



DOMESTIC ABUSE HOUSING STRATEGY

May 2008 - 2011

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1. FOREWORD

As the portfolio member for housing I am delighted to introduce the Borough's first Domestic Abuse Housing Strategy, this is a bold step in tackling such an important but often widely misunderstood issue.

For a long time the general public has viewed domestic abuse in terms of physical violence against female victims. Our strategy seeks to break these stereotypes, highlighting that abuse can happen to anyone and can take many forms, including emotional, sexual and financial abuse.

Our strategy also seeks to ensure that victims of domestic abuse can access safe accommodation and a range of services to help break the cycle and loneliness of domestic abuse. Just as importantly, it recognises that the Council alone cannot tackle domestic abuse without the support and expertise of our partnership agencies. The Dartford Domestic Abuse One Stop Shop is a prime example of this approach in action; our lead has enabled a variety of services required by victims of domestic abuse to be provided in one location.

Our strategy has helped to put domestic abuse on our agenda and I hope this will continue - in order that domestic abuse will no longer be tolerated in today's society.



Councillor Pat Coleman
Portfolio Member for Housing

2. INTRODUCTION

Domestic abuse is a serious problem in society; it is estimated that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men¹ will experience domestic abuse at some point in their lives. Domestic abuse is a crime which affects the quality of life for its victims. Mentally, victims are likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, eating problems and sexual dysfunction²; physically, abuse may lead to chronic pain, fractures, arthritis, hearing or sight defects, seizures or frequent headaches³, and even threaten life itself, as it claims the lives of 2 women a week and 30 men a year⁴.

The impact of domestic abuse is not limited to its victims; 75-90% of domestic abuse incidents occur when children are in the same or next room and studies have shown that this has a long term detrimental effect on a child's health, increasing the risk of mental health problems⁵. Refuge (a women's domestic violence charity) report that domestic abuse is the biggest unborn baby killer⁶.

The cost of domestic abuse to the economy is staggering; it is estimated the total cost in England and Wales (Criminal Justice System, Health, Social Services, Housing and Legal) amounts to £3.1bn, and a loss to the economy of £2.7bn per annum. Pain and suffering (which are not counted in the cost of services) have been estimated at a further £17bn.

2.1 What is Domestic Abuse?

Domestic abuse is commonly defined as:

"Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between adults who are or have been in a relationship together, or between family members⁷"

The terms domestic abuse and domestic violence are often interchanged. Domestic violence is often used to describe the physical nature of abuse, however it is realised that abuse has many different forms which are all equally serious; for this reason the term 'domestic abuse' has been used.

A report by the British Medical Association (BMA) Board of Science 2007 highlighted four different types of abuse:

1. Physical abuse

Physical Injuries are sustained, such as cuts, bruises; broken bones and teeth; in the most severe cases death.

2. Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse may include unwanted touching, forced sex, sexual jokes or demeaning gender remarks. Across the world between 6-47% of adult women report being sexually assaulted by intimate partners in their lifetime.

3. Psychological abuse

Abuse is in the form of destructive criticism, pressure tactics, belittling, breaking trust, isolation. Domestic abuse has long-term consequences on the mental health of its victims. Over a third of female victims and a tenth of male victims are likely to suffer emotional problems as a result.

4. Financial abuse

Financial abuse is more commonly seen in older people or people with disabilities as they may be reliant on carers to collect their pensions or organise their bank accounts. Financial abuse can have a negative impact on an older person's health as it can lead to ongoing distress and, if left with no access to their finances, an older person could be without money, medications or transportation.

In ethnic minority communities, domestic abuse may also occur in the form of forced marriage, or genital mutilation⁸.

Often domestic abuse isn't just a single event but a pattern of control where one person is trying to achieve power and control over another⁹; repeat victimisation is therefore higher than any other crime.

Substance misuse does have a role in domestic abuse; research by Mc Cord (1993)¹⁰ in particular found that alcohol 'is best seen as contributing to violent behaviour, rather than causing it.'

2.2 Who are the Victims of Domestic Abuse?

Domestic abuse is irrespective of age, social standing and ethnic barriers. Abuse in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender communities is in similar proportion to the rest of the population¹¹. Although both men and women experience domestic abuse, 80% of reported abuse was against women¹²; however it is known that DA is underreported especially among men and the elderly¹³.

In the UK, a two year study revealed that approximately 242,000 elderly people face abuse at home¹⁴. The House of Commons Health Committee also recognised that most elder abuse occurs within the victim's own home and the majority of perpetrators of abuse were partners (62%) and family¹⁵. Care workers were responsible for a small percentage of abuse cases (9%). The committee's report also highlighted how the elderly are likely to suffer from all types of abuse (financial, physical, psychological and sexual); neglect in particular was the main type of abuse, where there was failure to undertake day to day tasks, such as shopping and meal preparation; 41% of cases involved failure to get someone out of bed or to dress them or assist them with eating and toileting. Victims were shown to be predominantly women and abuse was shown to increase with age, those aged 85 and over were most at risk.

2.3 Vision of the Strategy

The overall vision of this Domestic Abuse Housing Strategy is framed by the Council's aspirations to make Dartford "the place of quality and choice, a place where people choose to live, work and enjoy their leisure time." In this context our vision is:

No one should live in a home where they fear domestic abuse. Victims of domestic abuse will be aware of services that can help; and will be supported as they choose to leave abusive relationships.

2.4 Aims of the Strategy

The Strategy will aim at meeting these strategic objectives.

- **Increase awareness and challenge the acceptability of domestic abuse.**
- **Reduce homelessness as a result of domestic abuse**
- **Encourage a multi-agency approach in order to ensure an appropriate and speedy response for each individual.**

3. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

3.1 Kent Wide Context

This Strategy works towards the aims set out in the Community Safety Plan (CSP) 2008/11, produced by the Dartford and Gravesham Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership. The CSP seeks to reduce violent crime and includes a target to reduce the number of repeat domestic abuse victims as part of the Kent Local Area Agreement 2. The CSP aims to reach this target by implementing multi agency risk assessment conference (MARAC), and continuing to support the Talk to Us Campaign.

The strategy also seeks to assist in achieving the vision set for housing in the Kent and Medway Multi-agency Domestic Violence Strategy; in order that a co-ordinated multiagency approach can be achieved across Kent and Medway.

Diagram 3.1.1 below, shows how Dartford Borough Council Domestic Abuse Housing Strategy fits into the wider strategic context in Kent. For further explanation of the diagram please see Appendix A.

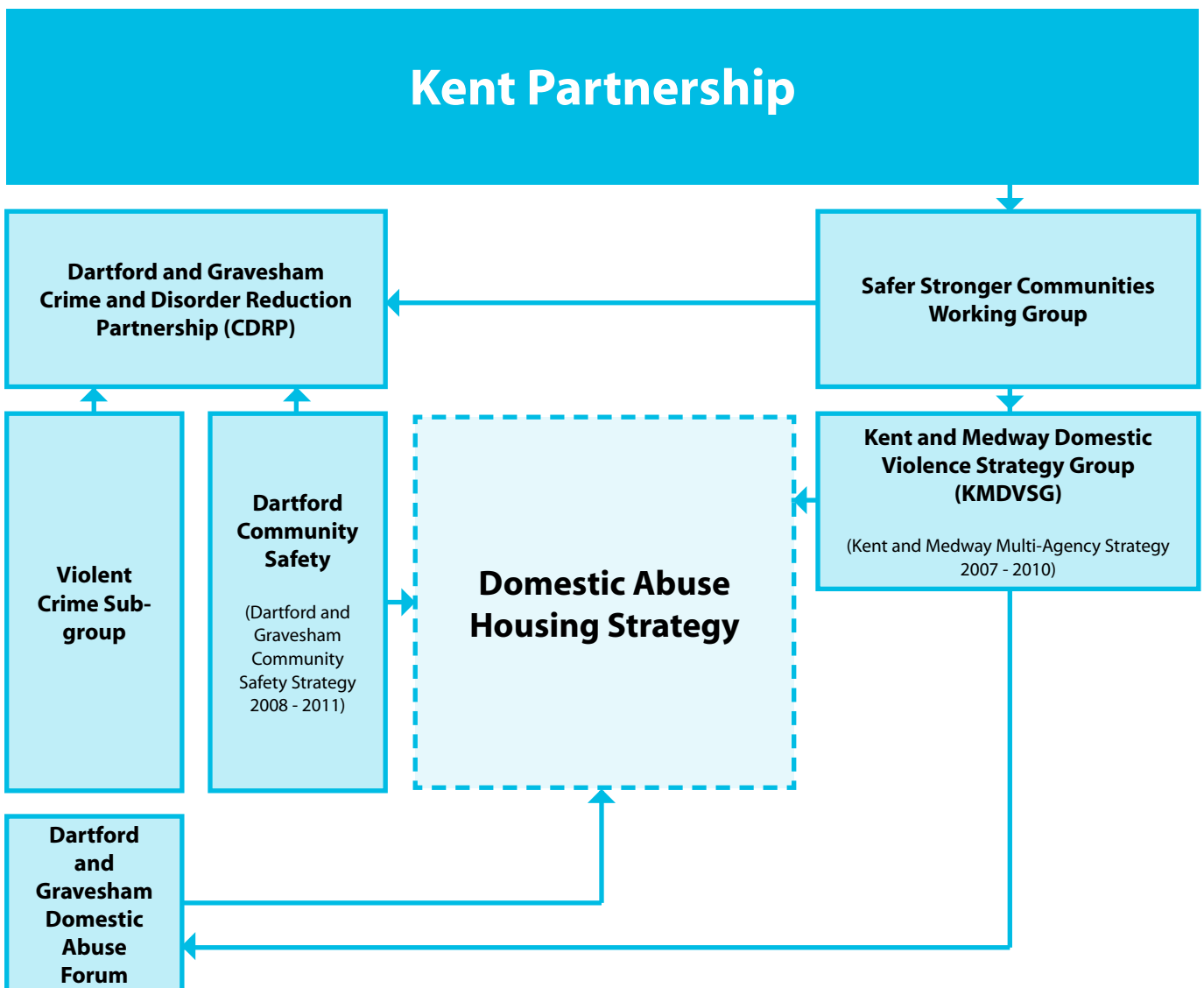


Diagram 3.1.1 Kent Strategic Context

3.2 Housing context

The Domestic Abuse Housing Strategy aims to develop one of the central themes of the Housing and Homelessness Strategies; by supporting people who are vulnerable due to domestic abuse. A summary of both the Housing and Homelessness Strategies are listed below:

3.2.1 Dartford Borough Council's Housing Strategy 2004-2007

This Strategy sets out 16 objectives central to Housing; they include issues as diverse as the 'Decent Homes Standard' to 'Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour' and 'Meeting the needs of Black and Minority (BME) Households.'

Under the objective of 'Supporting Vulnerable People' the strategy aims to support victims of domestic abuse by:

1. Streamlining management transfers for those suffering from domestic abuse.
2. Developing a written Domestic Abuse Policy

3.2.2 Dartford Borough Council's Homelessness Strategy 2003-2008

This Strategy focuses on preventing homelessness. The Strategy recognises that there are certain households who may find it hard to obtain or maintain a dwelling and therefore in order to prevent homelessness, it is important to support them. Victims of domestic abuse are acknowledged as 'vulnerable households,' and the Homelessness Strategy sets out the range of objectives which are also outlined in the Housing Strategy in order to help them.

4. LEGISLATION

National legislation has been introduced to protect victims and their children from domestic abuse, below is a summary of existing legislation:

4.1 Housing Act 1996

- Section 7 –States that it is not reasonable for a person to continue to occupy accommodation, where it is probable that this will lead to domestic violence against him/her, or their family.
- The Act also cites domestic violence as grounds for ending a tenancy.

4.2 Protection from Harassment Act 1997

- Under this Act the non-physical aspects of abuse (such as stalking) may be prosecuted and are considered as an offence: **'Person must not pursue a course of conduct which amounts to harassment of another.'**
- This act provides protection for those who do not live with the abuser.

4.3 Human Rights Act 1998

- This Act places obligations on statutory bodies, which includes the police to ensure that victims are protected and that: **"No one shall be subject to torture or inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment"** (article 3)

4.4 Homelessness Act 2002

- Under Section 10 domestic abuse victims are considered 'statutory homeless' for the allocation of properties.

4.5 The Adoption and Children Act 2002

- Section 120, expands the definition of harm in the Children Act 1989, so that it includes **"the impairment suffered from seeing and hearing the ill-treatment of another."**

4.6 Children Act 2004

- The Act imposes new duties on Councils to ensure local co-operation in order to improve well-being and to safeguard children. The Act also outlines proposals for information sharing and Local Safeguarding Boards.

4.7 Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act 2004

- Makes breach of a non-molestation order an arrestable offence.
- Allows cohabiting and same sex couples the same access to restraining orders as married couples.
- Makes common assault an arrestable offence.
- Enables the court to make restraining orders in relation to any criminal offence, on conviction or acquittal.
- Creates an offence of 'causing or allowing the death of a child or vulnerable person.'

5. NATIONAL CONTEXT

From 2006-2007, 407,000 cases of domestic violence were reported to the Police. When compared with other violent crimes (see Chart 5.1) domestic violence accounted for 16% of the total violent crime in the UK. This figure does not take into account the non-physical aspects of abuse.

Those suffering from domestic abuse may become homeless as they decide to leave the abuser. From 2003-2004, 137,000 households in England and Wales were accepted as homeless due to 'relationship breakdown.' 65% of this figure was due to domestic abuse¹⁷; thus representing 13% of homelessness applications.

These official figures are likely to underestimate the number that leave home due to domestic abuse, as many will turn to family and friends and will later apply for homeless status on the basis of 'friends or family unable to accommodate.'¹⁸

Domestic abuse is a strong factor for those who experience repeat homelessness¹⁹; often it takes victims several attempts to leave the abuser, and once safe many find it hard to settle²⁰. One candidate interviewed by a study carried out by 'Communities and Local Government' had moved 27 times due to domestic abuse.²¹

Types of Violence Reported
(Crime in England and Wales 2006/07)

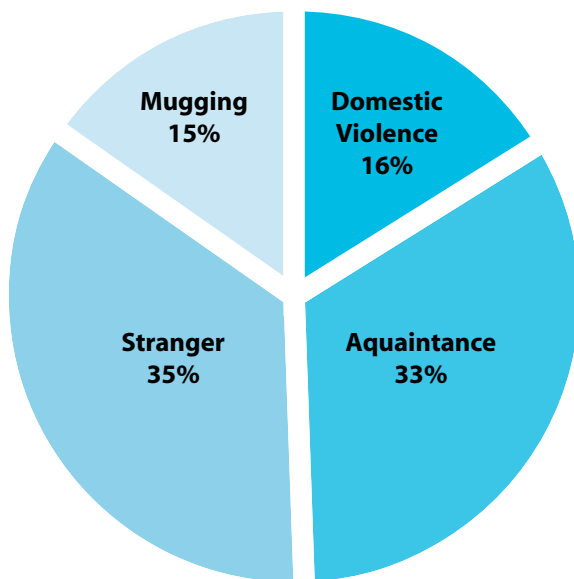


Chart 5.1 Showing the percentage values, for types of Violence in England and Wales which have been reported to the Police

Reasons for Homelessness 2002/03
(Unintentional and in priority need homeless)

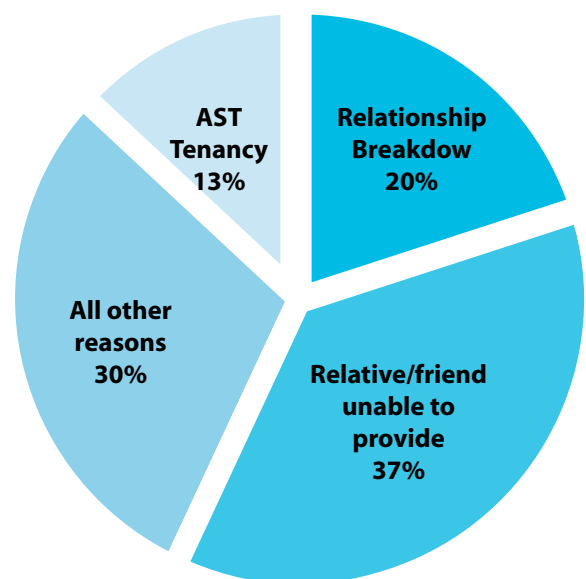
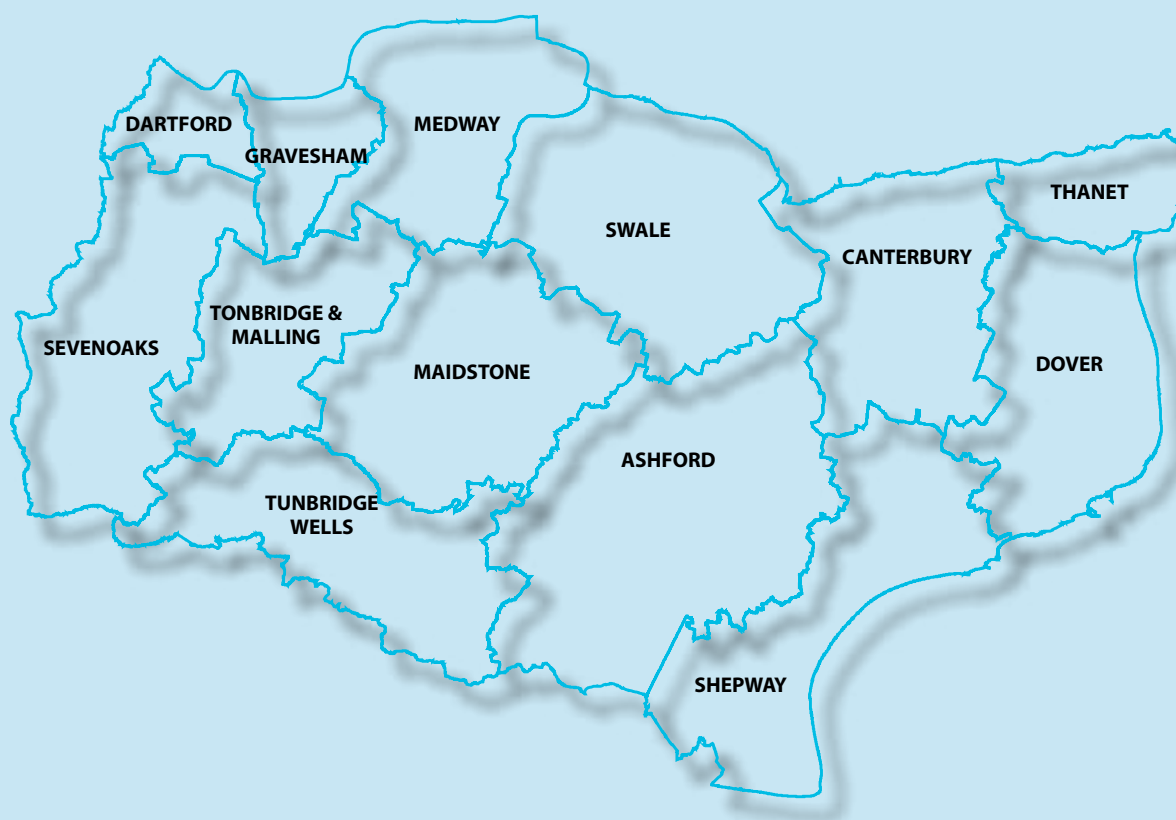


Chart 5.2 Households accepted by local authorities as statutorily homeless, by reason for loss of last settled home in 2003/04

6. LOCAL CONTEXT



6.1 Kent and Medway

Kent is the largest county in England with a population in 2006 estimated as 1,634,600²³. Kent is formed of 12 districts and boroughs, including Dartford (see map above²²). Medway in the north is a unitary authority and does not come under the administration of Kent County Council.

6.1.1 Domestic Abuse

From April 2006 to March 2007 there were 20,303 domestic abuse incidents reported to the police across the whole of Kent (see table 6.1.2). Around 32% of cases were repeat incidents²⁴.

6.1.2 Recorded incidences of Domestic Abuse April 2006 – March 2007

Area of Kent	Number of domestic abuse incidents reported to the Police	Total population of area	Percentage of abuse incidents from total population
North Kent (Dartford, Gravesham)	2,845	187,000	1.5%
West Kent (Sevenoaks, TMBC, Tunbridge Wells)	2,765	332,200	0.8%
Mid Kent (Maidstone, Swale)	3,138	271,300	1.1%
Medway	3,701	251,700	0.5%
East Kent (Canterbury, Thanet)	3,771	274,800	1.4%
South Kent (Ashford, Dover, Shepway)	4,083	317,200	1.3%
Kent Total	20,303	1,634,600	1.3%

6.2 Dartford

Dartford has approximately 85,900 residents and 37,400 households ²⁵. 'British white' are the majority group comprising 91.92% of the population. ²⁶

Dartford's population is set to grow, with around 25,000 new homes due to be developed by 2026. ²⁷ With an increasing population the problem of domestic abuse is expected to increase.

6.2.1 Domestic Abuse

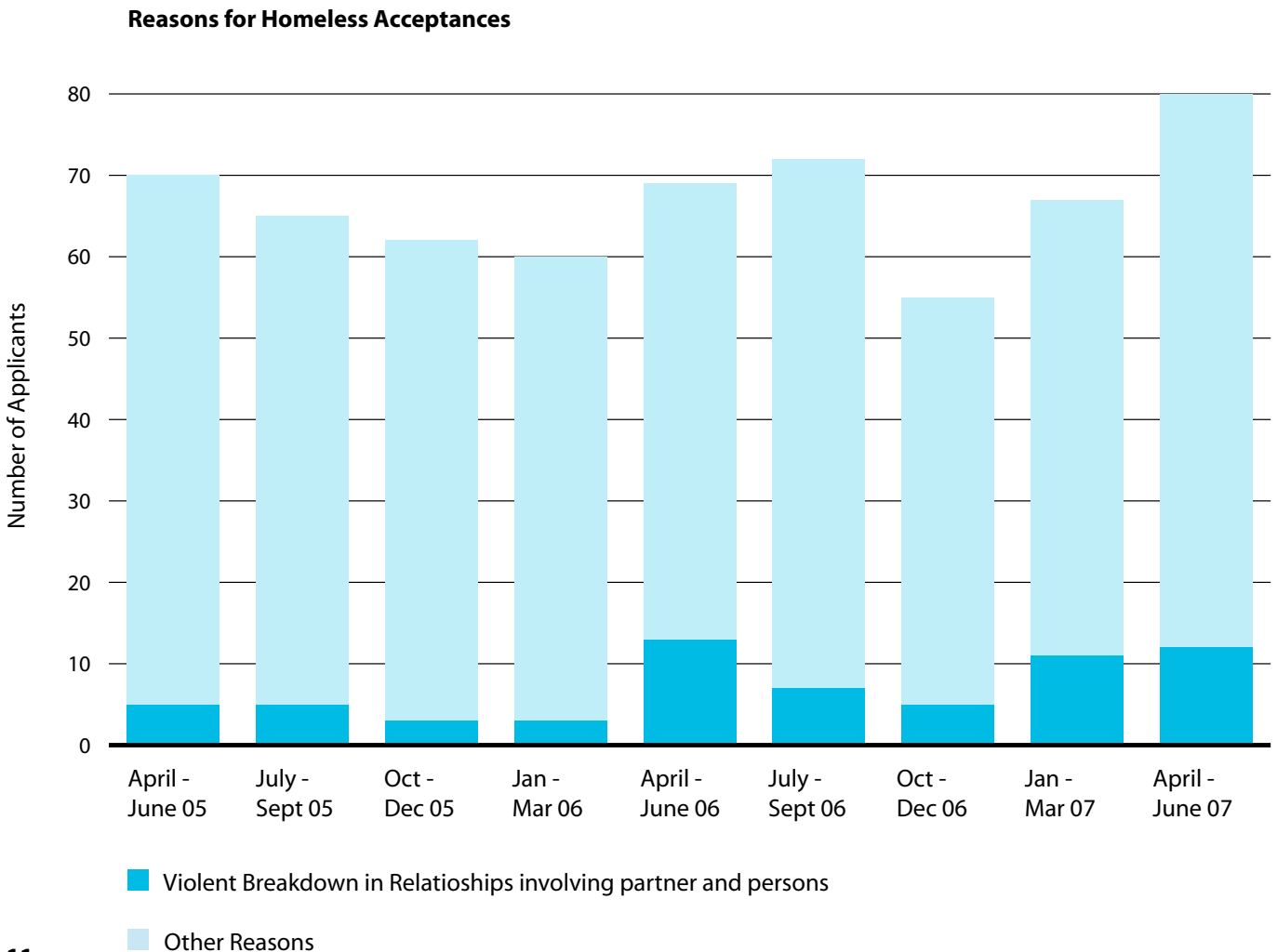
The number of domestic abuse incidents that were reported to the police for Gravesham and Dartford from 2006-2007 were 2,845. Alongside Medway, Dartford and Gravesham have the highest percentage of population affected by domestic abuse, compared to the rest of Kent (see table 6.1.2). Considering that most incidents do not reach the police the problem of domestic abuse is significant.

6.2.2 Domestic Abuse and Homelessness

Between April 2005 and June 2007 there have been 69 accepted cases of homelessness due to a violent breakdown of relationship in Dartford. ²⁸ This figure only represents 'physical domestic abuse.'

Graph 6.2.3 shows the prevalence of 'violent breakdown of relationship' in accepted (unintentional and priority need) homelessness applications over 2 years in Dartford.

- In every quarter, violent breakdown of relationship (VBR) was one of the causes of homelessness.
- When compared with other causes of those unintentionally homeless and in priority need, VBR on average caused 15% of homelessness applications, which is above the national average, of 13%.



7. WHY VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE MAY NOT SEEK HELP

Domestic abuse (DA) is unlike any other crime in that the majority of victims do not report it. On average, those who do report it, will have experienced 35 assaults beforehand.⁴

This presents a challenge in attempting to provide support and help to victims who do not access services.

There are many different and complex reasons behind why victims do not seek help from services.²⁹ One of the reasons may be that they do not realise domestic abuse is a crime; for instance The British Crime Survey (2001) found that out of those women who had experienced domestic abuse (non-sexual threats or force), only half (51%) thought their worst incident was a crime. 13% on the other hand felt that it was something that 'just' happens. Other reasons for not seeking help could include love for the perpetrator, fear of future violence or not wanting to break up a family.

A quote from Women's Aid:

"The issues surrounding domestic abuse are extremely complex and the reasons why a person may not approach an agency for help are many. In our experience reasons may range from practical issues such as language barriers, being concerned about their immigration status, to embarrassment and shame, fear of further violence and losing their children, to name but a few. It can also sadly be because they are unaware that help is available."

Dartford and Gravesham Women's Aid, Nov 2007

Dartford Borough Council recognises that certain groups may face particular barriers. Some of these are outlined below:

7.1.1 Male Victims

- Taking on a macho "I can handle it attitude."³⁰ They may not even regard the domestic abuse they are experiencing as a crime.³¹
- Men often prefer to hide from the problem rather than report it. They may stay late in the office or even sleep over at a friends house or in their car.
- They may feel embarrassed to admit that they are receiving abuse.

I had a discussion with a male professor at one University (in a family department) who refused to believe that a woman could be abusive. Try talking as a male victim to others that you are a victim of this kind of behaviour and you will get such reactions as this, or reactions that imply: "you wimp", or "why don't you take it like a man", or "you must be a controlling man or she wouldn't do that", or "you must be abusive too".

Quote taken from³²

7.1.2 Ethnic Minorities

Although each ethnic community will face different barriers preventing them from seeking help (which may be specific to their own culture) some of these barriers will be similar.

A report³³ looking into the dominance of domestic abuse in South Asian communities in West Kent, found that around 55% of Asian women in the study had experienced abuse, the majority of them did not report it because:

- It would bring shame on the family and may result in rejection from the community.
- The victim would lose all respectability, honour and status; since these are dependent on marital status.
- Fear of deportation, as they were aware that their inadequate citizenship status might come to light if they were to access services.

“Yes, on the outside Asian families try to convey they have a happy and fruitful loving family life. By getting support is considered to break that ‘illusion’ and admit problems exist; thus causing shame in the community.”

South Asian woman
Quote taken from³⁰

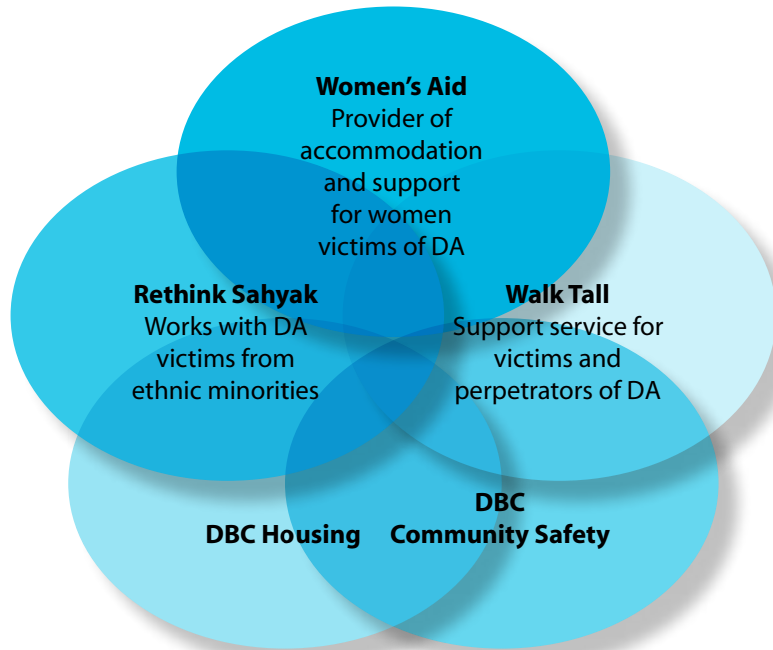
7.1.3 The Elderly

- May be dependent on the perpetrator for care or support (maybe even financial support). And fearful that if they report the abuse they may lose these things³⁴.
- May think that the situation is too trivial, and if they were to report it then nothing would happen³⁵.
- Dementia and Alzheimer’s disease may also play a part as people may not be fully aware of what is going on, or forget about instances of abuse that they have suffered.
- May be doubtful that anyone would believe them; The House of Commons report found that many people had no experience of being heard or taken seriously if they had been mistreated.³⁶
- May not know about the services available to help them.³⁷

8. PRIORITY AREAS

8.1 Research and Needs Analysis

In the development of this strategy a focus group was held for front line service providers (see diagram 8.1.1) and a survey was submitted to service users. Both methods were used to identify gaps in the service that the housing department provides for domestic abuse victims.



8.1.1 Diagram representing members of the Focus Group (DBC=Dartford Borough Council)

8.1.2 Survey Results

Unfortunately responses from the survey sent to service users was low; however the results showed that generally victims were happy with the service they had received from the council's housing service. The survey did highlight that PO Boxes may be required by some victims (See section 8.3.3 for more details).

8.1.3 Priority Areas

From the feedback obtained during the focus group session and the survey, the following were identified as priority areas:

1. Raising awareness of domestic abuse and services available to victims
2. Reducing homelessness and repeat homelessness as a result of domestic abuse
3. Encouraging a multi-agency approach in order to ensure a appropriate and speedy response for each individual

8.2 Raising Public Awareness of Domestic Abuse and Services Available to Victims

The Housing Focus Group identified that raising awareness is vital in tackling domestic abuse; through it victims can be made aware of the services that can support them, it can also send out a clear message to society indicating that domestic abuse is a serious crime and will not be tolerated; this may help to change attitudes towards domestic abuse.

Currently the public are made aware of the services for domestic abuse victims in Dartford via:

- The Council's website.
- The Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Information Line, which includes a call back translation service (0845 603 6813).
- Seeking advice at the Civic Centre or the Citizen's Advice Bureau.
- Dartford's Advice Booklet and leaflets in minority languages, which are provided on request at the Civic Centre.

The Focus Group highlighted that in Dartford there is a lack of posters and leaflets raising awareness of domestic abuse. As part of this Strategy's action plan, Housing Services will be responsible for producing eye catching posters aimed at all victims of domestic abuse, regardless of age, gender and ethnicity. They will be advertised throughout Dartford in a number of locations, such as clinics, libraries, doctor's surgeries and other public venues. The 'Link' which is the quarterly newsletter for Council tenants will also contain an article annually and the contact number for the domestic abuse helpline will be advertised in every issue.

Housing will also aim to improve awareness amongst the elderly and disabled in supported housing. Various studies have highlighted how the elderly are often 'insufficiently conscious of what behaviour constitutes as abuse and should simply not be tolerated'³⁸ and often they do not know of the systems that can help them, or how they can be accessed.³⁹ As part of our action planning, regular articles will be written in the 'Grapevine' which is a newsletter for supported housing residents and the telephone number for the Kent and Medway information line will be in every issue. Posters will also be displayed on supported housing notice boards.

8.3 Reducing Homelessness and Repeat Homelessness

There are many options open to victims of Domestic Abuse in order to enable them to live in safety without the fear of abuse.

8.3.1 For those who would wish to remain in their own home

i) Sanctuary Scheme

Around 40% of domestic abuse assaults are carried out by perpetrators who do not live in the victim's home.⁴⁰ To help victims who are in this situation, Dartford Borough Council provides a 'Sanctuary Scheme.' The scheme is open to all. Its aim is to make safe the home where the victim lives in order to prevent the perpetrator from accessing the property. Work may range from providing new locks for windows and doors to installing a safe room with a panic button. We will aim to develop a written procedure for the scheme and encourage Housing Associations to adopt it.

ii) Legal Options

There are legal procedures which seek to protect men and women from violent partners and allow them to remain in their own homes. These include Occupation Orders and Non-Molestation Orders; however victims are always advised to seek legal advice before considering them.

If a Dartford tenant commits domestic abuse against a member of his/her household, the council does have the power to evict the tenant since the tenant is violating the tenancy agreement which states 'you must not use or threaten violence against any person living in the property.' If the victim is a joint tenant then the victim has the right to end the tenancy thus evicting the perpetrator. In both these cases the perpetrator will be classed as intentionally homeless. Tenants are able to get information and advice from their Housing Officer concerning legal options. Council Officers will never seek to influence an applicant's decision and are not permitted to find a solicitor to act on behalf of a victim.

8.3.2 For those who wish to leave their home:

i) Advice

If the decision to leave home is taken or a person is considering such action, advice on re-housing can be provided by the Council's Homelessness Officers based at the Housing Advice Centre in Dartford, or by ringing (01322) 343114. Housing Advice can also be given to those who have no access to public funds (such as Housing Benefit).

ii) Emergency Accommodation pending re-housing

Dartford Borough Council is able to provide emergency accommodation for victims of domestic abuse. This may be in the form of finding accommodation within the Borough or referring victims to 'Refuges.' There are 11 refuge spaces in Dartford,⁴¹ and these are provided by Women's Aid.

If a person finds themselves homeless and the council offices are closed, they should telephone the council's 'Emergency Out of Hours Service' on 0845 6341212.

8.3.3 Preventing Repeat Homelessness

If a person chooses to flee domestic abuse they will often have to leave family/friends and possessions behind. It may also be the first time the person has had to live independently and deal with the challenges of maintaining a tenancy and budgeting. All of these factors can leave the victim feeling extremely anxious and vulnerable. The Focus Group and a report by the Communities and Local Government identified that it is at this stage that the risk of repeat homelessness or returning to the perpetrator is at its highest for the victim.

The following highlights, how the council, with its partners aims to try and prevent repeat homelessness.

i) Domestic Abuse Process

In order to combat repeat homelessness there is a need to support victims. Currently Housing refers victims to floating support services, however it was identified that the time of referral is often too late.

As part of the Strategy, a procedure will be written for victims of domestic abuse to ensure that referrals are made at the right time and that victims have received all the training/information that they need before they leave emergency accommodation.

ii) Furniture

In order to practically support victims as they move into permanent accommodation and therefore reduce repeat homelessness. Dartford Borough Council is currently looking into ways in which furniture can be provided for victims of domestic abuse, (and other people in need) that have little or no money in which to pay for necessities.

iii) PO Boxes

Perpetrators may often pursue their victims, forcing them to move once they have settled in accommodation.⁴²

In order to prevent this, a member of the Focus Group suggested that anonymity of domestic abuse victims could be improved by offering PO Box numbers to all those placed in council organised temporary accommodation. By using a PO Box number, victims would be prevented from disclosing any information of their whereabouts. Instead bills and letters would be delivered for collection to the nearest Post Office.

8.4 Improving Multi-Agency Response

The Home Office article 'Break the Chain' highlighted that in order for agencies to be effective in tackling domestic abuse they must work together; not at cross purposes but in producing a co-ordinated response; in this way resources can be maximised.

Dartford Borough Council has sought to encourage multi-agency working in the following ways:

8.4.1 Training

Training was provided by Housing for front line staff from various agencies across Dartford. Its aim was to raise awareness of Domestic Abuse, while encouraging 'joined up thinking' across the Borough. Training sessions will occur annually to ensure that information is up to date and new staff are included. It was advised by the Focus Group that future training should cover themes such as how to recognise the signs of Domestic Abuse, questions to ask the potential victim and services available to help victims.

8.4.2 One-Stop-Shop

Currently Dartford's Housing Department and other agencies in Dartford are involved in the development of a One-Stop-Shop. This will provide a walk-in service for people suffering from domestic abuse, on entering they will be able to access a variety of services, such as: Solicitors, Police, Housing and Women's Aid. The One-Stop Shop will be open every week on Tuesday, from 9:30-12:30pm in the Citizen's Advice Bureau, no appointment is necessary.

One-Stop Shops have been developed across the county and their results have been extremely positive. Research interviews by Hester and Westmarland (2005)⁴³ found that women really appreciated it when main sources of support and advice were located in one place.

8.4.3 Housing Contact

Housing often refers those that it assists on to other organisations that can provide additional help and support. The Focus Group highlighted that in order to improve communication a member of staff in Housing should be designated the role of 'Contact.' Organisations would inform the Contact of their service and any change in details; the Contact would also be responsible for keeping those in Housing up-to date with current services available, thereby guaranteeing that customers and in particular victims of domestic abuse are referred to the right service and receive the most available help.

8.4.4 Dartford and Gravesham Domestic Abuse Forum

The Dartford and Gravesham Domestic Abuse Forum is a committee made up of representatives from various agencies (voluntary, private and public) from the Dartford and Gravesend area. It meets 6 times a year and aims to develop a joint policy approach and understanding between agencies. Many of the members have found the central 'pool of knowledge' which the forum provides to be beneficial. The Forum also aims to identify gaps in the service; whether that is preventing domestic abuse, seeking justice, or supporting the victim. In many instances the Forum has pooled resources to meet certain gaps, for instance it has helped to fund the 'Freedom Programme' which is a course run for female victims of domestic abuse and it also helps to fund the Kent Domestic Abuse Information Line for Dartford and Gravesend areas.

The Dartford and Gravesham Domestic Abuse Forum also advises a subgroup of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership. This ensures that 'ground knowledge' is fed up to influence strategic planning and that funding from the CDRP is channelled into local 'bottom-up' schemes.

Dartford Housing sends a representative to the forum and will continue to do so to promote multi-agency working.

8.4.5 MARAC- Multi- Agency Risk Assessment Conference

MARAC is a government led scheme. It encourages agencies within a local area to attend a forum in order to share information and take action to reduce further harm to high risk victims of domestic abuse and their children. The scheme was pioneered in Cardiff with around 16 agencies involved including Police, Probation, Local Authority, Health, Housing, and the Women's Safety Unit. Evaluation of the scheme found that 6 out of 10 victims had not been re-victimised since the MARAC⁴⁴ and 12 months later this was the case for 4 out of 10; this is notable given that all were identified as being at high risk for repeat violence⁴⁵.

A trial MARAC is due to be set up in Medway and Maidstone in 2008, Dartford may expect one later on next year, which will be set up through the Violent Crime Group. A representative from Housing may be asked to attend.

9. MONITORING & EVALUATION

This Strategy will be implemented over a period of three years with regular checks to track progress. It will be monitored and delivered through the action plan based on the priorities that have been agreed.

9.1 Action Plan

Target	Action to achieve	Timescales/ Milestones	Resources	Officer Responsible
Raise awareness of domestic abuse and services available to victims	Produce posters for public areas and Supported Housing notice boards.	Sep 2008	Housing resources	Housing Policy Officer/ Communications Officer/Information Officer
	Article to be written in the tenant's newsletter 'The Link' annually. Details of the Kent Domestic Abuse Information line, to be included in every issue.	Annually	Housing resources	Housing Policy and Development Manager
	Article to be written every two years in the Grapevine. Details of the Domestic Abuse Information Line to be included in every issue.	2 yearly	Housing resources	Supported Housing Review Manager
Reduce homelessness and repeat homelessness as a result of domestic abuse	Continue to enable people to live safely in their own homes using the Sanctuary Scheme.	Ongoing	Homelessness Grant	Housing Options and Advice Manager
	Develop a written procedure for the Sanctuary Scheme and consult with Local Housing Associations.	July 2008	Existing resources	Housing Options and Advice Manager
	Enable PO boxes to be offered to all victims of domestic abuse placed in Council organised temporary accommodation; in order to improve their anonymity.	February 2008	Homelessness Grant	Housing Options and Advice Manager
	Process to be written by Housing Options and Advice partnered with Women's Aid. In order that women using refuge accommodation can access available help at the correct time.	March 2008	Existing resources	Housing Options and Advice Manager
	Internal process to be written, for victims that are not placed in refuge accommodation, in order that they access available help at the correct time.	March 2008	Existing resources	Housing Options and Advice Manager
	Explore ways in which people, who are being resettled by Housing Services, can gain access to furniture.	April 2009	Existing resources	Housing Options and Advice Manager
	Encourage a multi agency approach in order to ensure an appropriate and speedy response for each individual	Continue to send a representative from Housing to the Domestic Violence Forum Meeting.	Ongoing	Existing resources
	Provide multi-agency training on domestic abuse, in partnership with Women's Aid.	Ongoing	Existing resources	Housing Options and Advice Manager
	Take a lead in the development of the One Stop Shop and work with other agencies to provide this facility in Dartford.	May 2008	Existing resources	Housing Options and Advice Manager
	Develop the role of Housing contact, to improve communication between Housing and other agencies in Dartford and to ensure that information kept is up to date and reliable, in order that victims are referred to the best possible service.	March 2008	Existing resources	Housing Options and Advice Manager

10. APPENDIX

Appendix A: Useful Contacts

Age Concern Advice and assistance on any matter affecting the elderly or disabled	Tel: 01322 226496 Website: www.AgeConcern.org.uk
Broken Rainbow Information and support for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual or transgender victims of domestic abuse	Tel: 07812 644914 Website: http://www.broken-rainbow.org.uk/
Darenth Valley Hospital	Tel: 01322 428100
Dartford Borough Council Housing Advice Advice on options available to victims of domestic abuse	Tel: 01322 343083 Emergency out of hours Tel: 0845 6341212
Dartford Citizen Advice Bureau	Tel: 01322 220448
Domestic Violence Police Unit	Tel: 01622 690690 Domestic Violence Officer, Tel: 01474 565153
Foreign and Commonwealth Office Advice on forced marriages	Tel: 020 7008 0135/0230
24 hour National Domestic Violence Helpline A free phone number for women victims of domestic abuse Text phone and Language line available	Tel: 0808 2000 247
Kent Council on Addiction (KCA) Provider of community drug and alcohol services in Kent	Tel: 01795 590635
Kent Domestic Abuse Information Line Provides local information of services for victims of domestic abuse. Open 24 hrs 7 days a week. Provides call back translation service	Tel: 0845 603 6813
Minor Injuries Unit (Gravesend)	Tel: 01474 574217
Respect Phone Line Information and advice line for those who are abusive towards their partners. Open Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday 10-1pm and 2-5pm	Tel: 0845 122 8609 Website: http://www.respect.uk.net/pages/respect_phoneline.html
Rethink Sahayak Free and confidential Asian Counselling Service	Tel: 01474 364837 Asian language speaking helpline Tel: 0808 800 2073 Email: asiancounselling@rethink.org
The Male Advice and Enquiry Line A helpline offering information and advice for male victims of domestic abuse	Tel: 0845 064 6800
Victim Support (Dartford Gravesham and Swanley) Support and practical advice for anyone affected by crime.	Tel: 01634 401733 Website: http://www.victimsupport.org.uk/

Appendix B: Further Information: Strategic Context

Kent Partnership

Is a strategic partnership made up of representatives from private, public, voluntary and the community across Kent. The partnership works to achieve certain objectives; one of the objectives is "Safer Stronger Communities." To achieve this target, the Safer and Stronger Communities working group was set up.

Safer and Stronger Communities Working Group

Works to achieve the "Safer Stronger Communities Objectives" which seek to reduce crime, anti-social behaviour, and drug misuse across Kent.

Kent and Medway Domestic Violence Strategy Group

Is a subgroup of the Safer Stronger Communities group; specifically designated to tackle domestic violence across Kent and Medway. The Kent and Medway Domestic Violence Strategy Group Co-ordinator works for this group. The Co-ordinator seeks to encourage a co-ordinated response to domestic abuse, which has involved regular attendance of Domestic Violence Forums and the release of a multi-agency strategy. This strategy has included priorities for Housing services, which Dartford's Domestic Abuse Housing Strategy has sought to achieve.

Gravesham and Dartford Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP)

Is a partnership between the Police, Probation Services, Fire Services, Social Services, Health and Dartford and Gravesham Borough Councils. The respective Council's Community Safety departments take an active role in the CDRP. The CDRP seeks to reduce crime and disorder in the local area and works to fulfil the objectives of 'Safer and Stronger Communities.'

Dartford and Gravesham Domestic Abuse Forum

Both Dartford's Community Safety team and Housing Services send a representative to the Dartford and Gravesham Domestic Abuse Forum. The Forum was involved in the final consultation of Housing's Domestic Abuse Strategy. (Please see section 8.3.4 for more details of the forum)

Violent Crime Group

The Violent Crime Group is a subgroup of the CDRP; it is made up of representatives from the CDRP and other voluntary organisations. Its aim is to reduce violent crime (of which domestic abuse is included) in Dartford and Gravesham. The Domestic Abuse Forum sends a representative to the Violent Crime Group to ensure that 'ground knowledge' is fed up to influence strategic planning and that funding from the CDRP is channelled into local schemes, which tackle domestic abuse.

Appendix C: Copy of survey submitted to service users

Please fill out and return this survey in the freepost envelope by the 1st February 2008, you can also send it to: **Marie Gerald, Housing Options and Advice, Dartford Borough Council, Civic Centre, Home Gardens, Dartford, Kent, DA1 1DR**

Q1) What Borough did you come from?

- Gravesham Bexley Dartford

Q2) Did you approach any other Local Authority for help?

- Yes No Don't Know

Q3) If you answered yes to Q2, how would you compare Dartford Borough Council's service to the other local authority?

- Better Same Worse

Q4) How did you find out about the Housing service offered by Dartford Borough Council?

Q5) Was it easy to find out about the Housing service?

- Yes No Don't Know

Q6) Did you feel that we understood your needs?

- Yes No Don't Know

Q7) Did you feel that we were sensitive to your needs?

- Yes No Don't Know

Q8) Where did you stay while you were waiting for a home from Dartford Borough Council?

- Refuge
 Housing provided by Dartford Borough Council
 With family or friends
 Other (Please say
-

Q9) Did you feel safe while you were waiting for a new home?

- Yes No Don't Know

If you answered no why didn't you feel safe?

Q10) If you stayed in housing provided by Dartford Borough Council (DBC): We are thinking about offering those in emergency accommodation PO Box numbers. Instead of giving out your address, you could give out a PO box number and post would be delivered for you to collect at the Dartford Post Office.

Would you have wanted this service while you were in DBC housing?

Yes No Don't Know

If not, why not?

Q11) How long did it take for us to find you a new home?

0-2 Months 3-6 Months 6-12+ months

Q12) Were you happy with the time that it took?

Yes No Don't Know

Do you have any other comments about the time that it took?

Q13) Did you feel as if you got enough help after we placed you in a new home?

Yes No Don't Know

If you said no, what kind of help or support would you have liked?

Q14) Do you have any further comments that you would like to make which would help us improve our service?

Thank you very much for taking some time to answer these questions

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