

**HALTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
2025**

**DOMESTIC
ABUSE
NEEDS
ASSESSMENT**



Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment 2025

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This needs assessment aims to understand the nature and prevalence of domestic abuse in Halton. It will be used to inform the development of Halton's domestic abuse strategy and the provision and commissioning of domestic abuse services.

The Impact of Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse affects an estimated 3.8 million adults per year¹ in England and Wales alone, and has a devastating impact on individuals and families, affecting victims mentally, emotionally, physically, socially and economically. Existing inequalities, such as poverty, disability, or systemic discrimination, often intensify these harms. In 2017, the Home Office estimated that domestic abuse costs society approximately £66 billion (in England and Wales) in a single year, equating to around £85 billion in July 2024 prices.²

Types of Abuse

Domestic abuse most frequently occurs between intimate partners but can also be inflicted by other family members, including instances of Child to Parent Violence and Abuse (CPVA). It can take many forms, including physical, sexual, emotional, coercive, controlling and economic abuse, often occurring together, and in some cases, may lead to domestic abuse-related deaths. The experience of domestic abuse varies greatly from person to person, shaped by individual circumstances and backgrounds. A person's identity, for example, their race, ethnicity, age, gender, religion, sexual orientation, economic position, immigration status, disabilities, health and mental health, can significantly influence how they experience abuse, the effects it has on them, and their ability to seek and receive help. Support services should therefore be tailored to address the diverse and overlapping challenges faced by survivors, ensuring sensitivity to the multiple layers of disadvantage and risk they may encounter.

National Context

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 marked a significant step forward by creating a comprehensive legal definition of domestic abuse, appointing a Domestic Abuse Commissioner, and introducing key safeguards, such as preventing abusers from directly cross-examining survivors in court. Complementing this, the government's Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan outlines a cross-departmental strategy centred on prevention, enhanced support for victims, holding perpetrators to account, and strengthening the overall system. However, despite these developments, challenges

¹ Office for National Statistics (2025) *Crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2025*.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2025#domestic-abuse>

² Domestic Abuse Commissioner (2025) *HM Treasury Autumn 2025 Spending Review: Phase 2 Submission*.

<https://domesticabusecommissioner.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/012025-DAC-HMT-Autumn-2025-Phase-2-submission.pdf>

remain, particularly as incidents of violence against women and girls continue to rise.³

Local Context

The Halton Domestic Abuse Partnership Board leads the local response to domestic abuse by developing and implementing Halton's domestic abuse strategy and coordinating multi-agency efforts. Halton Borough Council commissions key services from providers such as Halton Women's Centre, which offer practical and emotional support to women affected by domestic abuse. While Halton has some safe accommodation options, including refuge, there is currently a lack of specialist by-and-for or second-stage accommodations within the borough. Male victims face limited access to safe housing. Ongoing efforts aim to expand and diversify support and accommodation options better to meet the needs of all survivors in Halton.

The Halton Domestic Abuse Partnership's key priorities are:

1. **To act before someone harms or is harmed:** By building their evidence and understanding, to develop approaches that stop abuse from happening in the first place
2. **To identify and stop harmful behaviours:** Using emerging evidence and practice to increase and improve the responses that challenge harmful behaviour
3. **To increase safety for those at risk:** To keep supporting and strengthening the work which protects people from abuse, increasing safety and wellbeing quickly and effectively
4. **To support people to live the lives they want after harm occurs:** To improve and expand the support for everyone impacted by abuse, for all forms that impact takes

National and Local Prevalence of Domestic Abuse

According to the Crime Survey for England and Wales⁴ (CSEW), for the year ending March 2025, an estimated 3.8 million people aged 16 years and over experienced domestic abuse in the last year, equating to 7.8% of the adult population. This includes approximately 2.3 million women (9.5%) and 1.5 million men (6.5%).

Based on these national prevalence rates and local demographic data from the 2021 Census, it is estimated that over 8200 residents aged 16 and over in Halton may have experienced domestic abuse in the past year, including almost 5000 women and over 3000 men.

Domestic abuse in Halton is closely linked with wider social and health factors that increase risk and can make it harder for victims to seek safety or change their situation. Higher rates of poverty, unemployment, and long-term illness or disability are all relevant locally, alongside factors such as caring responsibilities and pregnancy, which are nationally recognised as increasing vulnerability. Substance misuse can also intensify abuse or form part of victims' coping responses. These

³ National Audit Office (2025) *Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls*.

<https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls/>

⁴ Office for National Statistics (2025) *Crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2025*.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2025#domestic-abuse>

interrelated factors suggest that applying national prevalence rates may underestimate local need and underline the importance of person-centred, preventive approaches that connect domestic abuse support with anti-poverty measures, health and substance misuse services, and early help for families.

According to the CSEW⁵, the police recorded 815,941 domestic abuse-related offences in England and Wales in the year ending March 2025. This highlights the significant underreporting of domestic abuse to the police, given that an estimated 3.8 million people may have experienced domestic abuse during the same period.

Domestic abuse prevalence rates were higher among several groups:

- Women
- Those aged 16-19
- Mixed and white ethnic groups
- Adults with a disability (defined as a long-standing illness, disability or impairment which causes difficulty with day-to-day activities)
- Those with a long-term or temporary illness, students and those looking after their family and home (employment status may have changed as a result of the abuse)
- Separated and divorced individuals (marital status may have changed as a result of the abuse)
- Individuals in households composed of a single person with one or more children (household structure may have changed as a result of the abuse)

In Halton, the most at-risk categories, based on closed-case statistics since 2023, were white women aged 35-44.

Available Domestic Abuse Data

Domestic abuse remains a largely hidden crime, with an estimated 50 incidents occurring before victims access support. Only 35% of domestic violence cases are reported to the police, limiting our understanding of the true scale of the issue.⁶

In 2024, Halton recorded 2,461 domestic abuse-related offences, with a rate of 19.2 per 1,000 population, significantly higher than the Cheshire Constabulary average of 13.7. The most frequent offences were assault without injury, stalking, and assault with injury, which together made up more than half of all cases. Violence with injury accounted for 436 incidents, with slightly more reports from Widnes than Runcorn. Offences peaked in March and September.

There was a strong correlation between domestic abuse and wider crime types. Notably, 91 % of stalking offences were linked to domestic abuse. In total, 41 % of stalking and harassment offences and 59 % of sexual offences carried a Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) flag.

⁵ Office for National Statistics (2025) *Crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2025*.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2025#domestic-abuse>

⁶ SafeLives (n.d.) *Length of abuse*.

<https://safelives.org.uk/about-domestic-abuse/what-is-domestic-abuse/facts-and-figures/length-of-abuse>

Halton recorded 3,349 VAWG offences during the year, a rate of 26.1 per 1,000 population, again above the force average. Offences peaked in August and remained consistently high throughout spring and summer.

The borough recorded 2,251 stalking and harassment offences, with harassment being the most common subtype. Widnes Local Policing Unit saw the largest increases, particularly in the Inner cluster.

Sexual offences reached their highest levels in five years, with 530 incidents including 191 rapes and 376 child sexual abuse cases. Rates across all sexual offence categories were higher in Halton than in the wider force area.

In 2024/25, Halton's domestic abuse service received 1,833 referrals across all risk levels, with 603 cases allocated to IDVA support and the majority referred by police; however, a substantial proportion either declined support or could not be contacted, highlighting both demand and the importance of sustained engagement.

Safe Accommodation Data

Halton's response to domestic abuse aligns with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, ensuring victims can access safe and appropriate accommodation. While most support happens through safety planning and multi-agency partnerships that help victims remain at home, some require emergency housing due to ongoing risk.

Halton offers a range of housing options, including refuge, sanctuary schemes, supported accommodation and targeted services for those with complex needs. The Whole Housing Approach guides local efforts to support early intervention, tenancy protection and long-term recovery.

Despite strong partnerships, a 2024 Housing Needs Assessment found a shortage of emergency accommodation, especially for residents with complex needs. Survivors are not always prioritised as required, highlighting the need to strengthen prevention and ensure compliance with statutory duties.

Community sentiment strongly supports this direction. According to Halton's draft Housing Strategy, based upon the housing needs assessment, supporting domestic abuse survivors through accommodation was the second-highest priority identified by residents, with 68.3% of household survey respondents naming it a key issue. In response, the Council has proposed a series of strategic housing actions, including:

- Ensuring survivors receive appropriate priority through Housing Options
- Reviewing local domestic abuse housing needs in full
- Developing a new 3-4 bed refuge for emergency placements, including those with complex needs
- Improving accommodation options for older people fleeing abuse
- Standardising and expanding the Sanctuary Scheme across providers
- Enhancing perpetrator behaviour change offers
- Collaborating with private landlords to co-design a survivor-focused housing scheme
- Recognising that many victims need safe, short-term support rather than long-term dependency

These intentions, though still in draft form, signal the Council's commitment to aligning housing strategy with domestic abuse legislation, survivor voice, and local demand.

National data shows 63,580 referrals for domestic abuse safe accommodation were made across England. Most were female adults, with only 3% male and 1% trans or non-binary individuals, highlighting a gap in support for male victims.

Halton received 104 referrals and supported 119 individuals, representing around 0.09% of its population. Of those supported, 92 were female adults, 2 were male, 1 was trans or non-binary, and 24 were children. Nearly 30% came from outside the borough. This suggests Halton's provision primarily supports adult women, with a lower representation of children and male survivors than seen nationally.

Halton reported 34 individuals with additional support requirements. Mental health needs were most common, followed by alcohol and drug support needs. This reflects a need to improve access to trauma-informed and therapeutic services.

Halton currently has 12 refuge bed spaces and no dispersed, specialist, or second-stage accommodation. As a result, 60% of supported individuals were in refuge and 40% received support through sanctuary schemes. These allow victims to remain at home safely through property-based security enhancements.

Halton's average stay in refuge accommodation was approximately four months, longer than the national average. Short stays were more frequent than average, and one-third of lengths of stay were not recorded. A lack of alternative accommodation may be contributing to longer durations and reduced turnover.

Capacity constraints are the leading reason households could not be supported in Halton, accounting for 81% of the 57 cases, more than double the national rate. Only one case was recorded as 'unmet need', likely suppressed due to small numbers.

Of the 38 households that exited support, 60.5% moved on in a planned way. However, 36.8% returned to live with the perpetrator, compared with just 3.5% nationally. This is a significant safeguarding concern and may indicate challenges related to coercive control, lack of stable housing options, or insufficient follow-up support. Halton also had a higher-than-average rate of eviction or 'asked to leave' cases.

Despite limited accommodation types, Halton has delivered inclusive specialist services and demonstrates strong data recording. However, the borough would benefit from expanded housing options, increased therapeutic provision, and better pathways for families and male survivors.

Domestic Abuse-Related Death Reviews

Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews (DARDRs) investigate deaths of individuals aged 16 or over linked to violence or abuse by family or household members, including suicides, to learn lessons and improve victim support.

Between April 2023 and March 2024, England and Wales recorded 262 domestic abuse-related deaths, including 98 suspected suicides and 80 intimate partner

homicides. For the second year, suicides exceeded partner homicides, showing improved awareness of the abuse-suicide link.⁷

From 2020 to 2024, there were 1,012 such deaths, with victims mostly female and suspects predominantly male, many with mental health and substance misuse issues. Sharp instruments caused nearly half of homicides, and most suspects had prior domestic abuse police records.

Halton has had no confirmed domestic abuse-related deaths since 2014, but remains prepared to conduct DARDs if needed.

Halton's Domestic Abuse Service Research

Halton Borough Council conducted a qualitative study involving surveys and a 'pinpoint' focus group with service providers to better understand domestic abuse support needs in the area.

Key Findings - Service Providers:

- **Strong IDVA Engagement:** IDVA services were praised for responsiveness, communication, and partnership working, particularly in MARAC and with housing teams
- **Support Gaps:** There are significant service gaps for LGBTQ+, deaf, ethnic minority, and low-to-medium risk victims
- **Service Navigation Issues:** Many providers lack up-to-date information on available services, highlighting the need for a central service directory
- **Legal & Court Support Overstretched:** Victims often lack legal advocacy; court delays and poor follow-up are common
- **Housing Strain:** While housing teams are collaborative, refuge access is limited, and temporary solutions like hotels are inadequate
- **Insufficient Support for Children:** Limited local provision for children affected by trauma; more play therapy and specialist staff needed
- **Mental Health Access Difficult:** Support is inconsistent, with long waits and over-reliance on signposting
- **Training Needs:** Staff in other services raised the need for better training in trauma-informed practice, legal processes, and support for marginalised groups
- **Systemic Challenges:** High caseloads, communication issues (especially from Children's Social Care), and fragmented agency coordination persist
- **Recommendations:** Include creating a service portal, improving support for mid-risk victims, expanding trauma services, and boosting IDVA capacity

Key Findings - Service Users:

- **Awareness & Access:** Many victims are unaware of local services; most found help only through self-directed searches
- **Positive Experiences:** IDVA team and Women's Centre received strong praise for empathetic, consistent support
- **Negative Experiences:** Users reported poor follow-up, misjudgement by professionals, and fragmented services, especially post-court

⁷ Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme (VKPP) (2025) *Domestic Homicide Project*.
<https://www.vkpp.org.uk/vkpp-work/domestic-homicide-project/>

- **Housing Barriers:** Many experienced homelessness or poor support from housing services; safety measures were inconsistently applied
- **Children Lacking Support:** Services for affected children are limited; schools vary in response effectiveness
- **Justice System Frustration:** Delays, lack of updates, and confusing processes undermine confidence in legal protection
- **Health/Mental Health Support:** Mixed experiences - some accessed helpful referrals, others felt abandoned
- **Inclusion Issues:** Male, LGBTQ+, and older victims reported feeling excluded or unsupported by current services

While Halton demonstrates strengths in IDVA support and multi-agency collaboration, critical service gaps remain - particularly for marginalised groups, children, and victims with complex needs. Consistent communication, better service mapping, legal advocacy, trauma-informed approaches, and inclusive provision are essential for system improvement.

Halton Housing Needs Assessment Research

The Council also recently undertook a Housing Needs Assessment. During this assessment, feedback was also sought from staff working within the Domestic Abuse Team in Halton and other relevant Housing officers. They shared the following:

- Professionals believe domestic abuse is one of the most significant challenges in Halton. The true scale is not fully understood, particularly for those sofa surfing or staying with family and friends
- The Anne Street West emergency accommodation is not fit for purpose. It is widely known, lacks privacy, and its gender blind model is seen as unsuitable. People with complex needs are often excluded. A new multi-bedroom refuge is required
- Older people experiencing abuse face limited options, especially if they require ground-floor accommodation
- The sanctuary scheme is valued, but officers noted inconsistency in provision across the social housing sector. A clear service standard is needed
- There is strong support for keeping families in their homes and removing the perpetrator where safe and appropriate. However, resources to support perpetrators are currently limited
- Many victims do not require long-term support but do need safe, short-term accommodation to plan their next steps
- There is a shortfall of move-on accommodation, and survivors are not consistently prioritised in line with the legal duty
- Stronger engagement with local landlords is needed to expand housing support schemes

Citizens Advice Halton Study

In early 2025, Citizens Advice Halton⁸ conducted qualitative research with women in Halton who had experienced domestic abuse. Their findings offer critical insight into the barriers survivors face and what they need from services. This lived-experience evidence aligns closely with broader strategic priorities in the borough.

Survivors identified six main barriers to receiving support:

- **Lack of awareness** of what abuse is and what help exists
- **Fear of retaliation**, particularly relating to safety, housing, or children
- **Distrust of services**, especially statutory bodies, due to fear of judgment or child removal
- **Services not meeting needs**, being too impersonal, fragmented, or culturally inappropriate
- **Lack of diversity** in services, with minority and LGBTQ+ survivors feeling unseen or excluded
- **Perception of loss** when leaving - home, stability, community, and financial security

Survivors described an ideal domestic abuse service as:

- Empathetic and validating, where being believed matters
- Offering a single point of contact for consistency and trust
- Providing practical support with housing, benefits, court forms, and home safety
- Delivering timely responses, ideally same-day
- Built as “by and for” services, with lived experience and cultural understanding embedded

Recommendations from Citizens Advice Halton for how to improve Halton’s Domestic Abuse support offer:

1. Proactively ask about abuse in all frontline settings
2. Develop a multi-agency one-stop hub for coordinated support
3. Raise local awareness of what abuse looks like
4. Improve signposting and visibility of help
5. Expand support for those below IDVA thresholds
6. Commission inclusive, survivor-led services that reflect Halton’s diversity

These findings and recommendations provide a strong case for survivor-informed, timely, and inclusive support pathways, aligned with trauma-informed practice and long-term recovery goals.

Recommendations

Summary of recommendations:

1. Create a Centralised, Up-to-Date Domestic Abuse Service Directory (webpage and poss. Print version – IN PROGRESS)
2. Expand Support for Low- and Medium-Risk Victims

⁸ Citizens Advice Halton (2025) *Domestic Abuse: Community Research Report - Lived Experiences of Survivors in Halton*.

<https://haltoncab.org.uk/research-and-campaigns/>

3. Increase Capacity and Longevity of the IDVA Service
4. Improve Court, Legal, and Criminal Justice Navigation
5. Address Housing and Accommodation Gaps – Also in new Housing Strategy
6. Strengthen Support for Children and Young People
7. Improve Support for Marginalised and Underserved Groups
8. Enhance Inter-Agency Coordination and Communication
9. Improve Mental Health and Wellbeing Access
10. Provide Long-Term Recovery and Empowerment Options
11. Strengthen Interventions for Perpetrators and Expand Child-to-Parent Abuse Response
12. Tackle Workplace Domestic Abuse
13. Strengthen Future Needs Assessments

Glossary

This glossary provides definitions for acronyms used throughout the Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment to support understanding across professional and community audiences.

CPVA: Child to Parent Violence and Abuse

CSEW: Crime Survey for England and Wales

CSP: Community Safety Partnership

CSC: Children's Social Care

DA: Domestic Abuse

DAHA: Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance

DAP: Domestic Abuse Partnership

DARDR: Domestic Abuse Related Death Review

DHR: Domestic Homicide Review (previous name for DARDR, see above)

DLUHC: Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

HDAP: Halton Domestic Abuse Partnership

IDVA: Independent Domestic Violence Advisor, a specialist professional who supports victims at high risk of harm, offering safety planning, advocacy and emotional support

IPH: Intimate Partner Homicides

IPV: Intimate Partner Violence

LGBTQ+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/ Questioning and other identities

LPUs: Local Policing Units

MARAC: Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference

MHCLG: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

NEET: Not in Education, Employment or Training

NFS: Non-fatal strangulation, a form of physical abuse now recognised in UK law as a standalone offence under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021

NHS: National Health Service

NPCC: National Police Chiefs' Council

NSPCC: National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

ONS: Office for National Statistics

PCC: Police and Crime Commissioner

PTSD: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

RSHE: Relationships, Sex and Health Education
SHP: Safer Halton Partnership
SVSDA: Suspected Victim Suicides following Domestic Abuse
VAWG: Violence Against Women and Girls

Introduction

This needs assessment seeks to gain a comprehensive understanding of the nature and extent of domestic abuse in Halton. Its findings will support Halton Borough Council in planning, delivering, and commissioning domestic abuse services. By identifying gaps in provision, the assessment will help the Council and its partners allocate limited resources more strategically, focusing on the individuals, communities and areas most in need.

The assessment will:

- Examine relevant national policies and legislative frameworks
- Outline Halton's current approach to tackling domestic abuse
- Analyse national data and research on domestic abuse prevalence
 - Review local data to assess the scale and characteristics of domestic abuse in Halton
- Gather insights from local service providers and stakeholders
- Present a set of evidence-based recommendations

Halton's Vision

Halton's Sustainable Community Strategy 2011 – 2026 sets out that the vision of all partners is that:

"Halton will be a thriving and vibrant borough where people can learn and develop their skills; enjoy a good quality of life with good health; a high quality, modern urban environment, the opportunity for all to fulfil their potential; greater wealth and equality; sustained by a thriving business community; and safer, stronger and more attractive neighbourhoods."

Halton Borough Council Corporate Plan 2024 – 2029:

Priority 1: Improving health, promoting wellbeing and supporting greater independence

Priority 2: Building a strong, sustainable local economy

Priority 3: Supporting children, young people and families

Priority 4: Tackling inequality and helping those who are most in need

Priority 5: Working towards a greener future

Priority 6: Valuing and appreciating Halton and our community

The Halton Domestic Abuse Partnership's Vision:

"We have listened to our local survivors, their children and working together have designed a clear pathway to the Partnership to ensure that we are and continue to be service user-led. Halton has a long-established multi-agency partnership ethos. We recognise that no one agency can end domestic abuse, and we will continue to

work in collaboration and challenge agencies to ensure that Halton intervention models are based on best practice, evidence and robust evaluation. No one should live in fear, especially in a domestic setting... Halton aims to create safer homes, safer communities and a safer society, benefiting all of our residents, reducing fear and harm experienced by those affected by domestic abuse.”

Progress Since 2021

- **Integration of Services for Stronger Collaboration:**
In 2023, Halton’s Domestic Abuse Service was brought in-house and relocated to the Municipal Building in Widnes. This move has strengthened delivery, partnership, collaboration and increased interaction with the Council’s Community Safety Team
- **Housing Needs Considered Through a Domestic Abuse Lens:**
In 2024, the Council commissioned a comprehensive Housing Needs Assessment, which included an estimate of the local need for safe accommodation for those experiencing domestic abuse. This ensures housing strategies are better informed and responsive to the statute, which sets out requirements for emergency, step-down supported and dispersed accommodation for domestic abuse victims and children
- **Enhanced Data Collection and Monitoring:**
A new domestic abuse data dashboard was developed in 2024, providing clearer insights into service demand and outcomes and helping to drive data-led improvements
- **Increased Focus on Perpetrator Interventions:**
Progress has been made in understanding and addressing perpetrator behaviour. The Council now provides a perpetrator offer with the delivery of the ‘Choices’ programme with additional provision offered through *MyCWA*, funded by the Cheshire Police and Crime Commissioner, and ‘Remedi’, which includes an offer for those who harm under the age of 16
- **White Ribbon Accreditation:**
Halton achieved White Ribbon accreditation in 2024, reflecting its commitment to ending male violence against women. This included establishing a cross-departmental steering group, appointing champions and ambassadors, and launching awareness-raising activities
- **Improved Domestic Abuse Awareness in Primary Care:**
The commissioning of the IRIS programme in 2024/25 helped raise awareness of domestic abuse across Halton’s GP practices. The project introduced a specialist referral pathway and strengthened links between healthcare and support services
- **Stronger Police-Based Presence in Halton:**
There is now a dedicated Domestic Violence Advocate (DVA) for Halton, working closely with Cheshire Police to strengthen early intervention and improve the response to domestic abuse. The PCC office has invested heavily and has an area of focus on tackling domestic abuse. The response to the Serious Violence Duty has seen a programme on serial domestic abuse

perpetrators and investment in a whole system approach for harm reduction in a domestic abuse pilot

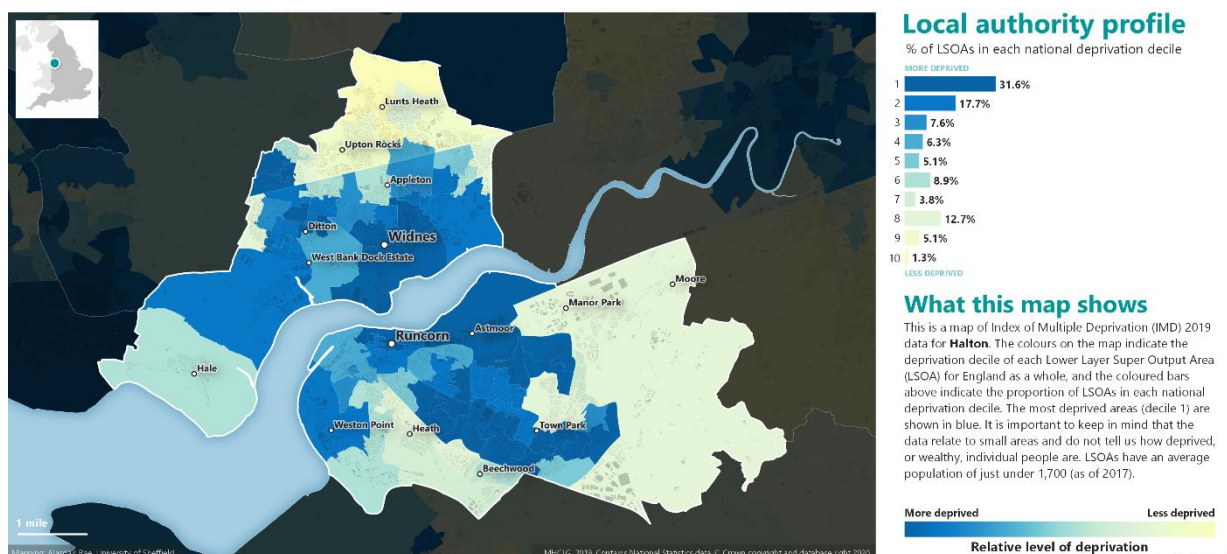
- **Improved Access to Support Online:**
Work is underway to launch a new domestic abuse webpage featuring enhanced information on local services and support. There has also been a focus on information and access to services with family hubs and Police Officer
- information to share at the point of contact
- **New Public Awareness Materials:**
Posters and information cards are currently being developed for distribution across the borough, making it easier for individuals to access help
- **Self-Referral Form Introduced:**
A new online self-referral form has been added to the Council's website, making it easier for survivors to reach out for support, advice, and services directly
- **Support for Children Affected by Domestic Abuse:**
The Children's Society's *Resolve* service has been commissioned in Halton, recognising children and young people as victims in their own right and providing specialist support
- **Halton Domestic Abuse Partnership Board Reset:**
The Board was reviewed and reset to ensure delivery of statutory duties and strategic requirements. The Board is currently in progress of establishing several subgroups to provide extra support, and also is expanding its membership to include representation from more third sector and commission partners, and lived experience through including domestic abuse survivors
- **MARAC Improvements:**
Halton is actively working to enhance its MARAC practices, including a MARAC review, plans to establish a dedicated Steering Group, and will be participating in a shadowing program with another local authority recognised for its exemplary MARAC model.

Borough Profile

Halton is a unitary authority (formed in 1998), and a largely urban area when compared to other areas of Cheshire. It covers the towns of Runcorn and Widnes, and the parishes of Daresbury, Hale and Preston Brook, serving a population of 128,478 and approximately 58,000 households (based on the 2021 census and Halton's Housing Strategy data). Halton is the 23rd most deprived local authority in the country, with 30% of households living in the top 10% of most deprived areas in the country. The 5 most deprived wards in Halton are Halton Lea, Central & West Bank, Halton Castle, Grange and Norton South & Preston Brook.

Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019

HALTON



Halton shares many of the social, economic and crime/Anti-Social Behaviour issues more associated with its urban neighbours in Merseyside, and has been part of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority since 2014. The environment acts as a contributory factor to the abuse and violence seen in Halton.

The 0-15 years cohort has increased by 1.3% in the last ten years, ages 16-64 have decreased by 3% and, most significantly, the 65+ age group has increased by some 29.3%. The rise in over-65s signals a growing need for age-appropriate domestic abuse services, particularly accessible housing and outreach. Significantly, the proportion of primary-aged children eligible for free school meals is the 11th highest in the country, and for secondary schools, Halton is the 10th highest.

The average life expectancy is 77.1 years for males and 80.5 years for females, both below the England averages of 78.8 and 82.8 years. Health outcomes present a challenge in the borough with cancer, cardiovascular, respiratory and liver disease being higher than the national average, and poor mental health a prominent feature in our communities.

Halton has a very stable community, with a low level of outward migration, which is more or less the same as those migrating into Halton. 96.5% of the population is white, with only 4.8% of the population being born outside of the UK. The main language spoken is English at 97.3%.

23% of Halton's population aged 16-65 are claiming Universal Credit, compared to a national average of 17.9%. There is also a much higher proportion of 16 and 17-year-olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), at 5.5% compared to 3.2% (England). The unemployment rate has reduced to just 3.2% for individuals aged 16 or over, which is lower than the national average of 3.7%; however, there is a higher rate of economic activity (25.9%) than the national average (21.1%). People are classed as 'economically inactive' if they are not in employment, but don't meet the criteria for being 'unemployed'. Common reasons include being retired, looking after

the home or family, or being temporarily or long-term sick and disabled. High levels of economic inactivity may increase vulnerability to abuse and create barriers to leaving perpetrators.

The Impact of Domestic Abuse

The CSEW⁹ for the year ending March 2025 estimated that 3.8 million people aged 16 years and over experienced domestic abuse in the last year. Domestic abuse remains an underreported crime. In the same period, police recorded 815,941 million domestic abuse-related offences. The National Centre for Domestic Violence¹⁰ estimates that just under a quarter (24%) of domestic abuse-related crime is reported to the police.

Domestic abuse is a gendered crime. The CSEW estimated that 2.3 million women and 1.5 million men experienced domestic abuse in the previous year. A significantly higher proportion of women were victims of each of the overarching types of abuse than men.

Halton recognises that being subjected to Domestic Abuse can have a considerable impact on the health and well-being of an individual, for their children and for others such as family and friends who try and help. The direct immediate impact may include cuts, bruises, broken bones, lost teeth and hair, sight and hearing damage, as well as miscarriage, stillbirth, complications of pregnancy, and homicide of victims and children.

The results of domestic abuse can be long-lasting and may cause or worsen other chronic health issues, and stress-related conditions, including asthma, epilepsy, digestive problems, migraine, hypertension, fibromyalgia and skin disorders. Domestic abuse has a significant effect on an individual's emotional, psychological and mental wellbeing and can lead to anxiety, depression, PTSD and suicide, and can be associated with psychosomatic symptoms such as numbness, shaking, nervous twitching, cramps and paralysis. It may also lead to feelings of isolation, worthlessness and dependency on the perpetrator, as well as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and sleeping and eating disorders.

Those affected by domestic abuse are at greater risk of increased use of alcohol, drugs and other substances used as a coping mechanism. Domestic abuse can also lead to an individual having to take time off work and from caring responsibilities, and can lead to homelessness.

The psychological impact of domestic abuse can be so severe that it leads to suicidal ideation and attempts. The Domestic Homicide Project found that there were 98 suspected victim suicides following domestic abuse in the year ending March

⁹ Office for National Statistics (2025) *Crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2025*.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2025#domestic-abuse>

¹⁰ National Centre for Domestic Violence (n.d.) *Domestic Abuse Statistics UK*.

<https://www.ncdv.org.uk/domestic-abuse-statistics-uk/>

2024¹¹, which is likely an underestimate, as a previous Refuge report found that 24% of its service users had felt suicidal at least at one point.¹²

The health of children affected by domestic abuse is also likely to have been seriously compromised from witnessing abuse, and also in many cases from abuse that they may have suffered. Prior experiences of physical and psychological trauma may also make them less likely to seek help in the future.

Inequalities

Domestic abuse rarely occurs in isolation and is often shaped by complex, overlapping factors. In Halton, socioeconomic challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and long-term illness or disability can heighten vulnerability and make it harder for victims to seek safety or change their circumstances. Understanding these interlinked issues is vital to developing preventive and person-centred approaches that address root causes as well as immediate harm.

Women in poverty are much more likely to experience almost every type of violence and abuse, at rates which are generally twice as high as those of other women. Women in poverty are twice as likely as other women to have been raped either as children or adults.¹³ Victims who are homeless are vulnerable to being further targeted by perpetrators of both physical and sexual abuse, and the risk of homelessness for an individual and their children can prevent a victim from leaving a home shared with a perpetrator.¹⁴

Victims from ethnic minority backgrounds may face multiple and additional barriers when trying to escape domestic abuse, and may remain in abusive situations for longer before reporting. These barriers can be understood as the result of 'intersectional discrimination' whereby cultural and structural inequalities overlap and multiply to hinder women's ability to seek help. They may not report abuse to the police or public services due to a lack of trust, racism and cultural insensitivity, language barriers and possible limited understanding of the law and their rights, or for fears surrounding immigration and deportation.¹⁵

Pregnant women may be more vulnerable to domestic abuse. In 2023, the NHS estimated that one in three pregnant women experiences domestic abuse¹⁶. Abuse

¹¹ **Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme** (n.d.) *Domestic Homicide Project*.

<https://www.vkpp.org.uk/vkpp-work/domestic-homicide-project/>

¹² **Aitken, R and Munro, V.** (2018) *Domestic Abuse and Suicide: Exploring the Links with Refuge's Client Base and Work Force*.

<https://www.refuge.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/domestic-abuse-suicide-refuge-warwick-july2018.pdf>

¹³ **Agenda** (2016) *Joining the Dots: The combined burden of violence, abuse and poverty in the lives of women*.

https://www.agendaalliance.org/documents/121/Joining_The_Dots_Report.pdf

¹⁴ **Home Office** (2022) *Domestic Abuse: Statutory Guidance*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-act-2021/domestic-abuse-statutory-guidance-accessible-version>

¹⁵ **Scottish Government Justice Analytical Services** (2024) *Minoritised Ethnic Women's Experiences of Domestic Abuse and Barriers to Help-Seeking: A Summary of the Evidence*.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/minoritised-ethnic-womens-experiences-domestic-abuse-barriers-help-seeking-summary-evidence>

¹⁶ **House of Commons Library** (2021) *The Role of Healthcare Services in Addressing Domestic Abuse*.

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9233/>

often begins or escalates during pregnancy, putting both the adult victim and unborn child at risk.

Those with a long-term illness or disability are more than twice as likely (11.7%) to experience domestic abuse. Sign Health reported that deaf women are at twice the risk of being abused.¹⁷ The need for specialist services can also make accessing effective support more difficult.

There are many similarities between heterosexual and LGBTQ+ people's experiences of domestic abuse. However, LGBTQ+ victims may also experience abuse of power and control closely associated with having their sexuality, gender identity or gender reassignment used against them. LGBTQ+ victims can experience distinct personal and structural barriers in reporting abuse and accessing services.

Health

Domestic abuse can have significant physical health consequences. Victims often sustain injuries like bruises and fractures. Prolonged exposure to abuse may cause chronic pain, headaches, digestive problems, and a decline in overall health. Additionally, abuse can lead to issues such as unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, and pregnancy-related complications.

Physical abuse may include non-fatal strangulation (NFS), which perpetrators of domestic abuse can use to control and intimidate victims. Despite the strong link between NFS and domestic homicide, it can be difficult to evidence due to a lack of visible injury. Between July 2022 and June 2023, approximately 700 offenders were sentenced for non-fatal strangulation or suffocation offences in England and Wales. This offence was introduced in 2022 under section 75A of the Serious Crime Act 2015, as part of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. The number of offenders sentenced increased each quarter, with a notable rise in the proportion of cases heard in the Crown Court, from 25% in July-September 2022 to 76% in April-June 2023. The majority of these offenders were male, and the most common sentence was an immediate custodial sentence, averaging around 17 months.¹⁸

The mental health effects of domestic abuse can be profound. Victims are at a higher risk of developing depression and anxiety disorders, and many go on to experience Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Perpetrators frequently isolate victims from their social networks, leading to feelings of loneliness and social withdrawal. Prolonged abuse can also severely impact a victim's self-esteem and sense of self-worth.¹⁹

The Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey²⁰ found that 75% of women experiencing extensive physical and sexual violence were not receiving medication or counselling

¹⁷ **SignHealth** (2025) *Domestic Abuse Service – Information for professionals*.
<https://signhealth.org.uk/for-professionals/domestic-abuse-service/>

¹⁸ **Sentencing Council** (2023) *Non-fatal strangulation and suffocation - Statistical bulletin - Sentencing*.
<https://www.sentencingcouncil.org.uk/html-publication/item/non-fatal-strangulation-and-suffocation-statistical-bulletin/>

¹⁹ **Anxious Minds** (n.d.) *How Domestic Violence Affects Mental Health*.
<https://www.anxiousminds.co.uk/how-domestic-violence-affects-mental-health/>

²⁰ **NHS Digital** (2021) *Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey: Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing, England, 2014*.

for mental health problems, despite clear signs of severe mental ill health. Additionally, 36% of women in this group had attempted suicide. These women were also more than twice as likely to misuse alcohol, often as a way to cope, and eight times more likely to be dependent on drugs compared to women with little experience of violence and abuse.

Victims of domestic abuse frequently face homelessness and financial instability as they try to leave their abusers. These challenges can have a significant impact on both their physical health and mental well-being.

Male Victims

The CSEW²¹ estimated that in the year ending March 2025, there were around 1.5 million male victims of domestic abuse. Despite this, only 4.8 per cent of those accessing support from local domestic abuse services in England and Wales are men. Between a third to a quarter of stalking victims are male, and men who experience partner abuse are more likely to attempt suicide. The ManKind Initiative estimates that between three and five men die by suicide each week as a result of domestic abuse.²²

The risk increases significantly for LGBTQ+ men. For example, the percentage of gay men (6%) or bisexual men (7.3%) who suffered domestic abuse in 2019/20 was more than for heterosexual men (3.5%).²³

Male victims of partner abuse are much less likely to disclose their experiences, often as a result of social stigma. Research from the ManKind Initiative reveals that 58.9% of men who contact their helpline have never previously spoken to anyone about the abuse they endure, and 64% indicate that they would not have sought help if the service were not anonymous. Among these men, 98% report experiencing psychological abuse, 82% experience coercive controlling behaviour, 69% suffer physical abuse, and 29% face economic abuse.²⁴

However, the rate of male survivors disclosing partner abuse has significantly improved. In the year ending March 2023, only 21% of male victims reported not telling anyone about their experiences - a marked decline from 49% in 2017/18. Among female victims, the figures were 18.2% in 2022/23 compared to 19% in 2017/18.

As of February 2025, there were 60 organisations in the UK offering 436 refuge or safe accommodation spaces for men, 128 were exclusively for men, and 308 were mixed-use. The median provision per organisation is five spaces. Halton does not

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/adult-psychiatric-morbidity-survey/adult-psychiatric-morbidity-survey-survey-of-mental-health-and-wellbeing-england-2014>

²¹ **Office for National Statistics** (2025) *Crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2025*.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2025>

²² **ManKind Initiative** (2023) *4 Key Facts on Male Victims of Domestic Abuse 2023*

<https://mankind.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/4-Key-Facts-on-Male-Victims-of-Domestic-Abuse-2023-final-June-2023-revised.pdf>

²³ **Home Office** (2022) *Supporting male victims*.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-male-victims/supporting-male-victims-accessible>

²⁴ **ManKind Initiative** (2025) *Statistics on Male Victims of Domestic Abuse*.

<https://mankind.org.uk/statistics/statistics-on-male-victims-of-domestic-abuse/>

currently offer any spaces exclusively for men; their refuge accommodation is available for all genders.

Children

Under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, children are recognised as victims of domestic abuse if they see, hear or are otherwise impacted by the abuse, and are either related to or fall under the parental responsibility of the victim and/or perpetrator. This means a child may be considered a victim when, for example, one parent abuses the other, or when a parent is abused by or abuses a partner or relative.

Estimates from the Office for National Statistics show that between 2017 and 2019, 19.3% of children aged 10–15 (approximately 751,000) lived in households where an adult reported experiencing domestic abuse in the previous year, revising earlier estimates of approximately 7%.²⁵ Additional data from the NSPCC shows that between April and September 2024, there were 3,879 contacts to their helpline concerning children affected by domestic abuse - a 19% increase compared to the previous year.

In the year ending March 2023, around 32.4% of adults aged 16 to 59 who reported experiencing partner abuse were living in a household where at least one child under the age of 16 was present. Of those, 28.1% of victims reported that the child had seen or heard the abuse during the most recent incident.²⁶

A review by SafeLives found that nearly all children (97%) living in households affected by domestic abuse were exposed to the abuse. Among these children, about two-thirds experienced direct harm, including physical or emotional abuse, or neglect. More than half of the exposed children exhibited behavioural problems or felt responsible for negative events, with these effects potentially persisting into adulthood. Additionally, difficulties with school adjustment were identified in over one-third of cases.²⁷

The NSPCC reported²⁸ that witnessing domestic abuse can have many impacts on children's behaviour and mental health, and signs that a child has experienced domestic abuse can include:

- Aggression or bullying
- Anti-social behaviour
- Anxiety, depression or suicidal thoughts
- Attention seeking
- Bed-wetting, nightmares or insomnia
- Constant or regular sickness, like colds, headaches and mouth ulcers

²⁵ **Office for National Statistics** (2020) *Children Vulnerability to Victimisation in England and Wales: Year Ending March 2017 to Year Ending March 2019*.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/childhoodvulnerabilitytovictimisationinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2017toyearendingmarch2019>

²⁶ **Office for National Statistics** (2023) *Partner abuse in detail, England and Wales: year ending March 2023*.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/partnerabuseindetailenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2023>

²⁷ **SafeLives** (2014) *In Plain Sight: The Evidence from Children Exposed to Domestic Abuse*.

<https://safelives.org.uk/research-policy-library/in-plain-sight/>

²⁸ **NSPCC** (ND) *Domestic Abuse*.

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/domestic-abuse/#signs>

- Drug or alcohol use
- Eating disorders
- Problems in school or trouble learning
- Tantrums
- Withdrawal

Experiencing domestic abuse in childhood or adolescence has been shown to increase the likelihood of experiencing or perpetrating domestic abuse later in life.²⁹

In 2024/5, 33% of Halton's domestic abuse referrals involved children, with support being offered by both the Domestic Abuse Service and Children's Services. In 2023, Halton commissioned the Resolve Service through The Children's Society to provide specialist emotional and practical support for children and young people aged 5 -18 (or up to 25 with additional needs) who have been affected by domestic abuse. The service offers up to 12 one-to-one sessions tailored to each child's needs, focusing on safety planning, building resilience, and understanding healthy relationships. It also delivers the Gateway programme for parents, helping them recognise the effects of abuse on their children and how best to support them. A whole-family approach is central to the service, with an emphasis on hearing and prioritising the child's voice throughout.

Between July and September 2023, Resolve received 30 referrals. Of these, 22 children engaged in face-to-face support, and 20 parents participated in the Gateway programme. Only 2 cases were considered out of scope. In addition to direct support, Resolve also works alongside professionals in social care, particularly during pre-court proceedings, to help ensure decision-making is informed by the child's emotional well-being and safety. The service reflects a strong commitment to early intervention and trauma-informed care within the Halton area.

Young people can also be victims in their own relationships. Although it is often under-recognised, teenage relationship abuse can include emotional manipulation, physical violence, sexual coercion, and digital abuse. One of the challenges is that teenagers may not identify their experiences as abusive, especially in relationships that are short-term or perceived as casual. As many data sources only include information for those aged 16 and over in relation to domestic abuse, it can be a hidden problem. A 2025 Youth Endowment Fund³⁰ survey of 10,000 13-17 year olds in England and Wales found that:

- 49% of teens in relationships experienced violent or controlling behaviour
- 20% had been forced or pressured into sexual activity
- 17% had intimate images shared without consent
- 27% felt afraid to disagree with their partner
- 26% felt afraid to break up with their partner
- 27% saw or experienced online sexual violence (e.g. threats of sexual assault or non-consensual images)

²⁹ Costa, B. M, et al (2016) *Longitudinal Predictors of Domestic Violence Perpetration and Victimisation: A Systemic Review*.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1359178915000828>

³⁰ Youth Endowment Fund (2024) *Children, Violence and Vulnerability report*.

<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/news/half-of-teens-in-relationships-suffer-violence-or-controlling-behaviour-reveals-new-repor>

- 33% had encountered content promoting violence against women and girls

Certain vulnerable groups were at significantly higher risk, including teenagers involved in gangs, children with special educational needs and those excluded from school.

Experiencing abuse during adolescence is especially harmful, as it occurs at a critical stage of emotional and psychological development. During this transitional period between childhood and adulthood, young people may struggle to make sense of their experiences, form healthy relationships, or seek help. Their ability to disclose abuse is often shaped by fear, shame, or uncertainty about whether their situation will be taken seriously.

Halton offers support for perpetrators under the age of 16 through their PCC-funded Remedi offer, and their domestic abuse support is available for all ages through their Domestic Abuse team and Children's Services. Through new campaigns, Halton hopes to raise awareness of domestic abuse for teenagers by sharing posters and cards in local colleges, and by offering more tailored support and information on their website.

Wider Economic Impact

The Domestic Abuse Commissioner estimates that domestic abuse has an economic and social cost of around £85 billion in England and Wales each year (based on the Home Office figure of £66 billion in 2019).³¹ As an economic analysis commissioned by Women's Aid shows, for every pound invested in domestic abuse support services, we will see a saving to the public purse of at least £9.³² Early intervention, support services and perpetrator programmes are key to reducing long-term costs.

Examples of costs incurred by domestic violence include:

- **Healthcare Costs:** Victims often require medical treatment for physical injuries and mental health conditions, including use of the NHS and emergency services
- **Criminal Justice System:** Costs include policing, prosecution, legal aid, courts and imprisonment related to domestic abuse
- **Housing and Social Services:** Victims may need emergency accommodation or refuge services, as well as additional security on existing housing
- **Lost Economic Output:** Victims may miss work, reduce hours, or lose jobs entirely. Abusers may also experience job loss or legal consequences affecting their employability
- **Impact on Children:** Children exposed to domestic abuse are more likely to require educational support, mental health services and can be at increased risk of entering the criminal justice system

³¹ **Domestic Abuse Commissioner** (2025) *Written Evidence Submitted by The Domestic Abuse Commissioner*. <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/138343/pdf>

³² **Women's Aid** (2023) *Investing to Save: The Economic Case for Funding Domestic Abuse Support*. <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/investing-to-save-report>

Overview of Abuse Types

At the national level, our analysis primarily draws on data from the police, the Office for National Statistics (ONS), and the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW). These sources typically categorise domestic abuse into the following types:

- Non-sexual abuse by a partner or family member, including physical force, threats and emotional or financial abuse
- Sexual assault and attempted sexual assault
- Stalking, including domestic and non-domestic
- Coercive control

Halton recognises the following behaviours as types of abuse related to domestic abuse, which include all those outlined in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021:

- Physical abuse
- Isolation
- Verbal abuse
- Threatening behaviour
- Emotional and psychological abuse
- Economic and financial abuse
- False allegations
- Stalking
- Sexual abuse
- Online abuse
- Coercive and controlling behaviour

According to the latest CSEW for the year ending March 2025, 7.8% of people aged 16 and over experienced domestic abuse in the past year. This includes 6.1% who experienced partner abuse and 2.7% who experienced abuse by a family member. Emotional abuse was the most common form, affecting 5.0%, followed by economic abuse (2.7%), threats (2.6%), and physical abuse (1.3%).

Domestic stalking was reported by 2.2%, with 1.7% stalked by a partner or ex-partner and 0.7% by a family member. Domestic sexual assault affected 1.6%, including 1.5% at the hands of a partner or ex-partner and 0.1% by a family member.

Since the age of 16, 20.5% of people are estimated to have experienced some form of domestic abuse, although the survey did not disaggregate lifetime figures by perpetrator type. Some individuals may have experienced abuse from both partners and family members during their lifetime.³³

The data available from the police, CSEW and ONS can be limited. Police data can be underreported as it only includes crimes, CSEW relies on self-reporting and ONS

³³ **Office for National Statistics** (2025) *Crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2025*. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2025>

data can be subject to definitional and method changes, which can skew data year on year.

Intimate Partner Abuse

Domestic abuse most commonly occurs in intimate partner relationships, but it is not limited to marriages, civil partnerships, or cohabiting couples. Abuse can take place between current or former partners, regardless of marital or living status. Intimate partner abuse is often characterised by patterns of coercive control, where one partner seeks to dominate the other through emotional, psychological, financial, or physical tactics.

Abuse often persists or intensifies after separation, as perpetrators may feel a loss of control, increasing the risk to the victim's physical and emotional safety. Separation is now widely recognised as a high-risk period, particularly in cases involving coercive control and stalking. Most domestic murders occur in the first 6 months of a relationship ending, making this the most dangerous time for anyone trying to escape an abusive relationship.³⁴

Intimate partner abuse affects people across all genders, sexual orientations, and relationship types, including same-sex relationships and non-cohabiting dating couples, highlighting that abuse transcends traditional partnership models. Victims may also face intersecting challenges related to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, or immigration status, which can create additional barriers to seeking support and safety.

Young people can be particularly vulnerable to domestic abuse within their own intimate relationships. Despite growing awareness, abuse among teenagers often goes unrecognised, both by the victims themselves and by those around them. Such abuse may take the form of emotional manipulation, physical violence, sexual coercion, or digital control, including harassment through social media, messaging apps, GPS tracking, or non-consensual sharing of images. Technology has introduced new avenues for abuse that may be especially prevalent in intimate partner relationships.

Furthermore, the impacts of intimate partner abuse often extend beyond the individuals involved, affecting children, extended family members, and wider communities, with profound social and psychological consequences.

Family Abuse (including CPVA and honour-based abuse)

Abuse within family settings extends beyond intimate partnerships and can involve harmful behaviours perpetrated by family members against other relatives. Such abuse encompasses a wide range of actions, including physical or sexual abuse, 'honour'-based violence, forced marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), reproductive coercion, forced abortion, and other culturally or socially motivated harmful practices. These forms of abuse are often driven by attempts to control or 'protect' the perceived honour of an individual, family, or community, enforcing strict adherence to codes of behaviour.³⁵

³⁴ **Independent Domestic Abuse Services (IDAS)** (n.d.) *Post-separation abuse*.
<https://idas.org.uk/16-days/post-separation-abuse/>

³⁵ **HM Government** (2019) *Multi-agency statutory guidance on female genital mutilation*.

Young people may face an elevated risk of abuse from family members, partly due to the complex dynamics of trust and authority within families. For many children and adolescents, it can be difficult to differentiate between acceptable behaviour and abuse, especially when the perpetrator is a caregiver or other trusted adult. Disclosure is often hindered by fear of retaliation, lack of safe reporting mechanisms, or concern about disrupting family relationships. Research from Galop indicates that young people who identify as LGBTQ+ experience disproportionately higher rates of abuse from immediate family members compared to their heterosexual peers, underscoring the intersection of family abuse with issues of identity and acceptance. The most common perpetrators of domestic abuse against LGBTQ+ people were parents, mothers (45%) and fathers (41%).³⁶

A significant and growing concern within family abuse is Child-to-Parent Violence and Abuse (CPVA). In 2023/4 the government ran consultation to seek views on a definition of child to parent abuse, as there is currently no agreed definition. Although violence and abuse can be committed by a parent's adult children, CPVA is usually in reference to those aged 10-16, or 18, to avoid cross over with other family abuse, and also applies to harm directed towards a guardian, carer or anyone with a caregiving role. Such behaviour may include verbal humiliation, threats, physical violence, controlling or jealous actions, property damage, theft, and inappropriate sexualised conduct. While some incidents may be isolated, CPVA often manifests as a persistent pattern of abuse. CPVA is predominantly perpetrated by sons against mothers (with single mothers being disproportionately affected); however, both sons and daughters abuse both mothers and fathers.³⁷

The stigma surrounding CPVA contributes to significant underreporting. Parents may hesitate to seek help due to fears of blame, disbelief, or punitive consequences for their child, such as criminalisation or removal from the family home. There is also a lack of research in the UK; there is currently no population-level data on CPVA. As a result, recorded cases likely represent a small fraction of the true prevalence of CPVA nationally.

Halton's Domestic Abuse Service provides support for survivors of family abuse, including parents and caregivers experiencing CPVA, alongside support from Children's Services, and Halton's Remedi programme for those who harm under the age of 16 in conjunction with the PCC office.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is a significant and distressing component of domestic abuse, often hidden behind the broader patterns of physical and emotional violence experienced by victims. Within intimate or familial relationships, sexual abuse can include forced sexual acts, coercion, harassment, and other forms of non-consensual sexual

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/multi-agency-statutory-guidance-on-female-genital-mutilation>

³⁶ Galop (2021) *LGBT+ young people and family abuse*.

[LGBT+ Experiences of Abuse from Family Members | Galop](#)

³⁷ Baker, V., & Bonnick, H. (2021). *Understanding CAPVA: A rapid literature review on child and adolescent to parent violence and abuse for the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office*.

<https://domesticabusecommissioner.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CAPVA-Rapid-Literature-Review-Exec-Summary-November-2021-Baker-and-Bonnick.pdf>

behaviour. It is a serious violation that compounds the trauma of domestic abuse and can have profound long-term impacts on survivors' physical and mental health.

Halton defines sexual abuse (within a domestic violence context) as:

- Sexual harassment/ pressure, or sexual acts, including with other people
- Forcing sex, including after physical assaults
- Sexually degrading language
- Rape
- Forcing someone to have sex or commit a sexual act against their will
- Unwanted sexual contact and demands
- Forcing involvement in making or watching pornography
- Deliberately hurting someone during sex
- Pressuring someone or tricking someone into having unsafe sex
- Refusing to use, or lying about using, contraception

In England and Wales, sexual abuse within domestic settings is, unfortunately, common. According to the CSEW for the year ending March 2024, 1.6% of adults aged 16 and over experienced sexual assault within a domestic context in the previous 12 months.³⁸ This translates to tens of thousands of individuals subjected to sexual violence by a current or former partner or family member annually. Moreover, over the longer term, the CSEW has shown that a majority of sexual offences, including rape and assault by penetration, are committed by partners or ex-partners. For example, data combining 2017 and 2020 surveys indicate that 44% of rape victims aged 16 to 59 reported their partner or ex-partner as the perpetrator.³⁹

The impact of sexual abuse within domestic abuse can be particularly severe because it violates personal boundaries in the context of a relationship where trust and safety should exist. Survivors often face stigma and may be reluctant to disclose abuse due to fear, shame, or concerns about not being believed, which is sadly exacerbated by poor conviction rates. This underscores the importance of sensitive and accessible support services tailored to the unique challenges faced by those experiencing sexual abuse in domestic settings.

Economic Abuse

In their 2023-2024 Impact Report, Surviving Economic Abuse reported that 4.1 million UK women experienced economic abuse from a current or former partner in the last 12 months, with the rising cost of living coming so soon after the pandemic exacerbating the devastating impact of this form of domestic abuse.⁴⁰

³⁸ **Office for National Statistics** (2025) *Crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2025*.
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2025>

³⁹ **Office for National Statistics** (2021). *Nature of sexual assault by rape or penetration, England and Wales: Year ending March 2020*.
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/natureofsexualassaultbyrapeorpenetrationenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2020>

⁴⁰ **Surviving Economic Abuse** (2024) *Impact Report 2023 – 24*.
<https://survivingeconomicabuse.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Surviving-Economic-Abuse-Impact-report-2023-24-December-2024.pdf>

Economic abuse consists of actions that severely undermine a person's ability to access, manage, or maintain financial resources, property, or essential goods and services. These actions often include restriction, exploitation, or deliberate sabotage, such as controlling a person's income, denying access to necessities like food or transport, or accumulating debt in the victim's name. When such behaviour is repeated, affects the victim's everyday life, and occurs between individuals who are personally connected, it may constitute controlling or coercive behaviour under the Serious Crime Act 2015. The law recognises this form of abuse as serious when it causes fear of violence or substantially disrupts daily living.

Halton's Domestic Abuse Partnership Strategy⁴¹ gives the following examples of economic and financial abuse:

- Totally controlling the family income
- Not allowing someone to spend any money unless 'permitted'
- Making someone account for every pound they spends
- Running up huge bills such as credit/store cards in someone else's name
- Purposely defaulting on payments
- Setting up false companies, accounts or credit cards
- Deliberately forcing someone to go back to the family courts as a means of costing them additional legal fees
- Refusing to contribute to household income
- Interfering with or preventing someone from regularising their immigration status, so they are dependent on the perpetrator
- Preventing someone from claiming welfare benefits, forcing someone to commit benefit fraud or misappropriating such benefits
- Interfering with someone's education, training or employment
- Not allowing someone access to their mobile phone/ car/ utilities
- Damaging someone's property

Economic abuse can lead to financial dependence or instability, which often makes it more difficult for victims to leave abusive relationships and can extend their exposure to harm. In some cases, this abuse continues even after separation. Children may also be affected, potentially facing deprivation or poverty as a consequence. A national survey by Surviving Economic Abuse found that more than half of those experiencing economic abuse fell into debt, with a quarter suffering credit damage or coercive financial control.⁴²

In a Women's Aid study, 52% of female respondents still living with their abuser reported that they could not afford to leave due to having no money of their own. Additionally, nearly one-third of participants in the Women's Aid 2018 Survivor Voice

⁴¹ Halton Borough Council (2025) *Halton Domestic Abuse Partnership Strategy 2025–2026*.

<https://moderngov.halton.gov.uk/documents/s79831/Appendix%201%20DA%20Strategy%2025-26.pdf>

⁴² Surviving Economic Abuse (2024) *Measuring economic abuse: Preliminary findings on the prevalence and impact of economic abuse on women in the UK*.

<https://survivingeconomicabuse.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Measuring-economic-abuse-preliminary-findings-Nov-2024.pdf>

Survey said their access to money was controlled by the perpetrator during the relationship.⁴³

Online Abuse

The Online Safety Act 2023 was enacted to address online harms, including image-based abuse and cyberstalking. The Act simplifies prosecution by removing the need to prove intent to cause distress when sharing intimate images without consent, and also criminalises the creation and sharing of sexually explicit deepfake images without consent.

Halton's Domestic Abuse Partnership Strategy outlines online abuse as:

- Cyberstalking someone
- Placing false and malicious information about someone on their or others' social media
- Trolling someone
- Denying someone access to their own social media platforms or control of their own content
- Revenge porn
- Monitoring or controlling someone's email and phone calls (including work emails and calls)
- Image-based abuse – for example, the non-consensual distribution of private sexual photographs and films with the intent to cause someone distress
- Hacking into, monitoring or controlling someone's email accounts, social media profiles and phone calls
- Use of spyware or GPS locators on items such as someone's phone, computer, wearable technology, car, motorbike, and pets
- Hacking internet-enabled devices such as PlayStations or iPads to gain access to someone's accounts or trace information such as someone's location
- Using personal devices such as smart watches or home devices (e.g. Amazon Alexa) to monitor, control or frighten someone
- Use of hidden cameras

Online harassment is an increasingly common problem, with the ONS reporting that approximately 7% of women and 4% of men have experienced cyberstalking once or more since the age of 16.⁴⁴ Women's Aid also reported that 85% of survivors who experienced online abuse said it was part of a broader pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour, also taking place offline.⁴⁵ In 2023, the Revenge Porn Helpline received nearly 19,000 reports, marking a 106% increase on the previous year.⁴⁶

⁴³ **Women's Aid** (n.d.) *The Impact of Domestic Abuse*.

<https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/the-impact-of-domestic-abuse/>

⁴⁴ **Office for National Statistics** (2024) *Stalking: findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales*.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/stalkingfindingsfromthecrimesurveyforenglandandwales>

⁴⁵ **Women's Aid** (2022) *Technology and domestic abuse: Experiences of survivors during the Covid-19 pandemic*.

<https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/4.-Technology-domestic-abuse-and-Covid-19-1.pdf>

⁴⁶ **Revenge Porn Helpline** (2024) *Reports to the Revenge Porn Helpline*

[Reports to the Revenge Porn Helpline Increased by 106% in 2023 | Revenge Porn Helpline](#)

Halton's new Domestic Abuse website will provide people with access to information on how to stay safe online.

National Context

Over the past several years (2021-2025), the national landscape for tackling domestic abuse has seen significant change, with legislative, strategic, and funding updates aimed at improving prevention, protection, support, and accountability.

Domestic Abuse Act (2021)⁴⁷

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 provided the first statutory definition of domestic abuse in the UK. It defines abusive behaviour as including:

- Physical or sexual abuse
- Violent or threatening behaviour
- Controlling or coercive behaviour
- Economic abuse
- Psychological, emotional, or other abuse

To qualify, the behaviour must involve individuals aged 16+ who are "personally connected" through relationships, marriage, family ties, or cohabitation. The Act introduced several landmark reforms:

- Children are now recognised as victims if they see, hear, or experience the effects of domestic abuse
- Creation of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, responsible for promoting best practices and publishing a strategic plan every three years
- Local authorities now have statutory duties to assess and provide accommodation-based support for victims, informed by a local needs assessment conducted at least every three years, supported by Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Boards

Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy (2021)⁴⁸

This strategy set out a cross-government ambition to reduce violence against women and girls through prevention, protection, and prosecution. Key priorities included:

- Increasing support for victims, including improved access to specialist services and additional funding for frontline organisations.
- Strengthening the criminal justice response to enhance victim outcomes and offender accountability.
- Focusing on prevention through education campaigns and early intervention.
- Improving data collection to better understand and address root causes.
- Launching the *StreetSafe* online tool for the public to report places where they feel unsafe.
- Committing to long-term system reform, robust legislation, and better multi-agency collaboration.

⁴⁷ **UK Government** (2021) *Domestic Abuse Act 2021*.

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/contents>

⁴⁸ **Home Office** (2021) *Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy*.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls-strategy>

Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts (PCSC) Act (2022)⁴⁹

This Act introduced the Serious Violence Duty, requiring local authorities, emergency services, and partners to collaborate to prevent and reduce serious violence, including domestic abuse. Local strategies must identify patterns of violence, understand the root causes, and implement targeted interventions.

It also mandated that Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) address serious violence in their strategies, although local partnership arrangements may vary.

Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan (March 2022)⁵⁰

Published by the Home Office, this national plan outlined four central pillars:

1. Prioritising Prevention
2. Supporting Victims
3. Pursuing Perpetrators
4. Strengthening the System

The plan aims to reduce domestic abuse prevalence, prevent domestic homicides and suicides, improve survivors' health and economic outcomes, and ensure a more coordinated, skilled systemic response.

Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Strategic Plan (2022–2025)⁵¹

The Commissioner's plan focuses on:

- Standing with victims and survivors
- Improving support for marginalised and underserved groups
- Addressing the inconsistency of services across England and Wales
- Promoting coordination between local agencies and national government

Domestic Homicide Sentencing Review (2023)⁵²

This review introduced key reforms following long-standing advocacy by victims' families, campaigners, and the Domestic Abuse Commissioner. Key changes include:

- Longer sentences for murders involving coercive control, even where physical violence was limited
- Recognition of psychological abuse as an aggravating factor in sentencing
- Introduction of statutory aggravating factors for murders with a history of coercive or controlling behaviour under the Sentencing Act 2020
- A commitment to fairness and consistency in sentencing, ensuring domestic abuse-related killings are treated as seriously as other homicides
- The government pledges to monitor the impact through continued consultation with the judiciary, CPS, and advocacy groups

⁴⁹ **UK Government** (2022) *Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022*.

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/32/contents>

⁵⁰ **Home Office** (2022) *Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan*.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-domestic-abuse-plan>

⁵¹ **Domestic Abuse Commissioner** (2023) *Strategic Plan: September 2022 to September 2025*.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-commissioners-strategic-plan>

⁵² **Ministry of Justice** (2023) *Domestic Homicide Sentencing Review and Government Response*.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/domestic-homicide-sentencing-review>

Victims and Prisoners Act (2024)⁵³

This Act further strengthens victims' rights and access to justice:

- Enshrines the Victims' Code in law, clarifying what victims can expect from the criminal justice system
- Makes Operation Encompass a legal requirement, ensuring schools are informed when children are exposed to domestic abuse
- Requires commissioners to collaborate in delivering high-quality, consistent victim support
- Raises awareness of key roles such as Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs)

Before being elected in 2024, the Labour Party made a commitment in their general election manifesto to halve violence against women and girls (VAWG) within the next decade. This pledge reflects a broader national urgency to address the scale and severity of gender-based violence. That same year, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) and the College of Policing formally declared VAWG a "national emergency," citing that it accounts for nearly one in five (just under 20%) of all recorded crimes in England and Wales.⁵⁴ This recognition marks a significant escalation in the national response, positioning VAWG not only as a criminal justice issue but also as a public health and societal crisis requiring sustained, coordinated action across policing, government, and frontline services.

The Rise of Misogyny

The rise of misogyny, particularly among young boys and adults in the UK, has become a pressing concern, with alarming statistics and cultural shifts highlighting the depth of the issue. A recent poll, conducted by Zencity, revealed that 69% of women in England and Wales have personally experienced or know someone who has experienced male violence or harassment in the past year, with higher rates among younger women. Worryingly, the poll also found that 4 in 10 women do not believe that the police treat violence and harassment of women seriously, and 1 in 10 women said they would not report a rape or assault by a partner.⁵⁵

In response, the UK government has initiated several measures aimed at combating misogyny and its detrimental effects. As previously mentioned, the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 introduced provisions to strengthen the legal framework against gender-based violence, including measures to improve the handling of domestic abuse and sexual violence cases. Additionally, the Online

⁵³ **UK Government** (2024) *Victims and Prisoners Act 2024*.

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2024/21/contents>

⁵⁴ **National Police Chiefs' Council and College of Policing** (2024) *National Policing Statement on Violence Against Women and Girls*.

<https://news.npcc.police.uk/releases/call-to-action-as-violence-against-women-and-girls-epidemic-deepens-1>

⁵⁵ **Dodd, V.** (2025) *Most women in England and Wales have seen abusive male behaviour in the past year, says poll*. The Guardian.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jun/30/most-women-in-england-and-wales-have-seen-abusive-male-behaviour-in-the-past-year-poll-finds>

Safety Bill (2021)⁵⁶ seeks to hold online platforms accountable for harmful content, aiming to reduce the exposure of young individuals to misogynistic material online.

Educational institutions are also viewed as pivotal in challenging and preventing misogynistic behaviour. The Department for Education has updated the Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) curriculum to include lessons that challenge harmful gender stereotypes and promote respectful relationships. These lessons are designed to equip students, particularly boys, with the tools to critically assess and reject misogynistic narratives encountered online and in their communities.⁵⁷

Local Context

Local Governance

Halton Borough Council has local governance in place to coordinate domestic abuse prevention, support, and response, working closely with Cheshire Constabulary and partner agencies to protect victims and address perpetrator behaviour.

Halton Domestic Abuse Partnership (HDAP) and Local Partnership Board

Halton Borough Council, in collaboration with Cheshire Constabulary, holds primary responsibility for tackling domestic abuse within the borough. This includes developing and implementing Halton's Domestic Abuse Strategy, aligned with the requirements of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

Under the Act, Halton Borough Council was required to establish and appoint a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board to oversee the strategic coordination of domestic abuse services and support across the area. The Partnership Board's members include representatives from:

- Halton Borough Council departments, including Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care, Public Health, Environment and Regeneration and the Domestic Abuse Team
- Cheshire Constabulary: Halton Area Commander
- Halton Place Integrated Care Board (ICB)
- Halton Housing

It is noted that there are some gaps in Board representation, as the board was reset at the beginning of the year. Halton is looking to increase membership for commissioned services and third-sector representatives.

The Partnership Board reports to Halton's Community Safety Partnership (CSP), called Safer Halton Partnership, which identifies domestic abuse and violence

⁵⁶ **UK Government** (2021) *Online Safety Bill (Draft)*.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/draft-online-safety-bill>

⁵⁷ **Department for Education** (2024) *New RSHE guidance: What it means for sex education lessons in schools*.

<https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2024/05/new-rshe-guidance-what-it-means-for-sex-education-lessons-in-schools/>

against women and girls as a key priority. The Safer Halton Partnership envisions Halton as a place where women and girls are safe and feel safe to live their lives free from fear and harassment. They believe that effective early intervention, joint working, and a drive to challenge the culture and attitudes that give rise to all forms of abuse can help make Halton a safe place for women and girls to live, work and enjoy their leisure time. Their key areas of focus around domestic abuse include:

- Develop approaches that prevent abuse before it happens
- Identify and stop harmful behaviour
- Support and strengthen those at risk
- Improve and expand support for everyone who is affected by abuse

When required, it is the Safer Halton Partnership that fulfils statutory obligations in relation to Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews.

The Partnership brings together senior representatives from various agencies (including the Council, Cheshire Constabulary, Cheshire Fire and Rescue and NHS Cheshire and Merseyside ICB) to develop and implement the Domestic Abuse Strategy, which will be informed by the upcoming Halton Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment.

Halton has also recently made progress by adding a domestic abuse victim survivor to its Halton Safeguarding Adults Board.

Statutory Duties of Halton Borough Council

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places several statutory duties on Halton Borough Council concerning support for victims and their children living in safe accommodation. The Council must:

- Establish a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board (see Halton Domestic Abuse Partnership above)
- Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment of accommodation-based domestic abuse support at least every three years
- Update and publish any relevant strategies for delivering support services based on this assessment
- Implement the strategy through commissioning or decommissioning services as needed
- Commission and provide accommodation-based support, ensuring the availability of services such as refuges, dispersed accommodation, sanctuary schemes and specialist provision

Domestic Abuse Support Services

Halton Borough Council provides domestic abuse support through several avenues, including a dedicated Domestic Abuse Housing Officer, Adult Social Care and Children's Services, but also has a specialist in-house Domestic Abuse Service with a team of trained Independent Domestic Violence Advisors. Halton currently has a Domestic Abuse Manager, 4.5 IDVAs, a specialist Harm Prevention Officer, 1 Administration Officer, and 1 Performance and Improvement Officer, and is currently recruiting for a Senior IDVA.

Halton's IDVAs act as the primary point of contact for medium to high-risk victims of domestic abuse. They provide practical and emotional support to improve safety and reduce harm. The support offered includes:

- Conducting risk assessments, discussing appropriate options, and developing individualised safety and support plans
- Participating in Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) to coordinate safeguarding responses for high-risk victims
- Providing information, emotional support, and practical assistance related to criminal and civil court processes, including attending hearings where appropriate
- Offering housing-related advice and support, including access to sanctuary schemes, emergency accommodation, and long-term housing solutions
- Facilitating access to legal advice and advocacy, including support around protective orders and family law matters
- Delivering specialist support tailored to the needs of individuals with protected characteristics (e.g., disability, race, sexual orientation) and those with multiple or complex needs, such as mental health issues or substance use
- Supporting victims to engage with additional services, including counselling, children's services, and health care professionals

Halton's IDVAs play a critical role in ensuring victims feel supported, informed, and protected throughout their recovery and any criminal justice proceedings.

Commissioned Services in Halton

Halton Borough Council commissions additional domestic abuse services from key local providers, including:

- *Refuge - SHAP*
- *Resolve – Children's Society*
- *RASAC (Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre)* – part-funded by Community Safety

Other Local Services

Several local organisations within Halton, Cheshire and the Liverpool City Region offer information, advice and support free of charge. Halton's new domestic abuse website will include more information relating to these available services:

- **Halton Women's Centre:** A multi-service hub for women and children experiencing domestic abuse, offering support groups, outreach, and advocacy
- **Fortuna Female Society:** A community group offering a supportive network for women, including their Women:Kind Café for women affected by domestic abuse
- **Authentic Voice Forum:** A monthly forum for survivors and those affected by domestic abuse to have their say on how services work to support those experiencing domestic abuse

- **Cheshire CARES (Cope and Recovery Enhanced Service):** an enhanced service offering emotional and practical support to help victims cope and recover from the impact of crime.
- **Citizens Advice, Halton:** An independent and impartial charity ready to support people with a wide range of help, including relationship issues, problems with housing, access to grants, advocacy and representation
- **Cheshire & Merseyside RASASC:** Confidential and anonymous phone line, counselling, pre-trial therapy and support groups (online and face to face) for anyone who has experienced sexual violence, including specialist counselling for children and young people.
- **Venus:** Charity offering support for victims of abuse in Halton, predominantly for children, young people and vulnerable adults. Venus offers both a course and one-to-one support in the community, focusing on promoting good home conditions.

National and Local Prevalence of Domestic Abuse

According to the CSEW⁵⁸ for the year ending March 2025, an estimated 3.8 million people aged 16 years and over (in England and Wales) experienced domestic abuse in the last year, equating to 7.8% of the adult population. This includes approximately 2.3 million women (9.5%) and 1.5 million men (6.5%).

Based on these national prevalence rates and local demographic data from the 2021 Census, it is estimated that over 8200 residents aged 16 and over in Halton may have experienced domestic abuse in the past year, including almost 5000 women and over 3000 men. However, it is important to recognise that applying national prevalence estimates to Halton may underestimate the true local scale of domestic abuse, given the borough's higher levels of deprivation and other overlapping risk factors.

According to the CSEW⁵⁹, the police recorded 815,941 domestic abuse-related offences reported in England and Wales in the year ending March 2025. This highlights the significant underreporting of domestic abuse to the police, given that an estimated 3.8 million people may have experienced domestic abuse during the same period.

As demonstrated in the paragraphs below, Halton's most at-risk groups include women aged 25 - 44, single-parent households, and individuals with long-term

⁵⁸ **Office for National Statistics** (2025) *Crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2025*.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2025#domestic-abuse>

⁵⁹ **Office for National Statistics** (2025) *Crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2025*.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2025#domestic-abuse>

illness or disability. These findings should inform targeted service planning and outreach.

Sex and Gender Identity

Domestic abuse remains a gendered crime. According to the latest CSEW, year ending March 2025, an estimated 2.3 million women and 1.5 million men experienced domestic abuse in the past year. Police-recorded data show that 72.5% of domestic abuse-related crime victims were female, which rose to 92.1% for domestic abuse-related sexual offences. Between March 2021 and March 2023, 65.4% of domestic homicide victims were women, compared to 12.3% of non-domestic homicide victims.⁶⁰

Survivors may also self-identify, identify as non-binary, transgender male, transgender female or other. A 2021 SafeLives study found that for trans victims and survivors of domestic abuse, 72% had experienced multiple forms of abuse, 81% of perpetrators were male, and 58% had housing needs.⁶¹

Halton has a population of approximately 128,478 (based on 2021 census data), with an estimated 103,000 residents aged 16 and over. Based on national prevalence rates, it is estimated that almost 5000 women and over 3000 men in Halton may have experienced domestic abuse in the past year.

Since 2023, Halton's Domestic Abuse Team's records of all closed cases indicate that 83.02% involved female victims, 16.78% male victims, and 0.2% where the gender was unknown.

Age

In 2021, the CSEW removed the upper age limit for survey respondents, which was previously 59 years. In the year ending 2024, the order of prevalence for domestic abuse by age group (in England and Wales) was as follows:

16 – 19: 8.7%
20 – 24: 7.1%
25- 34: 5.1%
35 – 44: 5.1%
60 – 74: 4%
55 – 59: 3.8%
75 and over: 2.1%

The percentage of women who experienced domestic abuse in the last year was significantly higher than men for the majority of age groups, except for those aged 24 years and under, and those aged 55 to 59 years, where there was no statistically

⁶⁰ **Office for National Statistics** (2024). *Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2024*.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabusevictimcharacteristicsenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2024>

⁶¹ **SafeLives** (2021) *Transgender victims' and survivors' experiences of domestic abuse*.

<https://safelives.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Transgender-victim-survivors-experiences-of-domestic-abuse-briefing.pdf>

significant difference in the prevalence of domestic abuse between men and women.⁶²

Based on the 2021 Census, Halton Borough has a population of approximately 104,000 residents aged 16 and over. Applying the national prevalence rate of 4.8% for domestic abuse among individuals aged 16 and over, it is estimated that around 4992 people in Halton may have experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2024.

Since 2023, Halton's Domestic Abuse Team's records of all closed cases show that the most frequent age groups they have worked with are 35-44 (30.83% of cases) and 25-34 (26.82% of cases).

Ethnicity

Halton is a largely homogenous borough, with 96.5% of its population identifying as White according to the most recent census data. Other ethnic groups include 1.1% identifying as Asian, Asian British, or Asian Welsh; 0.4% as Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean, or African; 1.4% as Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups; and 0.6% as Other ethnic groups. English is the primary language for the vast majority of residents, at 97.34%. Furthermore, only about 3% of the population was born outside the UK, reflecting relatively low levels of recent immigration compared to more ethnically diverse urban areas.

Data from Halton's Domestic Abuse Team on closed cases mirrors this demographic profile, with most individuals identifying as White British. A small proportion, 1.03%, are recorded as 'other white origin,' while 2.84% identify with different ethnicities. However, ethnicity information is missing in 31.9% of cases, which may impact the accuracy and interpretation of these statistics.

For the year ending March 2024, the CSEW showed that there were some statistically significant differences between ethnic groups in relation to experiencing domestic abuse. Mixed (7.1%), Other (5.1%) and White (5%) were the most highly represented groups, with Black or Black British (3.4%) and Asian or Asian British (3%) following.⁶³ However, it is important to consider that lower representation of domestic abuse in some ethnic groups may reflect cultural factors such as stigma, differing perceptions of abuse, or barriers to reporting, rather than actual lower incidence. These factors can influence the willingness or ability of individuals from certain communities to disclose their experiences, potentially leading to an underestimation of domestic abuse within these groups.

Based on the previous estimate of over 8000 (approximately 8276) Halton residents having possibly experienced domestic abuse in the last year, this translates to approximately 8067 residents in the White ethnic group, around 166 in the Mixed

⁶² **Office for National Statistics** (2024) *Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2024*.
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabusevictimcharacteristicsenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2024>

⁶³ **Office for National Statistics** (2024) *Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2024*.
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabusevictimcharacteristicsenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2024>

ethnic group, about 12 in the Black ethnic group, and roughly 29 in the Asian ethnic group who may have experienced domestic abuse during that period.

Sexual Orientation

The CSEW does not routinely include breakdowns by sexual orientation. This omission means that data often fails to fully capture the experiences of LGBTQ+ populations.

A 2024 article by DIVA Magazine summarised key findings from an ONS data release that included victim characteristics by sexual orientation and gender identity. According to this report, gay men are more likely to experience domestic abuse compared to straight men (7.6% of gay men compared to 2.8% of straight men), and lesbians are less likely to experience domestic abuse compared to straight women (3.4% compared to 6.3%). This aligns with the fact that most perpetrators of intimate partner violence and domestic violence are men. Surprisingly, 11.2% of bisexual women reported experiencing domestic abuse in the last year, compared to 4.5% of heterosexual individuals. This includes a far higher rate of sexual assault by partners.⁶⁴

These findings are consistent with longer-term evidence cited in the Home Office's Domestic Abuse Act 2021 Statutory Guidance⁶⁵, which recognises LGBTQ+ communities as facing heightened risks of abuse, often compounded by barriers to disclosure and access to services. The guidance states that "LGBT victims may experience additional vulnerabilities and barriers when seeking help, including fear of discrimination or being outed".

A recent study by Galop gave some insight into the prevalence of the LGBTQ+ experience of family abuse. 29% of 5000 LGBTQ+ respondents had experienced abuse from a family member or members (and 43% of trans and non-binary people).⁶⁶

In Halton's 2021 census, 2736 people identified as gay or lesbian (1555), bisexual (976), pansexual (162), queer (4), asexual (32) or other (7), making up 2.63% of the area's population aged 16 and over.

Marital Status

Recent census data⁶⁷ reveals a notable shift in relationship patterns among Halton residents aged 16 and over, aligning closely with both regional and national trends. In 2021, 39.3% of Halton adults reported never having been married or in a civil partnership, an increase from 35.4% in 2011. At the same time, the proportion of those who were married or in a registered civil partnership declined from 45.1% to

⁶⁴ Kelley, N. (2024) *New data shows bi+ women and trans people are more likely to experience domestic abuse*, DIVA Magazine.

<https://diva-magazine.com/2024/11/28/new-data-shows-bi-women-and-trans-people-are-more-likely-to-experience-domestic-abuse>

⁶⁵ Home Office (2022) *Domestic Abuse Act 2021: Statutory guidance*.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-act-2021/domestic-abuse-statutory-guidance>

⁶⁶ Galop (2022) *LGBT+ experiences of abuse from family members*, Galop LGBT+ anti-violence charity.

<https://www.galop.org.uk/resources/lgbt-experiences-of-abuse-from-family-members>

⁶⁷ Office for National Statistics (2023) *How life has changed in Halton: Census 2021*.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E06000006>

42.2%. The percentage of adults who were divorced or had dissolved a civil partnership fell slightly, from 9.8% to 9.6%. These changes reflect broader societal shifts in attitudes toward marriage and long-term partnerships.

These trends in Halton are consistent with those seen across the North West and England more widely. In the North West, the share of adults who had never married or entered a civil partnership rose from 35.6% to 39.4%, while across England the increase was from 34.6% to 37.9%. A key factor behind these shifts is the evolving legal recognition of relationships: same-sex marriages became legal in England and Wales in 2014, and opposite-sex civil partnerships were introduced in 2019. These developments have expanded the range of formal relationship options; however, they have not resulted in an overall increase in people entering formal partnerships.

Importantly, there is a clear correlation between relationship status and vulnerability to domestic abuse. A recent CSEW⁶⁸ shows that separated (15%), divorced (11.8%), and single individuals (7.6%) are significantly more likely to experience domestic abuse than those who are married or in a civil partnership (2.5%) or widowed (2.4%). These national patterns are relevant locally in Halton, where similar relationship status profiles are emerging. It is important to note that relationships and marital status may change as a result of the abuse experienced.

Overall, Halton's relationship demographics are evolving in line with broader trends, with increasing numbers of adults delaying or opting out of formal partnerships. These shifts have important implications for local services, particularly concerning domestic abuse prevention and support, where single, divorced, and separated individuals are disproportionately affected.

Employment Status and Occupation

Between 2011 and 2021⁶⁹ Halton experienced the third-largest reduction in unemployment among people aged 16 and over (excluding full-time students) in the North West. The unemployment rate in Halton fell significantly from 5.1% to 2.7%, a decrease of 2.4 percentage points. Only Knowsley and Liverpool saw larger declines during this period, with Knowsley's rate dropping from 5.9% to 3.1% and Liverpool's from 6.2% to 3.4%.

This positive trend was reflected across the entire North West region, where unemployment decreased from 4.2% to 2.8%. Despite these improvements, it's important to note that the 2021 Census occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, a time of rapid changes to the labour market influenced by lockdowns, guidance, and furlough schemes, which may have impacted the data.

Other economic activity indicators in Halton showed relatively stable employment rates for those aged 16 and over (excluding full-time students), with slight decreases in full-time student employment and minor changes in economic inactivity categories such as retirement, long-term illness, and caregiving.

⁶⁸ **Office for National Statistics** (2024) *Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2024*.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabusevictimcharacteristicsenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2024>

⁶⁹ **Office for National Statistics** (2023) *How life has changed in Halton: Census 2021*.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E06000006>

A recent CSEW⁷⁰ reported that adults with long-term or temporary illnesses (12.9%) and those looking after family and home (8.4%) experience higher rates of domestic abuse compared to employed individuals (4.6%). Unemployed adults also face a slightly higher risk (6.8%) than those employed, as well as students (9.9%), while retired individuals (2.4%) report the lowest rates. Given Halton's improving employment rates - with unemployment decreasing from 5.1% in 2011 to 2.7% in 2021 - this data suggests that employed residents may be somewhat less vulnerable to domestic abuse than unemployed or economically inactive groups. However, the relatively higher risk among those with health issues or caregiving responsibilities highlights a need for targeted support services in Halton to protect these vulnerable populations, especially as the area still has a significant proportion of residents who are economically inactive due to illness or family care.

Working hours in Halton

In 2021, 7.9% of employed Halton residents aged 16 and over reported working 15 hours or less per week, a figure virtually unchanged from 7.8% in 2011. Meanwhile, the proportion working over 49 hours per week decreased from 10.0% to 8.8%, and those working between 31 and 48 hours increased from 62.0% to 64.5%.

Halton had the joint third lowest percentage in the country of people working 15 hours or less per week, tied with Wakefield. Only the City of London (7.2%) and Knowsley (7.8%) had lower proportions, though comparisons with the City of London should be made cautiously due to its unique size.

It is again worth noting that working hours in 2021 may have been influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Household Structure

According to a recent CSEW,⁷¹ single-person households with children experience a higher prevalence of domestic abuse compared to other household types.

Specifically, 20.1% of individuals in single-person households with children reported experiencing domestic abuse in the past year, compared to 4.4% in households with no children and 4.6% in households with multiple people and one or more children.

Applying these national prevalence rates to Halton, which has approximately 53,000 households, the estimated number of households experiencing domestic abuse is as follows:

- **Single-person households with children:** Approximately 10,653 households (20.1% of 53,000)
- **Households with no children:** Approximately 2,332 households (4.4% of 53,000)

⁷⁰ **Office for National Statistics** (2024). *Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2024*.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabusevictimcharacteristicsenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2024>

⁷¹ **Office for National Statistics** (2024) *Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2024*.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabusevictimcharacteristicsenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2024>

- **Households with multiple people and one or more children:**

Approximately 2,438 households (4.6% of 53,000)

These estimates suggest that single-parent households in Halton are disproportionately affected by domestic abuse. This highlights the need for targeted support services and interventions to address the specific challenges faced by these households. Again, it is important to note that household structure may have changed as a result of abuse.

Crimes and Convictions

In the year ending March 2024, police in England and Wales recorded approximately 1,350,428 domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes, of which 851,062 were recorded as crimes. Nationally, 72,641 domestic abuse suspects were referred to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), and 49,046 of these resulted in a charge, reflecting a high charging rate of 79%, the highest recorded to date⁷². For the year ending 2025, police recorded approximately 815,941 domestic-abuse related offences, showing a 4% decrease from the previous year.⁷³

Within Cheshire Constabulary, which covers Halton, local enforcement data reflects robust efforts to address domestic abuse. A 2024 inspection found that 63% of 678 domestic abuse arrests involved the use of force, demonstrating consistent and proactive policing⁷⁴. In Cheshire, domestic abuse also features prominently in serious violent crime, accounting for one-third of violent crimes with injury, nearly 30% of rapes, and more than a quarter of knife-related offences⁷⁵.

Available Domestic Abuse Data

Cheshire Constabulary

The following information was shared by Cheshire Constabulary concerning domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes in Halton, and comparatively, the wider Cheshire area.

In 2024, a total of 2,461 domestic abuse-related offences were recorded in Halton. This equated to a rate of 19.2 offences per 1,000 population, which remained higher than the overall rate for Cheshire Constabulary, recorded at 13.7. The most commonly recorded offences during the year were assault without injury, stalking,

⁷² **Office for National Statistics** (2024) *Domestic abuse and the criminal justice system, England and Wales: November 2024*.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabuseandthecriminaljusticesystemenglandandwales/november2024/pdf>

⁷³ **SafeLives**. (2025) *Statement in response to ONS crime figures 2025*

<https://safelives.org.uk/news-views/ons-crime-figures-2025-statement/>

⁷⁴ **HMICFRS** (2024) *PEEL 2023–25: An inspection of Cheshire Constabulary*. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services.

<https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets-hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/uploads/peel-assessment-2023-25-cheshire.pdf>

⁷⁵ **Warrington Borough Council** (2024) *Cheshire Serious Violence Strategy 2024–2029*.

<https://www.warrington.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-03/Cheshire%20Serious%20Violence%20Strategy%202024%20-2029%20-%20January%202024%20v3.pdf>

and assault with injury. These three categories remained consistent with 2023 and together accounted for over half, approximately 55%, of all domestic abuse-related incidents in Halton.

Looking at the monthly distribution of offences, the highest number of incidents occurred in August (230 offences) and May (227 offences). In contrast, October and November saw the lowest volumes, with 155 and 177 offences respectively. Interestingly, this pattern differs slightly from the rest of the force area, which experienced a peak in June during the European football tournament.

Geographically, Runcorn Local Policing Unit (LPU) recorded the highest number of offences, with 1,243 incidents over the year. Within Runcorn, Runcorn East experienced the greatest demand, followed by Runcorn West and Widnes Outer. Widnes Inner was the only cluster to see an increase in offences compared to the previous year. There were no notable changes to crime recording practices in 2024, although it is possible that the introduction of the Principal Crime Rule in the previous year continued to influence how some offences were captured.

Beat Team Cluster	Domestic Abuse			
	2023	2024	Change	% Change
Runcorn	1362	1243	-119	-9%
Runcorn East	743	650	-93	-13%
Runcorn West	619	593	-26	-4%
Widnes	1211	1218	7	1%
Widnes Inner	532	562	30	6%
Widnes Outer	679	656	-23	-3%
Total	2573	2461	-112	-4%

Of note, 68% (1,661 offences) of the domestic-related offences recorded across Halton also had a VAWG flag, suggesting many victims were female.

Domestic-related Violence with Injury

In 2024, there were 436 recorded domestic abuse-related offences involving violence with injury in Halton, representing a rate of 3.4 offences per 1,000 population, higher than the rate for Cheshire Constabulary overall, which stood at 2.4. Unlike the broader trend for domestic abuse offences in Halton, which saw higher volumes in the Runcorn policing area, incidents involving violence with injury were more commonly recorded in Widnes, with 227 offences compared to 209 in Runcorn.

Across all local policing clusters, incident volumes in this category were lower than in the previous year. Runcorn West recorded the highest number of offences in the area, followed by other clusters within Runcorn and Widnes.

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

In 2024, a total of 3,349 Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) offences were recorded in Halton - the lowest annual figure in the five-year period beginning in 2020. The rate of VAWG offences in Halton stood at 26.1 offences per 1,000 population, which remained higher than the Cheshire Constabulary average of 19.2 per 1,000.

Both Local Policing Units (LPUs) in Halton recorded high levels of demand for VAWG offences in 2024. Runcorn LPU reported the largest number of incidents overall, followed closely by Widnes LPU. Within Runcorn, the Runcorn East cluster saw the highest volumes during the year. These areas also experienced the highest levels of recorded VAWG offences in the previous year, reflecting consistent demand over time.

Beat Team Cluster	Violence Against Women and Girls			
	2023	2024	Change	% Change
Runcorn	1955	1714	-241	-12%
Runcorn East	1093	920	-173	-16%
Runcorn West	862	794	-68	-8%
Widnes	1753	1635	-118	-7%
Widnes Inner	823	778	-45	-5%
Widnes Outer	930	857	-73	-8%
Total	3708	3349	-359	-10%

Stalking and Harassment

In 2024, there were 2,251 offences recorded under the Stalking and Harassment Home Office offence group in Halton. This included 1,243 harassment offences, 493 stalking offences, 272 malicious communication offences, and 242 offences related to controlling or coercive behaviour. Compared to other areas within the Cheshire force, Halton continued to record higher rates across all categories, with an overall rate of 17.6 offences per 1,000 population, above the force average of 12.7. Harassment in Halton stood at 9.7 per 1,000, stalking at 3.8, malicious communications at 2.1, and controlling or coercive behaviour at 1.9.

At a local level, Widnes LPU recorded more offences than Runcorn, accounting for the majority of the increase in total volume. Notably, changes in malicious communication and harassment figures were most evident in both Widnes and Runcorn. Within Widnes, the Widnes Inner cluster reported the most significant increase in incidents, primarily driven by a rise in harassment offences. In contrast, Runcorn East and Widnes Outer clusters saw small decreases.

Widnes LPU was the largest contributor to the borough-wide increases in harassment, stalking, and controlling or coercive behaviour, and also to the decrease in malicious communications. Of all stalking and harassment offences recorded in Halton, 41% were flagged as domestic abuse-related. For stalking offences specifically, this rose to 91%, higher than the force-wide figure of 88%. Additionally, 60% of all offences within this category were flagged as Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), a proportion that aligns with the overall force average and indicates that most victims were female. As with other domestic-related offences, recording patterns may still be influenced by the Principal Crime Rule introduced in the previous year (this rule states that when several crimes occur during the same event, only the most serious offence is recorded or prosecuted, rather than counting every single offence separately).

The high rate of stalking offences linked to domestic abuse suggests a need for enhanced early intervention and digital safety support.

Sexual Offences

In 2024, there were 530 recorded sexual offences in Halton - the highest total reported in the past five years. This included 191 rape offences and 339 categorised as other sexual offences. Child sexual abuse accounted for 376 of the total, also reaching its highest level during the period. The rate of recorded sexual offences in Halton was 4.1 per 1,000 population, exceeding the Cheshire Constabulary average of 3.7. Rates were also comparatively higher in Halton for rape (1.5 versus 1.3), other sexual offences (2.6 versus 2.3), and child sexual abuse (2.9 versus 2.4).

When broken down by policing area, both Widnes and Runcorn saw an increase in sexual offence volumes. The rise in Widnes was more prominent, largely driven by an increase in other sexual offences. Across the policing clusters, Runcorn West recorded the largest rise, again primarily due to increases in other sexual offence types. Runcorn East, by contrast, saw a drop in reported rape offences and the overall total. Widnes LPU accounted for all of the increase in rape offences across the borough and was also the primary contributor to the increase in other sexual offences.

Among the offence types within this category, exposure and voyeurism recorded the most notable rise. Additionally, 59% of all sexual offences recorded in Halton were marked with a Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) flag, highlighting the disproportionate impact of these crimes on female victims. Reporting patterns may also have been influenced by wider cultural or media factors, such as public attention drawn to historic cases through national operations like Operation Yewtree.

Halton continues to experience a higher demand for domestic abuse and related services compared to the wider Cheshire area, with consistently elevated offence rates. Offences such as stalking, harassment, and sexual violence show strong links to domestic abuse, both in terms of case numbers and the predominance of female victims. Among local areas, Widnes, particularly the Inner cluster, emerges as a significant concern due to noticeable rises across several offence types.

Seasonal patterns indicate that reporting tends to peak during spring and summer, which could help shape how and when support services are deployed. These findings highlight the ongoing need for trauma-informed, gender-responsive services, especially for women and children, and make a strong case for sustained investment in prevention, early intervention, and wraparound community support.

Halton Domestic Abuse Database

In addition to recorded offences, Halton's domestic abuse service received 1,833 referrals during 2024/25 across all risk levels. Of these, 603 cases were allocated to an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA), while 525 individuals declined support, and 437 could not be contacted despite follow-up attempts. A further 127 referrals were identified as perpetrators. The police remained the primary source of referral, demonstrating the continued role of frontline services in identifying and responding to domestic abuse cases. These figures reflect both the growing demand and challenges in engagement, and highlight the importance of outreach, trauma-informed practice, and consistent follow-up support.

MARAC Data

A MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) is a meeting where information is shared on victims at the highest risk of serious harm or murder as a result of domestic abuse. It is attended by representatives of local agencies such as the police and health. The meetings usually take place monthly or fortnightly and discuss an average of 16 cases at each meeting.

Between January and December 2024, there were 128,596 cases discussed across 283 MARACs in England and Wales, marking a 3% increase from the previous year and a 15% rise since 2020. The number of cases per 10,000 adult women also rose to 48, surpassing the expected benchmark of 40. Police remained the primary referrers, responsible for 64% of all cases, slightly up from 63% last year. Despite this rise in overall cases, the repeat case rate decreased marginally to 30%, staying within the typical range of 28-40%.⁷⁶

Victim demographics revealed some emerging trends, including an increase in cases involving victims with disabilities, which accounted for 10.3% of referrals, up from 10.1%. Cases involving racially minoritised victims rose to 15.6%, and male victims represented 6.5% of cases. Young victims aged 16 to 17 years made up approximately 1.3% of cases, equating to around 1,698 individuals. These shifts highlight the growing identification and referral of diverse victim groups requiring targeted support.

The rise in both the total number of cases and the rate per 10,000 adult women suggests improved detection and referral processes, potentially aided by new MARAC portal tools that use updated population data from the 2021 census. The stable repeat case rate underscores the ongoing cyclical nature of domestic abuse and the importance of long-term intervention strategies. Additionally, the increases in referrals among disabled individuals, racially minoritised groups, and male victims emphasize the need for more inclusive and tailored domestic abuse services.

Cheshire

In the year ending March 2024, there were 2,190 cases discussed at MARACs in Cheshire⁷⁷ with 652 individuals being discussed at MARACs in Halton. The number of domestic abuse cases discussed at MARACs was 47 per 10,000 adult females. This reflects a moderate rate of activity in relation to the adult female population.

Cheshire recorded 573 repeat cases, which accounted for 26% of its total. This indicates a relatively lower proportion of repeat victimisation being referred to MARAC compared to other areas.

2,311 children were living in households involved in MARAC cases in Cheshire, which corresponds to the population size and reflects the number of young people exposed to high-risk domestic abuse within the county. Overall, Cheshire demonstrates steady MARAC activity with a lower-than-average proportion of repeat cases and a significant number of children affected.

⁷⁶ SafeLives (2025) *Marac data – Key findings January 2024 to December 2024*.

<https://safelives.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Marac-Data-External-Key-Findings-January-24-to-December-24.pdf>

⁷⁷ SafeLives (2024) *Our quarterly Marac data*.

<https://safelives.org.uk/research-policy/practitioner-datasets/marac-data>

735 cases were heard at MARAC in Halton in 2024/25. Although 700 cases were heard, the referral rate could be much higher as a MARAC consideration meeting screens referrals, and this figure does not include repeat referrals.

Halton is actively working to enhance its MARAC practices, including a MARAC review, plans to establish a dedicated Steering Group - a structure commonly adopted by other local authorities. To support this development, Halton's Domestic Abuse Manager will participate in a shadowing program with another local authority that is recognised for its exemplary MARAC model.

Safe Accommodation Data

Halton Borough Council is currently developing a new borough-wide Housing Strategy, supported by a comprehensive Housing Needs Assessment. This will include data on supported accommodation, homelessness, and domestic abuse-related housing needs. A large-scale household survey was conducted in late 2024 to inform this work, and the draft strategy is expected to be published in 2025.

While specific figures for domestic abuse presentations to housing services in 2023/24 have not been published, Halton's strategy acknowledges the need for safe, affordable, and accessible housing, particularly for vulnerable groups, including survivors of domestic abuse.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 outlines statutory duties for local authorities to provide housing-based support for domestic abuse victims/survivors. This act aims to ensure that victims/survivors can access safe accommodation and appropriate support services.

Halton's Whole Picture Approach details clear work streams and outlines key priorities to ensure that local people are supported at the earliest stage of their experience to prevent the escalation of risk and harm. This includes the provision of specialist services to support the whole family – victims and their children, as well as those who harm. The intention is to work together to provide safety, recovery and sustainable change.

Accommodation need arises where prevention and early intervention has not been possible or successful, and is a last resort for individuals and families who are at risk of further harm if they do not move out of their home.

Only a small minority of people need such provision as there are many ways in which Halton provides safety in homes and communities, including:

- Safety planning with and support for victims to end abusive relationships in a planned and risk-managed way
- Using a range of multi-agency fora to bring all involved agencies together to safeguard clients
- Accessing the criminal and civil justice system to address the source of the problem, i.e. the alleged perpetrator
- Engaging the person who is harming in changing their behaviour

However there remain some families where the person causing harm continues to pose a significant threat and there is no other option than to seek safe alternative accommodation. This is provided locally through our Halton Domestic Abuse Service commission, where temporary supported accommodation (refuge) is made available to those in need. Service users have indicated that their preference is to maintain as 'normal' a life for them and their children as possible, and how important it is that we offer a range of solutions rather than a one size fits all.

Anyone accessing accommodation receives one to one support to address the abuse that has brought them into temporary accommodation and to support them towards independence and gaining a new permanent home, the offer of support will be accessible in all housing options provided in Halton.

The partnership between the council and the local registered social landlords is strong, working in collaboration, Halton aims to further develop options that will strengthen the offer of support for people who wish to remain in their own homes through an extended range of sanctuary measures.

The Sanctuary Scheme is a multi-agency victim-centred initiative which aims to enable households at risk of violence to remain safely in their own homes by installing a 'Sanctuary' in the home and through the provision of support to the household.'

Whole Housing Approach

The Whole Housing Approach is an evidence-based model that has been used as a framework to develop and construct a model for Halton. It was first conceptualised in 2018 by the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) in collaboration with the National Housing and Domestic Abuse Policy and Practice Group. The approach aims to:

- Enable earlier identification and intervention of domestic abuse
- Reduce the number of people rendered homeless because of domestic abuse
- Enable survivors to remain safely in their homes where it is their choice to do so, or to keep their tenancy status if they relocate
- Where a current joint tenancy is in place, enable the tenancy to be altered so the perpetrator is removed and the tenancy is put in the victim's sole name

The diagram below illustrates the model and its twelve components. The blue circles represent different forms of accommodation, including the three main tenure types (social, private rented, and private ownership) and temporary accommodation settings (refuges, supported accommodation). The orange circles are the housing options and specialist domestic abuse services designed to provide safe and stable housing that allow victims/ survivors to either remain in their property or relocate to new accommodation.



In response to the local need for accommodation, Halton offers a range of options including:

- Housing-related support – providing housing-related advice and support, for example, securing a permanent home and advice on how to live safely and independently
- Specialist support for victims with relevant protected characteristics and those presenting with complex needs
- Specialist services that can respond to those people who require interpreters, have regard to cultural and faith requirements, mental health advice and support, and immigration advice
- Inclusive, supported temporary accommodation
- Community-based supported accommodation
- Secondary stage accommodation
- House for life options
- Access to supported accommodation for people not eligible for benefits
- Grants to facilitate safe access to supported accommodation

Under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, victims/survivors of domestic abuse are automatically classed as having priority need for housing. This means local authorities must secure suitable accommodation if the person is homeless or at risk of homelessness. Previously, victims/ survivors had to prove they were vulnerable due to Domestic Abuse, but now no additional vulnerability test is required.

Local authorities must take action to prevent or relieve homelessness for all eligible applicants. These duties include:

Prevention Duty (56 days) applies if a victim is threatened with homelessness within 56 days (e.g., they are still in their home but cannot stay due to domestic abuse). The council must provide advice, support and practical help, such as arranging alternative accommodation before they become homeless, helping them remain in their home safely (e.g., through sanctuary schemes providing extra security) or assisting with financial help (e.g., Discretionary Housing Payments.)

Relief Duty (56 days) applies if a victim is already homeless, the council must make reasonable steps to help secure accommodation for at least six months. This could involve placing them in emergency accommodation (e.g., refuge, hostel, or temporary housing), helping them find private rented accommodation, or referring them to housing associations.

Main Housing Duty is required where the victim remains homeless after the 56-day relief duty; the council has a duty to provide long-term housing if they:

- Are eligible (most UK residents qualify)
- Are in priority need (which all domestic abuse victims/survivors are)
- Are not intentionally homeless (e.g., they did not deliberately refuse suitable housing)

Councils may offer social housing or help with private rental properties.

Normally, applicants must have a local connection to a local council area; however, domestic abuse survivors are exempt and can apply to any local authority. This is crucial for those needing to escape their abuser's area.

Local authorities must ensure any accommodation offered is suitable and safe, considering the risk from the perpetrator (e.g., the victim must not be housed near them) and the victim's support needs (e.g., access to domestic abuse services), the location (e.g., school, work, family support). Survivors can challenge unsuitable accommodation if it puts them at risk.

Housing Strategy Recommendations

In 2024, Halton Borough Council commissioned consultants to conduct a Housing Needs Assessment, which considered the suitability of accommodation for domestic abuse survivors. It found that there is insufficient domestic abuse emergency accommodation, and a total lack of domestic abuse accommodation for those who cannot be placed in emergency accommodation, i.e., complex needs, offending history. It states that there is a need for emergency accommodation for residents, rather than for them to be sent outside of the borough or put in hotels. Equally, where vulnerable families face eviction, the assessment found that the support pathway needs to be improved across multi-disciplinary teams who can prevent rather than respond. Homelessness service providers in Halton confirmed that survivors of domestic abuse are not being given the top priority for accommodation. This is against the requirements of the Domestic Abuse Act.

This Housing Needs Assessment supported the creation of a new Housing Strategy, which, at the time of writing, is currently in draft form. The new strategy places domestic abuse accommodation at the heart of its future priorities. In the Council's Household Survey, supporting survivors of domestic abuse emerged as the second-highest concern, with 68.3% of respondents identifying it as a strategic priority. In response, the Housing Strategy sets out a clear and ambitious plan to improve access to safe, appropriate housing and to align its delivery with survivor needs, legal duties and trauma-informed practice.

Key proposals include:

- Ensuring survivors are granted appropriate housing priority via the Housing Options Team
- Conducting a full review of domestic abuse housing needs to better understand scale, complexity, and demand
- Developing a new 3 - 4 bed refuge for emergency placements, including capacity to support individuals with complex needs
- Providing tailored accommodation options for older survivors (aged 60+)
- Strengthening and standardising Sanctuary Schemes across housing providers
- Supporting more survivors to remain safely in their homes, where appropriate
- Expanding perpetrator behaviour change support, with necessary resources
- Increasing access to safe, short-term accommodation for those not requiring long-term support
- Collaborating with private landlords to co-design a supportive housing scheme for survivors
- Reviewing commissioning options for emergency accommodation as part of ongoing delivery improvement

These proposals would address many of the needs and limitations identified within this Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment.

Available Housing Data

The MHGLC (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government), previously called DLUHC, compiles data to monitor progress and implementation of Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 across England. This relates to local authorities' duty to provide domestic abuse support services to domestic abuse victims within safe accommodation.

The latest report in 2023/24⁷⁸ reveals that English local authorities reported 63,580 referrals for domestic abuse safe accommodation. 36,870 (58%) of these were female adults, 1830 (3%) were male adults, 320 (1%) were trans or non-binary, and 24,940 (39%) were children. This demonstrates that the amount of males supported in safe accommodation services is extremely low compared to how many men are experiencing domestic abuse.

In 2023/4 Halton received 104 referrals for safe accommodation. Halton has 12 Refuge bed spaces and no dispersed, specialist, or second-stage accommodation available. The absence of these accommodation types may limit flexibility and options for victims, with a potential gap in supporting those with specialist or more diverse issues.

Despite not having specific specialist accommodation, Halton did report providing 'By and For' specialist services with targeted support, e.g., services that support specific

⁷⁸ **Office for National Statistics** (2024) *Domestic abuse in England and Wales – Data tool*.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/domesticabuseinenglandandwalesdatatool>

survivor groups such as counselling, advocacy, or casework. Halton reported 4 such services, each tailored for a different group, including Black and minoritised survivors, survivors with disabilities, LGBTQ+ survivors, and an 'other' category. In an area with very low diversity, this is crucial in ensuring inclusive support is available.

Halton's non-specialist accommodation available for both single and family households is currently as follows:

Brennan Lodge, Widnes	• 37 self-contained rooms offering supported provision for single clients • 2 self-contained rooms offering supported hostel provision for rough sleepers
Columba Hall, Widnes	• 14 self-contained apartments for families
Market Street/ Lacey Street, Widnes	• 4 self-contained apartments offering move-on provision for former rough sleepers
Grangeway Court, Runcorn	• 14 self-contained units offering supported provision for families
Halton Lodge, Runcorn	• 66 self-contained rooms offering supported hostel provision for single clients • 4 self-contained rooms offering supported hostel provision for rough sleepers

All of the above temporary supported hostel provision is used to accommodate vulnerable homeless households in accordance with Local Authority statutory duty.

Support Received in Safe Accommodation

In 2023/24, Halton supported 119 individuals through domestic abuse safe accommodation, with the majority of survivors receiving general support, as well as offering advocacy support, domestic abuse prevention advice, children's support, housing-related support, and financial/legal advice. Counselling and therapeutic support were notably limited, with only 8 individuals receiving this service, suggesting a potential gap in trauma-informed recovery provision.

According to Halton's Domestic Abuse database, there are currently 8 adults (including 2 families with 3 children) staying in their Refuge accommodation. Half of these are from Halton, half are from outside the borough. The average length of stay is currently 211 days.

Individuals Supported in Safe Accommodation

In 2024/25, 27 adults were supported in the refuge accommodation and have since left, including 21 single adults and 10 children within 6 families. The average length of stay was 97 days, with a max stay of 383 days. The most common age range for individuals staying was 25 – 34.

In 2023/4 Halton supported 119 individuals (roughly 0.09% of Halton's total population) who were referred for safe accommodation support. Of these, 92 were female adults (77%), 2 were male (2%), 1 who identified as trans or non-binary (1%), and 24 children (20%). This represents a much higher proportion of female adults and a lower proportion of children than the national average, demonstrating that Halton's safe accommodation services are predominantly accessed by adult women. This could suggest either fewer family placements, which may indicate a gap in provision for families. Halton may benefit from developing more child-inclusive services and male survivor pathways.

Nearly 30% of Halton's supported individuals (35) came from outside the borough, which is above the national average of 12%.

Halton supported 34 individuals with at least one special characteristic. These characteristics included (an individual may have multiple):

- 6 black and minoritised individuals (lower than the national average)
- 5 individuals with disabilities
- 2 ex-offenders (slightly higher than the national average)
- 5 individuals with drug support needs (higher than the national average)
- 10 individuals with alcohol support needs (significantly higher than the national average)
- 20 individuals with a history of mental health issues (slightly above the national average)
- 8 individuals under 25 (in line with national trend)
- 2 individuals aged 65+ (slightly higher than the national average)

Mental health needs are the most common special characteristic in Halton, which again demonstrates the need for more mental health support services, counselling, and therapeutic services.

Accommodation Types

71 out of the 119 individuals supported in safe accommodation were supported in refuge accommodation, which equates to 60% which is much higher than the national average of 31%. 48 were supported by sanctuary schemes, a type of support that helps victims of domestic abuse to remain safely in their own homes, rather than having to flee. The home can be made more secure through tailored safety measures, such as:

- Reinforced doors and locks
- Fireproof letterboxes
- Window alarms or security lighting
- Safe rooms with enhanced security features

These interventions are risk-assessed and delivered in partnership with the council and the police.

In Halton, sanctuary schemes make up a significant proportion of the borough's domestic abuse response, suggesting an emphasis on helping people stay in their homes where safely possible.

Length of Stay

Halton's most commonly reported length of stay in refuge accommodation is between 3 to 6 months, with the average stay being about 4 months. This is slightly higher than the English average. The length of stay was not captured in approximately 33% of cases (which may be due to lack of data or ongoing stays); however, this demonstrates stronger local data recording than nationally, where lengths of stay were not recorded in 52% of cases. A lack of dispersed accommodation and limited bedspaces could contribute to longer stays and reduce turnover, and restrict access for new referrals.

Short stays are more common in Halton than nationally, which could reflect early departures or limited suitability, or capacity.

Households Unable to Be Supported

In 2023/24, Halton reported that 57 households were unable to be supported. 46 of these cases were due to capacity constraints. This is more than double the national rate, indicating a local shortage of spaces.

2 cases were due to households not accepting referrals, 1 due to unmet needs, and 7 due to 'other reasons'.

Households Exiting Safe Accommodation

In 2023/24, 38 households stopped receiving accommodation support. Halton has a strong rate of planned move-ons (60.5%), which is encouraging and suggests effective case management for many survivors.

However, the proportion returning to live with the perpetrator, both from sanctuary and non-sanctuary settings, is alarmingly high (combined 36.8% vs 3.5% nationally). This may indicate:

- Coercive control or economic dependence
- Lack of long-term housing options
- Insufficient follow-up or outreach support

The eviction/asked to leave rate is also significantly higher than average, which may reflect challenges in managing complex needs or behavioural issues in a small service.

Domestic Abuse-Related Death Reviews

According to the Femicide Census, one woman has been killed every three days in the UK since 2009. 90% of the killers were family, partners, or known to the victim.

61% of women were killed by a current or former partner. 80% of the killings were committed in the home of either the victim or the perpetrator.⁷⁹

Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews are done when the death of a person aged 16 or over has, or appears to have, resulted in violence, abuse, or neglect by either a relative, a spouse, partner, or ex-partner, or a member of the same household. This includes death by suicide.

The purpose of a DARDR is to help identify lessons we can learn from the death, prevent further domestic abuse, and improve services for victims of domestic abuse.

The Domestic Homicide and Suspected Victim Studies 2020 – 2024 Report⁸⁰ stated that between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024, there were 262 domestic abuse-related deaths recorded in England and Wales. These included:

- 98 suspected suicides following domestic abuse (SVSDA)
- 80 intimate partner homicides (IPH)
- 39 adult family homicides
- 28 unexpected deaths
- 11 child deaths
- 6 'other' (where the victim and suspect lived together, but were not related or intimate partners)

For the second year in a row, suspected suicides following domestic abuse have overtaken the number of homicides involving current or previous partners (For LGBTQ+ victims, 68% of recorded cases were SVSDA). This reflects increased awareness and progress made against recommendations in the project's last report, which focused on improving policing's ability to better recognise and record the link between domestic abuse and suicide. The rise in suspected suicides linked to domestic abuse underscores the need for trauma-informed mental health support, early identification of coercive control, and stronger post-separation safeguarding.

Over four years (1 April 2020 – 31 March 2024), the number of people killed by their current or previous partner consistently represents around a third of domestic abuse-related deaths each year.

Between April 2020 and March 2024, there were 1012 deaths. These included 501 domestic homicides, 354 SVSDA, 71 unexpected deaths, 61 child deaths, and 25 deaths classified as 'other'. Overall, the most common method of death was by sharp instrument, accounting for 45% of domestic homicides. 73% of victims were female, and most were between 25 and 54 years old (60%). On the other hand, suspects were predominantly male (80%), with the majority aged 25 to 54 years old (69%).

Notably, across the four years of data collection, 22% of victims and 43% of suspects were recorded as having mental health needs. The most commonly recorded risk factors in relation to the suspected included mental ill health, as well as alcohol use, a history of coercive and controlling behaviour, and drug misuse. Another commonly recorded risk factor was separation (threat of actual ending of the relationship.)

⁷⁹ **Femicide Census** (2025) *Femicide Census – Profiles of Women Killed by Men*.

<https://www.femicidecensus.org>

⁸⁰ **Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme (VKPP)** (2025) *Domestic Homicide Project*.

<https://www.vkpp.org.uk/vkpp-work/domestic-homicide-project/>

Overall, 67% of suspects were known to the police as a suspect or perpetrator of domestic abuse.

While there have been no confirmed domestic abuse-related deaths in Halton since 2014, the Halton Domestic Abuse Partnership Board remains prepared to respond to and manage Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews (DARDRs) should they be required, with multi-agency coordination and survivor-informed learning at its core.

Feedback from Domestic Abuse Services

Halton Domestic Abuse Service Research

To gain deeper insight into the demand for domestic abuse support in the area, Halton Borough Council carried out a qualitative study. Input was gathered from service users and providers through a combination of surveys and a facilitated 'pinpoint' focus group. The objective was to explore the pressures on local services and highlight key challenges affecting the current system.

Service Providers:

The Council engaged with a range of local organisations working in the field of domestic abuse, including service providers, charities, and specialist agencies, to gather their perspectives. Participating organisations included Halton Housing, The Children's Society - Halton Resolve, RASASC Cheshire, Cheshire Constabulary, and Children's Services. The 'pinpoint' focus group session was attended by 8 representatives, including staff from Halton Borough Council, Probation, Change Grow Live, MyCWA and Halton Resolve. It is important to note that comments on staff performance and service needs reflect the views of a limited sample and apply across all agencies involved, not solely Halton's IDVA team.

Several key themes emerged from these discussions:

1. Strong Partnership Working and Positive IDVA Engagement

Findings:

- Consistent praise for IDVA responsiveness, professionalism, and collaboration.
- Evident staff dedication – IDVAs and other professionals show passion, teamwork and resilience despite heavy workloads.
- MARAC and multi-agency links seen as a strength.
- Strong collaboration between wider services.

Supporting Quotations:

"I am always impressed with the IDVA service... practical ideas and passionate support."

"Very good communication from IDVA service in a timely manner. They liaise with referrers on next steps."

"Target hardening tools are always increasing – doorbell initiatives etc. - great partnership with housing."

2. Gaps in Support for Marginalised & Complex Needs

Findings:

- Low confidence in support for LGBTQ+, deaf victims, those from ethnic minority groups, and those with immigration needs.
- Lack of services for low-to-medium risk cases and those not scoring high enough on DASH.
- Lack of specialist workers for complex cases, child-on-parent abuse, stalking, historic abuse, male victims and those without children.
- Inconsistent support for historic abuse cases.

Supporting Quotations:

“There is no real service offer for LGBTQ+ victims - that gap is very clear.”

“Support for those who don’t meet IDVA criteria is extremely limited.”

“We should be liaising more with ‘by and for’ organisations that support marginalised communities.”

3. Inconsistent Knowledge of Available Services

Findings:

- Staff struggled to navigate or keep up with which services exist and what they offer.
- Half said they could not easily find information about available services.
- Directory of services considered helpful but seen as hard to maintain.
- GP referrals remain low despite training.

Supporting Quotations:

“Do we have a current index of services? Is there a portal? It's hard to keep track.”

“An up-to-date website or service directory would be ideal.”

“Some services end suddenly due to funding – it makes consistency difficult.”

4. Court and Legal Support Is Limited or Overloaded

Findings:

- Support with legal matters, court orders, and attendance is stretched or unclear.
- Victims often moved instead of being legally protected in their own homes.
- Courts perceived as prioritising perpetrators’ rights over victims’.
- Lack of specialist domestic abuse training across services and courts.
- Long trial waits discourage victims and weaken testimony quality.

Supporting Quotations:

“The focus is still too much on moving the victim. More court support to remove the perpetrator is needed.”

“Court delays, overwhelmed services – legal support isn’t always by someone the victim knows.”

“Staff need better knowledge of court procedures and legal orders.”

5. Housing Support Is Helpful but Overwhelmed

Findings:

- Target hardening and MARAC participation by housing teams are seen as a strength.
- Refuge accommodation is difficult to access; hotel stays are impractical.

Supporting Quotations:

“Moving them doesn’t solve the issue as they often just move within the same area.”

“Hotel accommodation with no kitchen and children to feed is not sustainable.”

“Housing can be a blocker - survivors with kids often have no options but refuge, which they don’t want.”

6. Insufficient and Inconsistent Support for Children

Findings:

- Services for children affected by DA are limited, especially for trauma recovery.
- Lack of long-term support and a need for trauma-informed play therapy.
- Limited trauma-therapy provision is worsened by trial-related delays and long waiting lists.
- More prevention work needed in schools.

Supporting Quotations:

“There isn’t much locally for children affected by trauma.”

“Trauma-informed sessions are useful – we need more like this.”

“More facilities and qualified staff needed to support children long-term.”

7. Health and Mental Health Support Is Hard to Access

Findings:

- Support exists but is patchy, with long waits and a reliance on signposting.
- Survivors need practical and therapeutic support, not just prescriptions.
- Long counselling waiting lists, compounded by delays linked to court proceedings.

Supporting Quotations:

“Health is often ‘opt-in’ or closed - not helpful for complex needs.”

“Access to mental health support is too hard and takes too long.”

“Signposting is there, but actual delivery and accessibility is poor.”

8. Training Gaps and Suggestions

Findings:

- Staff in other services raised the need for further training in:
 - Legal processes (including Non-Molestation Orders)
 - Trauma-informed practice (including trauma-informed play therapy)
 - Support for marginalised communities
 - Service knowledge and referral pathways.
- Some social workers and services lack knowledge of domestic abuse (e.g., DASH risk assessments, differences between parental conflict vs. abuse).

Supporting Quotations:

“Trauma-informed play therapy training would be hugely beneficial.”

“We need to understand coercive control better and what each service offers.”

“Bite-sized, refresher, and CPD training on legal tools like Non-Molestation Orders would help.”

9. Common Systemic Challenges

Findings:

- Overstretched staff, high caseloads, and lack of communication (including from Children’s Social Care).
- Long wait times and survivors overwhelmed by demands from multiple agencies.
- Inconsistent referrals and limited access to information across teams.
- MARAC meetings could be shorter and more focused.
- Delays in police sharing case information and evidence.

Supporting Quotations:

“Survivors are penalised for speaking up - too many demands make them consider going back.”

“One key professional to mediate between agencies would make a huge difference.”

“We need better communication from CSC. They often don’t invite us to meetings or update us.”

10. Recommendations from Practitioners

Suggestions for Improvement:

- Create a central portal or index of services.
- Develop support for low- and medium-risk clients.
- Improve multi-agency coordination and feedback (e.g., MARAC).
- Increase access to counselling and trauma support.
- Better refuge availability, especially locally.
- Address staffing capacity in high-demand services like IDVA.
- Expand specialist provision for complex cases, historic abuse, and male victims.
- Increase prevention and awareness work (schools and community campaigns).
- Improve court processes and trial timelines.

Service Users:

Service users offered both praise and constructive criticism of domestic abuse services in Halton. While many had positive experiences, significant gaps and challenges were also identified. In total, there were 55 responses to the public survey. Again, it is important to note that comments and experiences are based on respondents' experience with all domestic violence services and support accessed in Halton, including police, third sector, NHS, and Halton’s IDVA service.

Key themes, with supporting feedback:

1. Service Usage and Awareness

Findings:

- All respondents had experienced domestic abuse (personally or through someone they knew).

- Almost 3/4 of respondents had used a support service, but many were unaware of what's available or how to access it.

Supporting Feedback:

"I didn't know it existed, and I didn't want to make a fuss at home."

"I sought help via Google but only found the national domestic abuse line, not a localised service."

2. Positive Experiences

Findings:

- Many praised the IDVA service and Halton Women's Centre.
- Empathetic, non-judgemental support and clear guidance were key to positive experiences.

Supporting Feedback:

"The IDVAs are wonder women. They were there for me through the worst time in my life... stood by my side at court."

"I was referred by my Doctor to the Women's Centre... they were caring, listened to my worries, arranged counselling... I can't thank the team enough."

3. Negative Experiences

Findings:

- Many cited inconsistent follow-up, dismissive professionals, and lack of communication, especially after court.
- Social services and police were frequently criticised for poor response, misjudging victims, or enabling abusers.

Supporting Feedback:

"I received no support for over 12 months, the court case is on 7th July - I've had nothing."

"Social services used the information against me and made me look like the abuser."

"Very negative experience of Police, CPS and IDVA service... staff had poor knowledge... services are not joined up."

"The police made a very negative impact on the experience, I would probably not call them again."

4. Housing and Accommodation

Findings:

- Access to housing support was limited. Some respondents were homeless, sofa-surfing, or living in cars.
- Many did not receive security measures or were not aware they were available.

Supporting Feedback:

"I moved my belongings into a storage facility and lived in my car for 9 months."

"I applied for housing... received absolutely no support. Didn't even respond to my application."

"They said they would put security cameras up, but never did."

"I had additional locks fitted... my address was also highlighted to the police."

5. Support for Children

Findings:

- Children often lacked support even when abuse was ongoing or disclosed.
- Schools were sometimes helpful, but services were inconsistent and overstretched.

Supporting Feedback:

"Social services didn't believe me or school... they enabled Dad to continue the abuse over about 6 years."

"The school was useless regarding domestic violence with children – they need training."

"Halton Resolve did sessions with my older children... support now continues in school."

6. Criminal Justice System

Findings:

- Mixed experiences with court-related services.
- Long delays, lack of updates, and emotional strain were common concerns.

Supporting Feedback:

"I have waited 2+ years to attend Crown Court - only for it to be postponed until 2026."

"No follow-up after the sentencing."

"We were not kept in the loop... use of acronyms was very off-putting."

7. Health and Mental Wellbeing Support

Findings:

- Some found help through GPs, referrals, or counselling.
- Others described being left to cope with trauma and mental health issues alone.
- A high proportion of respondents identified themselves as having a mental health condition.

Supporting Feedback:

"I chose to go to my Doctor... they got me into a specialist team to help with mental health and alcohol issues."

"The gateway program was brilliant... I'm now waiting for counselling."

8. Inclusion Gaps: Male, LGBTQ+, Older Victims

Findings:

- Male and LGBTQ+ respondents felt particularly unsupported or dismissed.
- Some noted that services were perceived as "for women only."

Supporting Feedback:

"I'm a man & finding a service is much harder."

"I feel due to it being a same sex situation it wasn't taken as seriously."

“There isn’t enough support for older women with no young children.”

Halton’s Housing Need Assessment Research

The Council also recently undertook a Housing Needs Assessment. During this assessment, feedback was also sought from staff working within the Domestic Abuse Team in Halton, and other relevant Housing officers. They shared the following:

- One of the major concerns of the team dealing with victims/survivors of Domestic Abuse is that there is not a true understanding of the scale of the challenge. The team believe that Domestic Abuse is the most significant challenge to Halton at present. The hidden numbers who are sofa surfing and staying with friends and relatives is unknown and further work is needed to be understand this and the ongoing impact in Halton. Poor housing offers can perpetuate Domestic Abuse.
- The Anne Street West scheme which is currently used as emergency accommodation for victim/survivors of Domestic Abuse is not fit for purpose. Its location is well known across the borough, and dispersed accommodation is the preferred model. It is also gender blind and allocation of a property is based on risk and therefore men and women can be allocated here. That is not a model that works well. In addition to this, where individuals have complex needs and are also going through domestic violence, they will not be accepted to Street West. Without appropriate options, the council is not meeting its legal obligations. Although dispersed options are required, there is a need for a 3 to 4-bed refuge type accommodation to offer emergency placements.
- There is a growing challenge of older people age 60+ who are living in abusive situations and do not have any alternative (ground floor) accommodation to move to.
- The council offers a sanctuary scheme, and a similar consistent offer would be welcomed in the social rented sector. The view from officers is that registered providers may put additional locks on properties, but this is not a full sanctuary measures, and a service standard for specification and timeframes needs to be in place.
- There needs to be more emphasis on retaining victims/survivors with children within the property and removing the perpetrator (with support). It is far easier to house a single person than a family and this is an aspiration of the team. The council is supporting perpetrators, but more resource is required.
- Not all people who experience Domestic Abuse are inherently vulnerable in every aspect of their lives. While they may be in a vulnerable position during the abuse, once they leave, many have the ability to make independent choices, secure jobs, and access the financial resources needed to find stable accommodation. The key support they require is not long-term dependence but a safe, temporary space where they can plan their next steps.

- There is a lack of move-on accommodation for victims/survivors of Domestic Abuse who do require housing support. Victims/survivors of Domestic Abuse are not being given the priority need that the legal duty places on the local authority.
- Further work needs to be undertaken with local landlords to develop a support scheme.

Citizens Advice Halton Study

In addition to engagement conducted as part of this needs assessment, further qualitative research was undertaken by Citizens Advice Halton in early 2025. This work captured the voices and experiences of women in Halton who had lived through domestic abuse. Their insights provide powerful context for understanding both the barriers to support and the essential components of effective service delivery.

Key Barriers to Accessing Support

The research identified six interconnected barriers that often prevented or delayed survivors from seeking and receiving help. These themes reflect the reality of many victims' lives in Halton today:

- **Lack of Awareness:** Many women did not recognise what they were experiencing as abuse, especially in the absence of physical violence. Coercive control, emotional manipulation, and financial restrictions were frequently misunderstood or minimised. Some women described the abuse as having “felt normal” at the time, only realising in hindsight how serious it had been. There was also low awareness of available support services, especially among those not already involved in the criminal justice system
- **Fear of Retaliation:** A significant proportion of survivors described the risks associated with speaking out or leaving an abusive partner. These included threats of increased violence, losing their children, homelessness, or becoming the subject of community gossip or judgment. One participant expressed concern that “if we go to court... he will be...more abusive” illustrating the fear that legal action would escalate danger rather than reduce it
- **Distrust of Services:** Participants often feared that approaching professionals, particularly the local authority, police, housing officers, or social services, would result in blame or further trauma. Some had past experiences of being judged or disbelieved, and others feared their children would be taken away. This deep-seated mistrust meant many delayed seeking help, even at high levels of risk
- **Services Do Not Meet the Needs:** Services were frequently described as disconnected, inaccessible, or unresponsive. Victims reported that they were “left with mountains of paperwork” or required to repeat their traumatic stories over and over again to different people. This fragmented approach created additional emotional strain and undermined trust. There were also concerns about counselling and advice services that were poorly timed or culturally out of step with their lived realities

- **A Lack of Diversity:** Survivors from minoritised communities, including those who were LGBTQ+, from ethnic minority backgrounds, or with insecure immigration status, often felt excluded or misunderstood. Non-English speakers reported language barriers and poor translation. Some felt dismissed because their situation didn't fit a stereotypical image of domestic abuse
- **Leaving Always Means Loss:** Leaving an abusive relationship was not only emotionally fraught, but also tied to significant losses: housing, financial security, community, and even identity. These were especially difficult to face alone. Many participants described staying in harmful situations because they saw no alternative. The pain of starting over, especially with children or no income, was often perceived as worse than enduring the abuse

These insights paint a vivid picture of the structural and emotional challenges faced by survivors. They also underscore the need for services that are accessible, trauma-informed, culturally competent, and guided by the voices of those who have lived through domestic abuse.

When asked what a high-quality, effective domestic abuse service should include, participants consistently identified five essential features:

- **Validation and Empathy:** More than anything, survivors wanted to be listened to and believed. The importance of emotional validation was repeatedly emphasised
- **A Single Point of Contact:** Continuity of care was vital. Victims felt strongly that having a single, named support worker helped build trust, reduced the trauma of repeating their stories, and provided a more consistent experience throughout their journey
- **Practical Support:** Many survivors struggled with complex forms, applications for housing, benefit claims, or court procedures. Some missed out on help because they were too overwhelmed to complete paperwork. Survivors also wanted quicker access to home safety measures, such as reinforced doors, letterbox shields, panic alarms, and security cameras - practical steps that made a real difference in their sense of safety
- **Timely Intervention:** Survivors expressed the importance of receiving help immediately, ideally on the same day. Delays often led them to downplay or minimise the abuse, resulting in inaction or returning to an unsafe home
- **“By and For” Services:** Many participants preferred to engage with services delivered by people with lived experience of domestic abuse, or by those who could understand the cultural, emotional, or community context of their situation

The Citizens Advice Halton report concluded with six key recommendations. These reflect the service design changes most requested by survivors and should be considered within any future commissioning or strategy development:

- **Proactive Conversations:** All public-facing professionals should be trained and expected to routinely ask about domestic abuse in their everyday roles.

Normalising this conversation increases early identification and opens the door to help

- **Multi-Agency One-Stop Hub:** A confidential, low-barrier location where individuals can access housing, health, legal, emotional and financial support from different agencies under one roof would reduce trauma and improve outcomes
- **Local Awareness Raising:** There is an urgent need to improve public understanding of all forms of abuse, including coercive control and financial manipulation. Community education can empower people to recognise abuse earlier
- **Better Signposting and Information Access:** Survivors should be able to easily find up-to-date, clear information about support services. This includes printed materials, online listings, GP posters, and local awareness campaigns
- **Support Beyond IDVA Thresholds:** Many survivors are not classified as high-risk but still need help. Expanding access to trained advisers at organisations like Citizens Advice Halton can ensure survivors get quality-assured support to rebuild their lives
- **Commissioning “By and For” Services:** Services should reflect the diverse identities of Halton’s population and be co-designed with the communities they intend to serve. Culturally competent, inclusive, and survivor-led support builds trust and ensures relevance

Recommendations

These recommendations have been developed in response to evidence from the surveys with service providers and service users, the targeted pinpoint focus group session, the Citizens Advice Domestic Abuse Report, and the Housing Needs Assessment. They also take into account developments since 2021, current local needs, and domestic abuse prevalence, as well as relevant policy updates and statutory requirements issued by the Government. They have been shaped and formally endorsed by **Halton’s Domestic Abuse Partnership Board**.

1. Awareness, Accessibility & Inclusion

Many survivors, professionals, and community members lack awareness of what domestic abuse services exist and how to access them. Access barriers are greater for marginalised groups and in workplace settings where staff may not know how to signpost.

Actions:

- Develop and maintain a centralised, up-to-date online and print service directory, including referral routes and eligibility.

- Distribute posters, leaflets, and business cards with QR code links to this directory across GP surgeries, schools, housing offices, libraries, workplaces, and community hubs.
- Ensure materials are multilingual, accessible, and inclusive, reflecting the diversity of Halton's communities.
- Partner with "by and for" specialist organisations to co-design inclusive messaging and ensure reach to male, LGBTQ+, deaf, disabled, and ethnic minority survivors.
- Establish mechanism to ensure information is up to date.
- Improve offer at Halton Women's Centre.
- Improve referral pathways via GPs, IDVAs and schools

2. Tiered and Ongoing Support Pathway

Many victims who do not meet the IDVA threshold receive little or no support, while others feel abandoned once crisis or court involvement ends. There is a need for a continuum of support that includes early intervention, trauma recovery, and empowerment.

Actions:

- Develop a consistent Low- and Medium-Risk Offer across agencies, providing early help, advocacy, and signposting.
- Fund and expand peer support groups, early intervention, and step-down services for those leaving crisis support or the justice process.
- Increase access to non-medical trauma and wellbeing services, including group and peer-led recovery, to complement clinical mental health options.
- Establish a "Step-Down" and recovery pathway following court outcomes, housing interventions, or IDVA closure, ensuring continuity of care.
- Promote empowerment, skill-building, and survivor-led recovery models, strengthening resilience and reducing repeat victimisation.
- Monitor outcomes to identify and address any gaps in early help or recovery provision.

3. Strengthen & Diversify the IDVA Service

The IDVA service is highly valued but overstretched, with limited specialist capacity. Survivors and professionals highlight the need for IDVAs in additional settings and for longer-term involvement in complex cases.

Actions:

- Secure funding to expand the IDVA team and introduce specialist posts in courts, hospitals, an IDVA based in iCART, and a multiple lived experience IDVA.
- Ensure IDVAs provide continuity of case management for complex or high-risk survivors, including follow-up after court, housing, or MARAC interventions.
- Explore use of volunteers or peer supporters to enhance the service while maintaining professional oversight.

- Integrate specialist therapeutic or trauma-informed practitioners within the IDVA team.
- Strengthen coordination between IDVAs, police, CPS, probation, housing, and health partners to ensure seamless information sharing and consistent support.

4. Justice, Accountability & Court Support

Survivors often experience confusion, delay, and lack of support within the justice process. Perpetrator interventions and monitoring also vary in quality and availability. A coordinated approach is needed to improve outcomes and accountability.

Actions:

- Train all relevant professionals on legal options (Non-Molestation Orders, Occupation Orders, Clare's Law, etc.).
- Strengthen post-court Step-Down pathways linking survivors to recovery and support services.
- Embed survivor-informed justice approaches within criminal justice agencies.
- Encourage specialist review and scrutiny into how the police investigate domestic abuse offences and communicate with victim survivors.

5. Housing & Whole Housing Approach

Survivors face housing insecurity, inconsistent support, and limited refuge spaces. A consistent, trauma-informed housing response is needed to ensure safety and compliance with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

Actions:

- Deliver and embed the Whole Housing Approach model across all housing providers.
- Expand access to refuge and move-on accommodation and standardise security measures (locks, alarms, CCTV).
- Strengthen joint working between housing and IDVA services, ensuring survivors can remain safely in their homes when appropriate.
- Ensure all local housing and homelessness policies are compliant with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and reflected in the Council's Housing Strategy.

6. Support for Children, Families & Intergenerational Prevention

Children affected by domestic abuse are often overlooked and under-supported. Families need holistic, trauma-informed interventions to break intergenerational cycles of abuse and strengthen safe parenting.

Actions:

- Integrate domestic abuse pathways into Family Hubs, ensuring early help and consistent referral routes.
- Introduce and resource a specialist Child-to-Parent Abuse response, potentially located within Children's Social Care and linked to drug and alcohol teams.

- Monitor outcomes for children and families to inform prevention and early help strategies.
- Improve access to therapies for children and young people who have experienced domestic abuse

7. Evidence, Data & Continuous Improvement

Consistent data collection, survivor voice, and shared learning are essential to sustain improvements. Better evidence will strengthen commissioning, governance, and accountability across all workstreams.

Actions:

- Strengthen inter-agency data-sharing protocols and establish a consistent outcomes framework.
- Improve qualitative data collection, including inclusive focus groups and targeted surveys for survivors and perpetrators, and develop an improved evaluation form for both survivors and perpetrators.
- Ensure surveys and consultations are accessible in multiple languages and inclusive of diverse communities.
- Continue to quality-assure the MARAC process, ensuring consistent attendance, risk management, and follow-up.
- Involve survivor representatives in the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board and key workstreams to embed lived experience in decision-making.
- Use findings from needs assessments and MARAC reviews to shape commissioning and workforce development.
- Publish annual progress and learning reports to demonstrate transparency and accountability.

Next Steps

Following the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board Meeting on 13^h October 2025:

- Update recommendations following receipt/ approval from Domestic Abuse Partnership Board
- Present final draft to Domestic Abuse Partnership Board 15th December 2025 for approval.