

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL	
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Report of:	Louise Grabham - Director of Adult Social Care and Health Integration
Relevant Executive Member:	Cllr Julia Rostron - Executive Member for Adult Social Care
Submitted to:	Executive
Date:	3 December 2025
Title:	Domestic Abuse Strategy 2025-2028
Report for:	Decision
Status:	Public
Council Plan priority:	Safe and resilient communities
Key decision:	Yes
Why:	Decision(s) will incur expenditure or savings above £250,000
Subject to call in?	Yes
Why:	Non-Urgent Report

Proposed decision(s)	
That Executive: • APPROVES the Middlesbrough Domestic Abuse Strategy 2025-2028 • APPROVES the proposed commissioning recommendations, as outlined in the Commissioning Plan (Appendix 2) with procurement to commence in 2025/26.	

Executive summary
Middlesbrough Council have a statutory duty under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 to assess the need for accommodation based domestic abuse support in their area every three years, develop and publish a strategy for the provision of support having regard to the needs assessment, give effect to strategy (through commissioning and decommissioning decisions) and monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy. Domestic abuse strategies play a critical role in preventing abuse, protecting victims and coordinating support services within local communities. This strategy identifies the

positive partnership work delivered to date and sets out the key strategic objectives required moving forward.

The Middlesbrough Domestic Abuse Strategy 2025-2028 has been developed by the Middlesbrough Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership Board (DASP). This strategy builds on the strong foundations established via the Preventing Domestic Abuse Strategy (2019) and the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy (2021). The Strategy has been developed taking into account the following:

- Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment
- Option Appraisal regarding future model for Safe Accommodation

As a result of the Needs Assessment, which has led to the strategy development the Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership has also identified gaps in support services locally and has proposed a number of commissioning recommendations (Appendix 2) which relate to:

- **Safe Accommodation** (Refuge, Sanctuary, Dispersed, Complex need)
- **Community Based Provision** (Referral and Response, Independent Domestic Violence Advisers, Therapeutic support and counselling, Parenting support)
- **Prevention** (Work with schools and Colleges, Community Engagement, Domestic champions, and support with employers)
- **By and For Specialist Service** (Services working with protected characteristics)
- **IRIS Programme** (Working with Primary care to identify and respond to domestic abuse effectively)
- **Immigration Advice** (For victims and their children who are fleeing domestic abuse with insecure immigration status)

Approval from Executive will support and endorse the work of the Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership in progressing the strategic key objectives and will facilitate procurement processes to commence in 2025/26, to deliver the required commissioning intentions.

1. Purpose of this report and its contribution to the achievement of the Council Plan ambitions

- 1.1 The Domestic Abuse Strategy impacts of a number of statutory council departments, and promotes a partnership approach towards tackling domestic abuse in the form of the Middlesbrough Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership.

Our ambitions	Summary of how this report will support delivery of these ambitions and the underpinning aims
A successful and ambitious town	Domestic Abuse is a significant cause of homelessness, which can create a cycle of vulnerability and further exploitation. Key barriers to leaving abusive situations include a lack of safe and affordable housing.

	Aims within strategy is to ensure Middlesbrough has safe accommodation which meets the demand for this provision, and which meets diverse needs of victims/ survivors and there is specialist support is find safe housing and access support.
A healthy Place	Domestic abuse has significant impact on long term health outcomes. Aims within this strategy are to ensure. We have appropriately resourced Independent Domestic Violence and abuse advisers so we can prevent homicides and reduce risk victims and their children. All GP practices in Middlesbrough are IRIS approved and can recognise and respond to Domestic Abuse. Victims/ survivors and their children have access to therapeutic interventions and counselling to support long term recovery form domestic abuse.
Safe and resilient communities	Domestic abuse has a significant corrosive impact on individuals' families and communities. Aims within strategy are to ensure that prevention work has strategic investment, and programmes are developed with children and young people, so they learn about healthy relationships, members of communities are trained as Ask Me ambassadors so they recognise and respond to Domestic Abuse and Employers are supported to develop policies and champions so appropriate support is provided to employees experiencing it.
Delivering best value	The Domestic Abuse ACT 2021 requires local authorities to ensure that all domestic abuse specialist services who are commissioned by Middlesbrough adhere to quality standards and have required level of accreditation. Aim within strategy is to ensure that we continue to have high quality provision and robust contract arrangements are in place, so impact and improved outcomes is fed back regularly to Middlesbrough Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership Board.

2 Recommendations

2.1 That the Executive:

- APPROVES Middlesbrough Domestic Abuse Strategy 2025-2028
- APPROVES the proposed commissioning recommendations, as outlined in the Commissioning Plan (Appendix 2) with procurement to commence in 2025/26.

3 Rationale for the recommended decision(s)

- 3.1 Middlesbrough Local Authority has a statutory duty to publish a Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment (Appendix 3) to determine the level of need for domestic abuse support, and to develop a Domestic Abuse Strategy which sets out the Local Authority's vision and strategic objectives for next three years. This has been undertaken and now sets out the immediate and long-term commissioning intentions, which will increase specialised safe accommodation, improve community-based support for victims and develop stronger partnerships between services working directly with domestic abuse victims and their children
- 3.2 The Statutory Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment has been agreed by the Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership (DASP) and was published September 2025. The executive summary is attached in Appendix 3 – this needs assessment has informed the strategy development.
- 3.3 The Needs Assessment has identified a need to recommission and reconfigure all Domestic Abuse provision to ensure priority areas are appropriately resourced and there are clear pathways for victims and survivors to access either community-based support and / or safe accommodation.
- 3.4 The recommended approach is to commission an independent specialist integrated protect and support service which incorporates all domestic abuse community-based provision, a diverse specialist safe accommodation service which will incorporate sanctuary, refuge, provision for complex need and dispersed properties and a prevention programme service which will comprise of prevention programmes in education, communities and employers.
- 3.5 Some immediate commissioning priorities have also been identified which will be commissioned this financial year to address gaps in provision, which includes a specialist By and For framework, immigration advice for victims and families with insecure immigrations status and extending IRIS and DAPP (Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Programme) Programmes which works with perpetrators.

4. Background and relevant information

- 4.1 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 created statutory duties on Local Authorities, to assess the need for, prepare and publish strategies for providing accommodation-based support to victims and their children in safe accommodation. These duties also include convening Domestic Abuse Partnership Boards, monitoring the support strategies and allocating funding to carry out obligations. The Government allocates funding to Local Authorities to support delivery of these duties and monitors this via an annual delta return.
- 4.2 The Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment has taken six months to complete and has involved extensive consultation with Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership, statutory and non-statutory stakeholders, commissioning bodies, staff and victims and survivors via surveys, and group consultation via Middlesbrough survivor panel. The terms of reference for the Needs Assessment were developed in line with government guidance and template for undertaking this work.

- 4.3 The Needs Assessment identified some key achievements since 2021. Middlesbrough Council commissioned an integrated Protect and Support service for adult victims and survivors which created a single point of access and ensured a more coordinated response for victims. In addition a therapeutic child and young person service was commissioned, which ensured children who have experienced domestic abuse have access to therapeutic intervention. Middlesbrough Council have raised public awareness of the needs and experiences of victims and survivors of domestic abuse by continually promoting education, training, and action to prevent it and have worked in collaboration with Domestic Abuse specialist services to develop a survivor panel. Middlesbrough Council have also driven innovation by supporting and funding one of our specialist domestic abuse services to deliver the gold standard IRIS Programme which has been successfully embedded across Primary Care services.
- 4.4 The Needs Assessment has also identified some significant challenges. Services have become overwhelmed by the frequency and complexity of domestic abuse incidents, particularly with higher risk cases. The accumulative impact of repeat incidents, which are at a high level in Middlesbrough are not always appreciated or managed effectively as a multi-agency partnership. It is essential we develop a system and well-coordinated process to cope with high demand and have the appropriate funding assigned so commissioned services can deliver effectively.
- 4.5 The Domestic Abuse Strategy 2025- 2028 and the identified strategic objectives for next three years have been developed in consultation with Middlesbrough Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership Board and is based on learning and recommendations identified in the Needs Assessment. This work will then inform how we commission our future domestic abuse services.

5. Ward Member Engagement if relevant and appropriate

- 5.1 The Deputy Mayor as chair of Middlesbrough Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership Board until October 2025 has been consulted and involved in development of this Strategy.

6. Other potential alternative(s) and why these have not been recommended.

- 6.1 The only alternative option is to remain with the existing strategy from 2019. However in doing so the Middlesbrough Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership Board will not have any agreed updated strategic objectives and will fail to meet statutory obligations. Furthermore delays will compromise how we recommission Domestic Abuse services, which would fail to meet local need. The current domestic abuse contracts are not aligned and configured correctly to reflect the current needs and demand for the services. The current contracts are due to expire in March 2026, and failure to re-procure in a timely, planned way could result in financial and organisational instability for Service Providers and service delivery. The Needs Assessment has made specific recommendations, and the Domestic Abuse Act

funding must be used specifically for safe accommodation. Therefore to remain operating under the 2019 strategy is not a viable option.

7. Impact(s) of the recommended decision(s)

Topic	Impact
Financial (including procurement and Social Value)	The financial implications of the Domestic Abuse Strategy have been assessed in the context of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). While the strategy does not currently anticipate any increase in overall costs, full financial assurance cannot be given. This is because the contracts for the new services have not yet been awarded and the figures included in the financial plan are indicative only and may change. However, the risk of any significant change is expected to be very minimal, and finance will continue to closely monitor the commissioning process and services throughout 2026/27. If any financial risk is identified, corrective action will be taken to manage the impact. Funding for the commissioned services will be met from base budget, the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation grant, and the Public Health grant and this has been confirmed with the relevant budget holders. The overall budget envelope is £1,132,734. A VAT assessment has been undertaken, and the proposal is considered to be outside scope. There are no implications for the Council's partial exemption position, and advice has been sought from the VAT team where appropriate. Procurement requirements have been reviewed in line with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules. The proposed procurement route will be a combination of both tender and quotation process. There is a dedicated Commissioning Officer identified for this procurement, in addition to the Procurement Team being consulted to ensure compliance. Where applicable, the procurement process will incorporate social value considerations, including local employment and community benefit, in line with the Council's Social Value Policy. In summary, the proposal represents a re-structure of the Council's Domestic Abuse service in line with statutory requirements, and financial risks have been considered.
Legal	The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 creates duties on Local Authorities, specifically at section 15-17 with regard to duties

	in relation to the Commissioner, and Part 4 of the Act referencing support. The recommendations in the report will enable the Council to comply with its obligations under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.
Risk	The Domestic Abuse Strategy aims to intervene and keep more victims and their children safe, reduce the occurrence of domestic abuse and repeat victimisation and end the harm caused by all forms of domestic abuse. The Strategy can only be effective if Middlesbrough Council commissions and procures high quality domestic abuse services which can evidence improved outcomes for victims and their children.
Human Rights, Public Sector Equality Duty, and Community Cohesion	Domestic Abuse denies those experiencing it the most fundamental of human rights. Victims and their children with protected characteristics are disproportionately impacted by domestic abuse. An impact assessment is attached at appendix 4.
Reducing Poverty	Poverty can trap victims and children in harmful relationships. It can exacerbate the impact of domestic abuse because it interferes with a victim's ability to leave abusive relationships.
Climate Change / Environmental	Strategy will not impact on this
Children and Young People Cared for by the Authority and Care Leavers	Domestic Abuse is a common factor for children and young people assessed by Local Authorities. Children who grow up with domestic abuse are at a higher risk of developing mental health issues and may become victims or perpetrators of abuse themselves in the future
Data Protection	The Strategy effectiveness will be monitored centrally via a dashboard which will collate and present data and report this to Middlesbrough Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership Board. An information sharing protocol has been developed in conjunction with the Data Protection Officer.

Actions to be taken to implement the recommended decision(s)

Action	Responsible Officer	Deadline
Domestic Abuse Strategy will be published on Middlesbrough Council website, alongside Needs Assessment Executive Summary and full report which were published in September 2025.	Domestic Abuse Strategic Lead	December 2025
All Domestic Abuse contracts will be extended	Head of Commissioning - Adult Social Care	November 2026

from 1 April 2026 until 30 November 2026 so they can all start 1 st December 2026		
Planning work will be undertaken to design specifications for Domestic Abuse services based on commissioning recommendations and operational requirements outlined in Need Assessment	Domestic Abuse Strategic Lead	April 2026
Procuring Domestic Abuse Services will be implemented in a phased process during 2026/27 with all DA services contracts starting from 1 st December 2026	Domestic Abuse Strategic Lead	December 2026

Appendices

1	Domestic Abuse Strategy 2025-2028
2	Proposed Commissioning Plan
3	Executive Summary – Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment 2025
4	Equality Impact Assessment

Background papers

Body	Report title	Dat
Middlesbrough Domestic Abuse Partnership Board	Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment	Published September 2025

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