

# Domestic Abuse Act 2021

People & families Scrutiny 14 October 2021

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# The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 - Overview

The Domestic Abuse Act received Royal Assent on the 29th April 2021

The Act contains both legislative and non legislative functions designed to:

- ▶ promote awareness of domestic abuse
- ▶ protect and support victims and their families
- ▶ transform the justice process to prioritise victim's safety
- ▶ drive consistency and better performance in the response to domestic abuse across all local areas, agencies, and sectors.

# The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 - Duties

The Act places a duty on Essex County Council as a Tier 1 Local Authority, to provide support to victims of domestic abuse and, where present, their children who are residing within safe accommodation.

To fulfil its duties the Council is required to appoint a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board to support it performing specific functions that are:

- ▶ assess the need for domestic abuse support within safe accommodation
- ▶ prepare and publish a strategy
- ▶ give effect to the strategy through commissioning and de-commissioning decisions
- ▶ monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy
- ▶ report back annually to central government

# The Domestic Abuse Act 2021

## Challenges

- ▶ Funding aligned to The Act does not take into account perpetrators outside of the judicial system
- ▶ The Act does not fully consider early intervention
- ▶ Appropriate safe housing options for victims
- ▶ Uncertainty about future funding allocations which impacts on long term planning
- ▶ Engaging victims and survivors in a meaningful way
- ▶ Building the infrastructures needed to ensure post recovery is included as well as crisis support

## Benefits

- ▶ The Act formally recognises children as victims in their own right
- ▶ Adolescent to parent violence and abuse is considered in the DA guidance, which strengthens the work currently being developed in Essex
- ▶ Requirement to consider the needs of marginalised groups and those with protected characteristics
- ▶ Funding aligned to the new duties will enable a wider reach alongside the current offer
- ▶ Opportunities for innovation and being survivor and victim led

# New Domestic Abuse Commissioning Strategy 2021 - 2024

A needs assessment was completed to inform the new Domestic Abuse Commissioning Strategy. A variety of activities were completed, including:

- ▶ quantitative data analysis
- ▶ service mapping
- ▶ desktop research
- ▶ case studies
- ▶ extensive stakeholder engagement
- ▶ interviews with victims and survivors as 'experts by experience'.

As a result, 5 key objectives were identified to drive the strategy over the next 3 years

# Domestic Abuse Commissioning Strategy Objectives

Five Key Objectives	What will we do
Objective 1: Children and young people residing in safe accommodation can access support that meets their needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Provide funding to support those already in safe accommodation</li><li>- Understand what works for children through research</li><li>- Invest further to develop adequate provision</li></ul>
Objective 2: Victims and survivors of domestic abuse can access support to improve their psychological and emotional wellbeing and recover from trauma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Conduct robust service design to understand the full scale of issues</li><li>- Identify what works well and any barriers</li><li>- Co-design/commission the appropriate response</li></ul>
Objective 3: Victims and survivors of domestic abuse will have improved access to safe accommodation through good quality information, advice and guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Allocate funding to the 12 districts/boroughs/city/ councils to increase their domestic abuse offer</li><li>- Continue to collaborate with Southend, Essex &amp; Thurrock Domestic Abuse Partnership housing sub-group</li></ul>
Objective 4: Victims and survivors of domestic abuse will be better informed of their legal options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Explore regionally the issues of legal advice and discuss actions to feedback to central government</li><li>- Work with stakeholders to identify where there are gaps in legal information advice and guidance and address the gaps</li></ul>
Objective 5: Victims and survivors of domestic abuse will play their part in the co-design of provision, decision making and influence on the wider domestic abuse agenda in Essex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Continue to work with victims/survivors as experts by experience</li><li>- Co-design a range of mechanisms for their on-going, meaning engagement in decisions that affect their lives and the lives of others</li></ul>

# The Impact of Domestic Abuse on Children

We welcome that The Act ensures child and young people are now considered victims of domestic abuse and that there is funding to ensure their specific needs are met.

A child or young person is classed as a victim if they see, hear, or experiences the effects of the abuse. The impact on children includes;

- Feeling anxious or depressed
- Having difficulty sleeping, nightmares
- Physical symptoms such as stomach aches or bed wetting
- Reduction in school attendance, attainment, truancy
- Inconsistent regulation of emotions, including becoming distressed, upset or angry
- Becoming aggressive or internalising their distress and becoming withdrawn
- Using alcohol or drugs, or self-harming

# Identifying and addressing the Impacts of Domestic Abuse on Children and young people - Early Intervention

The Act itself now enable us to design specialist and tailored early pathways to support for children and young people.

This means we can dovetail the extensive Early Intervention work we have already been doing in Essex to prevent poor outcomes for children and young people who have been victims

The definition of children and young people as victims serves to strengthen the already extensive work, preceding The Act, happening in Essex that aims to prevent or negate the impacts being a child victim might have

**Trauma Informed Perceptive Practice** – a developmental programme for Schools to develop and informed working and learning environments that will help children and young people disclose that they are victims and feel supported –

**Adolescent to Parent Violence** – *Some* adolescent to parent violence can be the result of a young person having witnessed domestic abuse. Practitioners across Essex, including schools and social care have been training to work with Parents on understanding how Non-Violent Resistant Behaviours will help to reduce that violence.

**Reducing Parental Conflict** – Not all conflict results in domestic abuse, but whether it does or doesn't, it can have devastating long lasting impacts on children and young people. Essex have been part of a national programme help parents understand the impacts their conflict can have on their children.