series of consultations with the public and key stakeholders have informed the strategic direction to date.

Ambition

Brighton & Hove City Council is committed to ending violence against women and girls, domestic abuse, and sexual violence (VAWGDAV). We will do this through focusing our efforts on prevention, strengthening the join-up across our services, those of our partners, stakeholders and community members, supporting survivors and holding perpetrators to account. Together, we will make Brighton & Hove a city where everyone is and feels safe.

Our four strategic objectives are:

1. **A Strengthened co-ordinated response** to all forms of VAWGDAV, irrespective of whether the incident occurs in private or public space, we will join up council and partner services and address gaps in provision.
2. **Prioritising prevention** to end VAWGDAV through a collaborative approach to awareness raising, data and information sharing, capacity building, education, and communication campaigns.
3. **Supporting survivors** to ensure anyone affected by VAWGDAV has access to high quality trauma-informed support. Working across public, private and third sector partners, with specialist and community providers, we will identify and support victims at an earlier stage.
4. **Building an accountable community and changing perpetrator behaviour** by shifting the focus away from the victim and towards the perpetrator, strengthening the criminal justice response and enabling behaviour change.

Next Steps

Over the coming months we will develop an action plan based on these strategic priorities. We will do this through:

1. Cross council collaboration

- Action: we will convene cross council workshops to ensure a joined up and coordinated response
- Purpose: to integrate our response to preventing VAWGDASV across all areas of council operations

2. Action Plan development

- Action: we will collaborate with council services, public, private and third sector partners to develop an action plan with clear KPIs
- Purpose: to translate our four strategic objectives into clearly defined and measurable actions

3. Governance and monitoring

- Action: we will review and improve governance arrangements and design a framework for monitoring the progress and impact of the plan
- Purpose: to provide senior level accountability, measure success, make data-driven adjustments and scale learnings

4. Evaluation and learning

- Action: we will evaluate the impact of the action plan
- Purpose: to understand value for money, impact, and effectiveness, share learnings and inform future practice

Brighton & Hove City Council is committed to listening and responding to the needs of survivors in our city. We will work with partners and our communities to continue to engage, listen and collaborate to codevelop and co-deliver our strategic approach.

1. What is violence against women and girls, domestic abuse, and sexual violence (VAWG DASV)?

This section sets out clear definitions of the terms violence against women and girls, domestic abuse, and sexual violence (VAWG DASV).

What constitutes violence against women and girls?

Brighton & Hove City Council has adopted the UN definition:

“Any act of gender – based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological harm or suffering to women including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life” (United Nations (UN Declaration (1993)).

VAWG is the umbrella term that describes the wide range of abuses that predominantly and disproportionately impact upon women and girls but can be experienced by all genders.

The Government acknowledges that “while we use the term ‘violence against women and girls...this refers to all victims of any of these offences’”. The council agrees with this position, and we will continue to support survivors of all genders.

VAWG can be broken down into different strands, including:

- Domestic abuse
- Sexual violence/rape
- Sexual Harassment
- Sexual exploitation
- Stalking
- Crimes committed in the name of “honour”
- Forced marriage
- Female genital mutilation/cutting
- Faith based abuse
- Violence against women in public spaces
- Forced Prostitution and human trafficking
- Digitally enabled Abuse
- Economic abuse

What constitutes domestic abuse?

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk> set out the legal definition of domestic abuse (appendix 1) with the significant change that children are classified as victims in their own right rather than witnesses. The Act also introduced a range of new duties for criminal justice agencies and local authorities, including new duties on tier 1 authorities to provide support for survivors and their children in safe accommodation.

What constitutes sexual violence?

Sexual violence is behaviour (physical, verbal, virtual or online) perceived to be of a sexual nature, that is forced on anyone without their informed consent or understanding. This can include rape, sexual abuse - including in childhood, sexual assault, sexual harassment, forced marriage, so-called honour-based violence, female genital mutilation, and sexual exploitation - including child sexual exploitation. Sexual violence and abuse can take place in many different settings, including in work, in the community or online.

Summary

In summary, VAWGDASV can take many forms which include physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse and can happen to anyone regardless of age, ethnicity, religion, gender, ability or disability or sexual orientation. These abuses may differ in how they are experienced, but they are almost always rooted in misuse of power and the desire to control the subject of the abuse. Forms of coercive and controlling behavior such as financial control, online abuse and stalking, are often the precursor to more violent forms of crime and often feature in Domestic Homicide Reviews.

2. Background

Our strategic approach to preventing VAWGDASV is informed by national and regional policy and emerging best practice.

An urgent national priority

Since 2010, tackling VAWGDASV has been a cross party priority. In July 2021, the government published [Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy](#), which focused on improving the criminal justice response, and improving safety in public spaces. In November 2021, the Government declared VAWGDASV an urgent national priority and its national framework for delivery set this as a strategic priority for all Police forces and by extension Community Safety Partnerships. All forms of VAWGDASV were added to the [strategic policing requirement](#).

VAWGDASV is well established as a major public health issue. The UK Health Security Agency aims to reduce harm across the wider determinants of health and address wider system issues such as poverty, unemployment, education, housing and homelessness.

Regional collaboration

Brighton & Hove City Council, in collaboration with East and West Sussex County Councils, commissioned the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner to develop the [Pan Sussex Domestic Abuse Support in Safety Accommodation Strategy 2021-](#)

[2024](#) in recognition of the impact of domestic abuse, the need to provide safe accommodation and support for survivors and their children. Brighton & Hove City Council is a partner in the [Pan Sussex Framework for Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse, 2020-2024](#), which sets out how partners will collaborate across the region, and is an equal partner in the Pan–Sussex Domestic Abuse Board.

Local context and delivery

Our strategic approach to addressing VAWGDASV aligns with the aims of the [Brighton & Hove Council Plan 2024-2027](#), and related strategies such as the [Community Safety and Crime Reduction Strategy 2023-2026](#), the [Brighton & Hove City Council Anti Racism Strategy 2023- 2028](#), our commitment to trans inclusion and the forthcoming strategies for Gender Equality and Alcohol Reduction respectively. As we develop our strategic approach and action plan over summer 2024 we will ensure this aligns with the delivery of all council services that can impact on and help prevent VAWGDASV.

How will our approach to VAWGDASV help deliver our [Council Plan 2024-2027](#)?

Our strategic approach will help to realise:

- **Outcome 1: A city to be proud of** through working with communities and partners across the public, private and third sector to coordinate and strengthen a city-wide response.
- **Outcome 2: A fair and inclusive city** through shifting responsibility away from the survivor and onto the wider community, and ensuring our services and partners provide support in an inclusive, intersectional and trauma informed way.
- **Outcome 3: A healthy city** through providing preemptive support, identifying issues at an earlier stage and working across the wider determinants of health to address systemic issues, such as education, employment, and housing.
- **Outcome 4: A responsive council with well-run services** through our One Council approach to preventing and tackling VAWGDASV using every (hard and soft) lever available.

3. What does the data tell us?

This section provides background information on VAWGDASV and its prevalence, setting the background for why this is a core priority for the council.

[Domestic Abuse overview, 2023](#)

- The Crime Survey for England and Wales estimated that 2.1 million people aged

16 years and over (1.4 million women and 751,000 men) experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2023.

- The police recorded 889,918 domestic abuse-related crimes (excluding Devon and Cornwall) in the year ending March 2023, a similar number to the previous year.
- There were 51,288 domestic abuse-related prosecutions in England and Wales for the year ending March 2023, compared with 53,207 in the year ending March 2022.

Sexual Violence overview, year ending 2022

- The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) provides the best measure of victimisation and estimated that 2.3% of adults (3.3% women and 1.2% men) aged 16 years and over were victims of sexual assault (including attempts) in the year ending March 2022 survey. This equates to an estimated 1.1 million adults (798,000 women and 275,000 men).
- Approximately 16.6% of adults aged 16 years and over (7.9 million) had experienced sexual assault (including attempts) since the age of 16 years; 1.9 million were a victim of rape (7.7% women and 0.2% men).
- Despite no significant change in the prevalence of sexual assault experienced by adults aged 16 to 59 years in the last year (2.7%) compared with the year ending March 2020 (2.2%), there has been a significant increase since the year ending March 2014 (1.5%), which aligns with trends seen in police recorded crime.
- The volume of sexual offences recorded by the police has been increasing over the last decade although the numbers remain well below the number of victims estimated by the survey. The latest figures for the year ending March 2022 show an increase of 31%, to 193,566 police recorded offences, compared with the previous year.

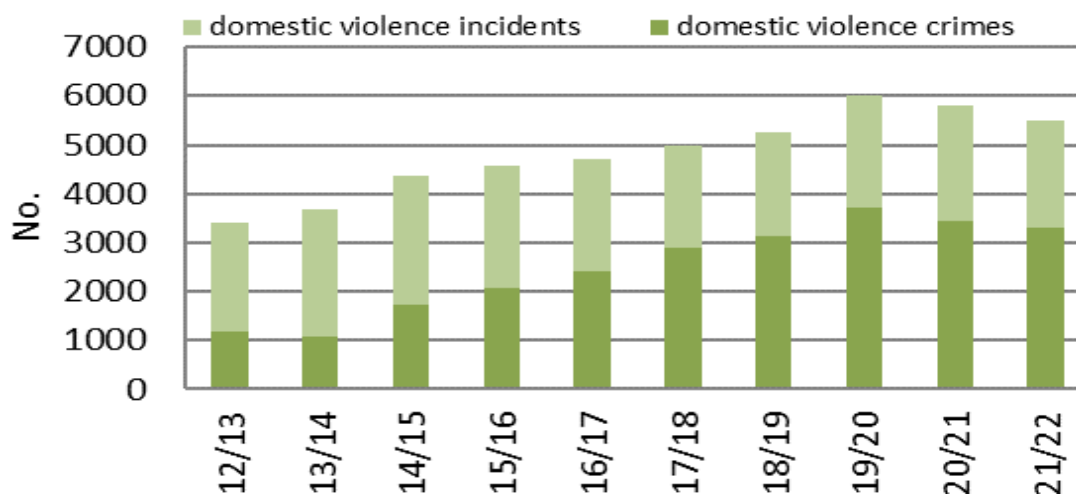
The local picture (2012/13 to 2021/22)

The available data tells us that domestic abuse is the most prevalent form of VAWGDASV in Brighton & Hove. We know that incidents of domestic and sexual abuse and violence and the wider forms of VAWGDASV occur in private and public spaces. Many incidents remain hidden, and many survivors never report incidents or reach out for support. For others harassment and online abuse is a daily occurrence that is rarely reported. The true extent of all forms of VAWGDASV locally is unknown and likely to be significantly higher than the available data indicates.

Domestic abuse

Table 1: Police recorded domestic abuse, violence crimes and incidents 2012- 2022

Police recorded domestic violence crimes and incidents



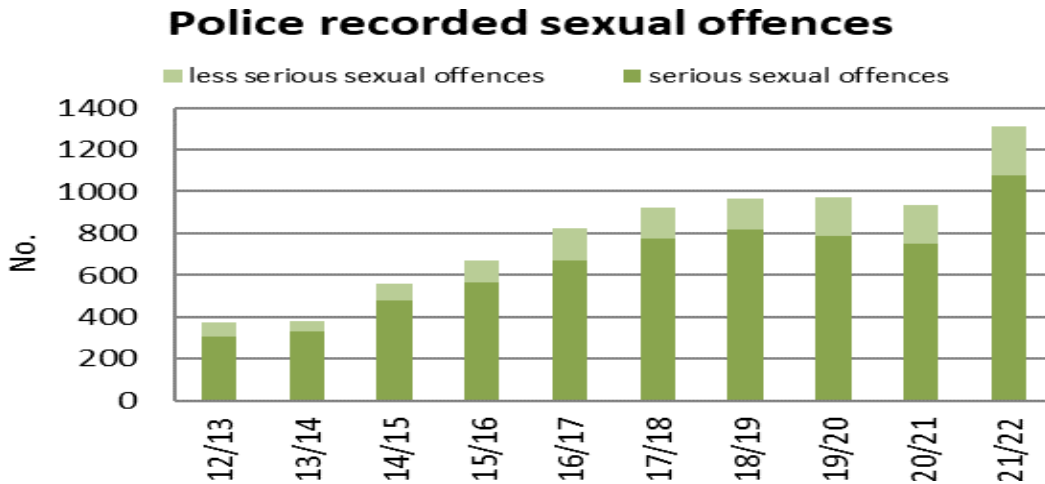
Police data confirms that DA is a prolific crime in the city - 12% of all recorded crime in 2021/22 had a DA Flag. In 2021/22 there were a total of 5,487 domestic violence incidents and crimes recorded by the police, of which 3,299 were crimes.

Numbers had been rising steadily up to 2019/20, but dropped during the following 2 years, coinciding with the Covid-19 pandemic. 74% of DA offences in 2021/22 had a female victim and 88% of perpetrators during April to September 2021 were male.

Sexual violence and abuse

Police data highlights that during 2021/22, the police recorded 1,239 sexual offences in Brighton & Hove, of which 1,077 were serious sexual offences including 397 rape offences. The data considered for the council's [Community Safety Strategy](#) concluded that sexual offences commonly occur in the context of the night-time economy. In terms of sexual offences, the city along with the rest of Sussex is in the bottom 10 nationally for cases going through the court system. In line with the [National Policing Plan and College of Policing](#), Sussex Police have introduced a new systemic approach to improving this target and recent data shows higher levels of cases into court for in 2023/24.

Table 2: Police recorded sexual offences 2012 -2022.



Stalking

Police data shows there were 463 crimes and incidents of stalking in Brighton & Hove recorded by the police in 2021/22. Numbers were on a rising trend and reached a peak of 549 in 2020/21 but dropped back in the last year. In 83% of crimes and incidents in 2021/22 the victim was female; 17% were male.

Harmful Practices: honour-based violence, female genital mutilation and forced marriage

Police data, since 2018/19, reveals between seven and 11 police recorded crimes and incidents of honour-based violence per year. There were 9 in 2021/22, with all the victims in this year being female. There were two crimes and incidents of forced marriage in 2018/19, and none recorded in the years since. There have been no police recorded crimes or incidents of female genital mutilation recorded in the city to date.

Demographics

VAWG/DASV can be experienced by anyone. However, we know that a survivor’s experience often intersects with other experiences linked to protected characteristics. This can introduce additional risks and make it harder for people to seek support. While men and boys also suffer from many of these forms of abuse, they disproportionately affect women and more so women with intersecting characteristics.

National statistics highlight that BME women suffer domestic abuse 1.5 times longer than their white counterparts (Safelives, 2020). Data also indicates that BME people are less likely to report VAWG/DASV. The council has commissioned a BME Domestic Abuse Capacity Building Service to work at the grassroots level to further improve understanding of and access to support for BME survivors.

Our strategic approach will fully recognise intersectionality. This includes the experiences of the city’s LGBTQ+ community, which report high levels of

VAWGDAV. The council will continue to work closely with partners to ensure a continued focus on intersectionality, including LGBTQ+ and BME integration into our VAWGDASV response.

Learnings from Reviews

Domestic Homicide Reviews

In 2011, the requirement for Community Safety Partnerships to conduct Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHR) became a statutory duty. DHRs review the circumstances and partnership response prior to and after the domestic abuse murder. These reviews shine a light on how the partnership responds to domestic abuse and enables local partnerships to learn lessons to improve future practice. The council has undertaken and completed six reviews since 2011. In 2024, a further fatality review was commissioned.

At the time of writing, a government consultation of the DHR process is underway and includes consideration of firmer guidance for DHRs to be undertaken in cases of death by suicide where there has been a significant history of domestic abuse.

An audit of DHRs nationally was undertaken in 2021, which involved consideration of 124 DHRs. Of these, a further sample of 50 DHRs identified 10 key themes contained which include the need for greater agency contact with victims and recognition that the perpetrator can control the victims contact with agencies.

Learning from safeguarding reviews

Lessons learnt from safeguarding children reviews nationally often highlight the presence of VAWGDASV related crimes. During 2021, the Brighton & Hove Adult Safeguarding Board (SAB) commissioned a thematic review into the deaths of three women who it was determined had multiple compound needs. These women shared their experience of multiple forms of VAWGDASV as well as issues around homelessness, substance misuse, offending and physical and mental health issues. All the women were repeat cases to the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference ([MARAC](#)) across Sussex. The recommendations arising from the review are being implemented, including changing the operating protocol for the local MARAC to improve joint working.

What is MARAC?

The MARAC is a domestic abuse Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC). It brings together representatives from a number of agencies to discuss the safety, health and well-being of people experiencing domestic abuse (and their children). An agency will make a referral to MARAC to get support from other agencies (from health and adult social care services to housing, education, the police and probation services) for an individual who has been identified as being at high risk of serious harm or death from domestic abuse.

4. A coordinated approach

We understand that no single service or agency can prevent or tackle VAWGDASV alone. Our approach will focus on joining up the approach across our services, those of our partners, stakeholders, and community members. Our response will support family, friends, residents, communities, faith-based organization's, the community and voluntary sector, statutory agencies, and the business community to work together to prevent VAWGDASV. This approach is set out below, as a visual approximation, and we will develop our own model in phase II.

Diagram 1: The Coordinated Response Model.



Source: Haringey Council (2016) Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, 2016-2026

Strategic objectives

Our work is focused around four strategic objectives:

- **Strengthening the co-ordinated response** to all forms of VAWGDASV irrespective of whether the incident occurs in private or public space, we will join up council and partner services and address gaps in provision.
- **Prioritising prevention** to end VAWGDASV through a collaborative approach to awareness raising, data and information sharing, education and communication campaigns.
- **Supporting survivors** to ensure anyone affected by VAWGDASV has access to high quality trauma-informed support. Working across public, private and third sector partners, with specialist and community providers, we will identify and support victims at an earlier stage.
- **Building an accountable community and changing perpetrator behaviour** by shifting the focus away from the victim's behaviour to the perpetrator's, strengthening the criminal justice response and supporting behaviour change.

Learnings from local consultations and surveys

In developing our strategic approach, two surveys were undertaken. The first focused on VAWGDASV in public spaces in 2022. From the 614 responses, the following issues were highlighted.

The most prevalent form of VAWGDASV experienced was sexual harassment with 45% stating they had experience this and 21% stating they had witnessed another person being sexual harassed. Whilst perceptions of safety in the city highlighted that 65% felt safe in the day, 77% felt unsafe at night.

Respondents had general concerns when out in public with 44% stating they were worried and 21% being very worried whilst out walking. There was a mixed response to safety when using public transport. Overall, 59% of respondents confirmed they felt safe on the bus, with 39% reporting they were worried about safety when using the train and 33% stating they were not concerned. Licensed premises were felt to be a risk area by 36% of respondents, and nightclubs by 57% of respondents.

A second public consultation on the strategic approach was responded to by 233 people in autumn 2023. Public opinion on the priorities confirmed that the majority of respondents agreed with our four strategic priorities. Of those that responded to the survey, there were 60 people (26%) with lived experience. Their valuable contributions will be incorporated into the final action plan under development. The responses stressed the importance of access to safe housing and enabling survivors to stay in their own homes, ensuring intersectionality is embedded across service responses, the importance of education, especially for men and boys, the role for decriminalising sex work, and more widely the need to improve the frontline response.

5. Next steps

Over the coming months we will develop an action plan based on these strategic priorities. We will do this through:

1. Cross council collaboration

- Action: we will convene cross council workshops to ensure a joined up and coordinated response
- Purpose: to integrate our response to preventing VAWGDASV across all areas of council operations

2. Action Plan development

- Action: we will collaborate with public, private and third sector partners to develop an action plan with clear KPIs
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Appendix 1: Legal Definition of Domestic Abuse 2021

- (1) “Domestic abuse” for the purposes of this Act.
- (2) Behaviour of a person (“A”) towards another person (“B”) is “domestic abuse” if—
 - (a) A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other,
and
 - (b) the behaviour is abusive.
- (2) Behaviour is “abusive” if it consists of any of the following—
 - (a) physical or sexual abuse.
 - (b) violent or threatening behaviour;
 - (c) controlling or coercive behaviour;
 - (d) economic abuse (see subsection (4));
 - (e) psychological, emotional or other abuse;
- 4) “Economic abuse” means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on B’s ability to—
 - (a) acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or
 - (b) obtain goods or services.
- 5) For the purposes of this Act A’s behavior may be behaviour “towards” B despite the fact that it consists of conduct directed at another person (for example, B’s child).
- 6) References in this Act to being abusive towards another person are to be read in accordance with this section.
- (7) For the meaning of “personally connected”, see section 2.

Section 2: Definition of “personally connected”

- (1) Two people are “personally connected” to each other if any of the following applies—
 - (a) they are, or have been, married to each other;
 - (b) they are, or have been, civil partners of each other;
 - (c) they have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated);
 - (d) they have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been terminated);
 - (e) they are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other;
 - (f) they each have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child (see subsection (2));
 - (g) they are relatives.

(1) For the purposes of subsection (1) (f) a person has a parental relationship in relation to a child if—

(a) the person is a parent of the child, or

(b) the person has parental responsibility for the child.

(2) In this section—

“child” means a person under the age of 18 years;

“civil partnership agreement” has the meaning given by section 73 of the Civil Partnership Act 2004;

“parental responsibility” has the same meaning as in the Children Act 1989;

“relative” has the meaning given by section 63(1) of the Family Law Act 1996

Children as Victims of Domestic Abuse

(1) This section applies where behavior of a person (A) towards another person (B) is domestic abuse

(2) Any reference in this Act to a victim of domestic abuse includes a reference to a child who –

(a) Sees or hears, or experiences the effects of abuse, and

(b) Is related to A or B

(3) A child is related to a person for the purposes of subsection (2) if –

(a) The person is a parent of, or has parental responsibility for, the child, or

(b) The child and the person are relatives

(4) In this section-

“Child” means a person under the age of 18 years;

“parental responsibility” has the same meaning as in the “Children Act 1989” (see section 3 of that Act);

“relative” has the same meaning given by section 63 (1) of the Family Law Act 1996

Appendix 2. Glossary

AE	Accident and Emergency
A/perp	Alleged perpetrator
ASB	Anti- Social Behavior
BHCC	Brighton and Hove City Council
BME	Black Minority Ethnic
CAG	Citizens Advisory Group
CCR	Coordinated Community Response
COE	Council of Europe
CSA	Child Sexual Abuse
DA	Domestic Abuse
DARA	Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment
DASH	Domestic Abuse, Stalking, Harassment, Honour Based Violence
DLUHC	Department of Leveling Up Housing and Communities
DVDS	Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme
DHR	Domestic Homicide Review
HBV	Honour Based Violence
HIDVA	Health Independent Domestic Violence Advocate
HP	Harmful Practices
ICB	Integrated Care Board
IDVA	Independent Domestic Violence Advocate
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Questioning
MARAC	Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference
MATAC	Multi Agency Tasking and Coordination
MOP	MARAC Operating Protocol
PP	Perpetrator Programme
SAB	Safeguarding Adults Board
SAR	Safeguarding Adults Review
SDVC	Specialist Domestic Violence Court
RISE	Refuge, Information, Support and Education
RP	Registered Providers
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
VAWGDA SV	Violence Against Women and Girls, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence
VS	Victim Support
VSS	Victim Specialist Service
WSW	Woman's Safety Worker

