

From Surviving to Safety

2024 - 2030

Sheffield's strategy to end Domestic and Sexual Abuse
and Violence Against Women and Girls





Foreword

‘Violence Against Women and Girls has reached epidemic levels in England and Wales... at least 1 in every 12 women will be a victim of Violence Against Women and Girls every year (2 million victims) and 1 in 20 adults in England and Wales will be a perpetrator of Violence Against Women and Girls every year (2.3 million perpetrators)’. National Policing Statement July 2024.

Violence against women and girls is recognised by the [World Health Organisation](#) as a global public health issue, as well as an issue of human rights, with significant impact on victim/survivor mental and physical health. Our needs assessment outlines this impact, citing the growing body of evidence in this area and what we have heard from victims /survivors across the city.

The strategy covers behaviours ranging from harassment on the street to serious violence. Lower-level harms, which can be an everyday experience for many women, can still have a huge impact on the victim/survivor, and it is increasingly recognised that the behaviour of perpetrators can escalate in severity.

In Sheffield violence against women and girls is a significant issue and factors such as inequality and poverty, impact on the size of the issue:

- » In 2022/23 South Yorkshire Police had the 10th highest rate across 42 police force areas of domestic abuse related crime.
- » Women in the North of England have the highest rates of domestic abuse in the country. The rate in Yorkshire and Humberside is 17 per 1000 compared to 11 per 1000 in England.
- » Sheffield data tells us that more high-risk offences are reported in the North and East of the city
- » Sheffield is a university city – we know there is a disproportionate impact of sexual violence on the 19-24 age group.

Services across Sheffield have a long history of working to support those affected by domestic abuse and sexual violence. We have had a strategy in place in Sheffield to address these issues since 2014.

In 2022 Sheffield City Council was proud to become [White Ribbon Accredited](#), showing our commitment to working to end violence against women and girls. In 2024, 2 of our highly valued support providers reached fantastic milestones – [Sheffield Women's Aid](#) turned 50 and [Haven](#) who support children and young people turned 10.

Our 2024 – 2030 strategy was developed following extensive work with our partners who support those affected by abuse and violence. Community and charity sector organisations, specialist services working with racialised communities, those who work in health settings, who work with children and young people, South Yorkshire Combined Mayoral Authority, South Yorkshire police, the Probation Service and many others have helped shape it.

It is informed by detailed needs assessments which looked at the prevalence of domestic abuse and sexual violence across our city and where the gaps in support lie. But most importantly, we heard from survivors

of abuse and the people of Sheffield who were clear about the impact of domestic abuse and sexual violence on them and their families, and they are clear about the solutions needed.





What survivors want in Sheffield

Greater emphasis on prevention and getting help they need much earlier

"I want to be helped before a crisis, rather than after it."

To talk to informed, non-judgmental staff who understand the impact of domestic abuse and sexual violence, notice when something is wrong, ask the right questions, don't blame them for the abuse, understand trauma and provide information about the range of support options and choices available

"I didn't know how to explain what I was going through. It was only because a professional asked me a few gentle probing questions that helped me open up."

Easier access to safe accommodation when they need it, not to be on the phone for hours trying to get through, and not to be asked to stay in B and Bs or hotels. They want the accommodation to meet their needs and the needs of their children

"A lot of people end up staying with the perpetrator because they can't get through to housing support options – that can't be right."

A system that puts the responsibility on perpetrators and does not expect victim/survivors to manage their behaviour

"Shift towards making the default that the perpetrator faces more consequences than the victim."

Services that work together in a meaningful way

"I don't want to have to repeat my story again and again."

To address these issues, our new strategy is structured as follows:

- » Early intervention and prevention
- » Support and safety for survivors
- » Domestic abuse safe accommodation
- » Holding perpetrators to account
- » Together we get things done

Threaded through is an understanding that the inequalities we know exist in Sheffield mean that people experience these issues and systems in different ways. Some people can access support more easily because they speak English or understand the system better than others. Or they can afford to pay for transport, pay for therapy, pay a solicitor or pay a higher rent.

For some it is harder as they are experiencing racism, or homophobia or ableism or facing another form of discrimination. We will work to recognise, understand and reduce

the barriers to accessing support in Sheffield – our strategy will take an intersectional approach, recognising that victims / survivors can experience more than one form of discrimination.

This strategy is inclusive of male victims. We know that abuse doesn't only affect women or heterosexual couples. But its impact does have a gendered dimension – most victims in the city, and nationally, are female and women and girls experience the most harm with the majority of perpetrators of these harms being male. In Sheffield 18 out of 21 [Domestic Homicide Reviews](#) in Sheffield (2011 – 2023) have been into murders / suicides of women who were victims of domestic abuse and 20 out of 21 perpetrators were male.

But we know men and boys can be victim/survivors too, and are underrepresented in services, and we will work to ensure that their experiences are fully considered, and

male victims / survivors know how to access support tailored to their needs.

Alongside the work we will undertake with our partners to implement this strategy, Sheffield City Council is proud to be [White Ribbon Accredited](#) which means that we are committed to working to end violence against women and girls as an organisation by working with men and boys as vital agents of change.

Our strategy is ambitious, we want survivors to see a difference. We need to work together so that perpetrators stop their behaviour and are held accountable. Most of all we want the epidemic to end, and lives being blighted by abuse become a thing of the past in Sheffield.

Estimated prevalence in the city

The figures below are estimates based on the [Crime Survey for England & Wales](#) as this is the only national data set in relation to domestic abuse and sexual violence. However, these figures are likely to only represent the tip of

the iceberg as the Crime Survey for England and Wales is increasingly recognised as limited.

For example, in its assessment of the prevalence of domestic abuse

particularly as it does not routinely ask questions about coercive control. The data, which is likely an underestimate, shows a stark picture of the scale of these issues in Sheffield.

85,355

people have been a **victim of domestic abuse** since the age of 16



8,762

victims of sexual assaults (including attempted offences) in 2023/24



10,383

16-24 year old women have experienced sexual harassment in 2023/24

23,865

children and young people affected by domestic abuse in 2023/24

69,261

people have been a **victim of sexual assault** since the age of 16

20,862

victims of sexual harassment in 2023/24

25,700

estimated number of **perpetrators of domestic abuse** in 2023/24 based on MARAC data



18,358

adult victims of domestic abuse in 2023/24 (aged 16-74)



**THE WAY
WE DRESS
DOESN'T
MEAN YES**



*"Educating the youth of today will
make things better for tomorrow."*

Objective 1:

Early Intervention and Prevention

Introduction

Over the last few years stories about violence against women and girls, domestic abuse, and sexual violence are often in the media: from high profile deaths to exposures of institutional failure, to #Metoo. More survivors are recognising the abuse they are or have been experiencing, and more are coming forward for support than ever before. Public resources are extremely stretched and are unlikely to grow to enable this increasing demand to be fully met through commissioned services. So, it is more important than ever to find ways to prevent abuse from happening in the first place and when it does happen, to intervene early to stop it escalating or getting worse.

This means:

- » Changing the culture in Sheffield. Everyone should know that violence, abuse, coercive control and harassment in our relationships and families, in our schools, colleges or workplaces, in public venues or on our streets is not acceptable.
- » Raising awareness of what abuse is, its many different forms and how to get support at an early stage.
- » Ensuring our workforce knows how to spot the signs of abuse and staff are confident to talk about it, ask the right questions and as minimum signpost to support.

- » Normalising talking about relationships with the people we support, at work, at school etc. So that unhealthy behaviour and abuse is easier to spot as a result.

“There needs to be a much wider focus on gender equality. Our society is so unequal. It feels that women are often dismissed as crazy/hysterical/over-emotional and then aren’t listened to or taken seriously.”

Statistics / data

- » In a [recent report on the State of Girls Rights in the UK](#) 56% of girls said they felt that “*education to change the attitudes and behaviour of boys and men towards women*” would help them feel safer and more protected. 63% of men agree that men in society aren’t doing enough to ensure the safety of women and girls. (YouGov, 2021)
- » [A government report in 2019](#) estimated the social and economic cost for victims of domestic abuse in year ending March 2017 in England and Wales to be approximately £66 billion.

What we’re already doing / achievements

In 2022 Sheffield City Council became [White Ribbon accredited](#), making a commitment to ending violence against women and girls as an organisation. We have an action plan in place to change the culture of the Council, and to engage men and boys in making a difference. We have encouraged partner organisations to do the same – from schools to health trusts.

The South Yorkshire [Violence Reduction Unit](#) has focused on violence against women and girls as a key priority – undertaking a county wide mapping of responses and funding a variety of community-based prevention and educational projects.

The Serious Violence Duty was introduced in January 2023. This requires Sheffield City Council, South Yorkshire Police, South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue, Youth Justice, the Probation Service and the Integrated Care Board, The Prison Service, Education and Youth Custody to cooperate and collaborate on addressing serious violence including to:

1. Promote gender equality to reduce and prevent Violence Against Women and Girls.
2. Tackle Domestic Abuse and work to ensure that survivors can access the support they need.

Sheffield’s Youth Services have led the way in undertaking innovative work with young people such as the [Be that Mate film](#), showcased at the Violence Against Women and Girls Conference for Sheffield schools in October 2023.

Children’s Social Care has been rolling out the [Safe and Together programme](#) of training since 2021 which emphasises partnering with victims / survivors to keep children safe and holding perpetrators to account for their parenting choices.

“There needs to be more awareness, everyone uses social media. Why aren’t there more campaigns on TikTok? Adverts on the radio that you would hear in the car? You need to let people know that there is a way out, I didn’t know there was.”

What do we know about it and what we're aiming to do about it

Healthy relationships

Survivors told us clearly that prevention should start in education at as early an age as possible. Young children should be taught about what is and what isn't a healthy relationship, sexual consent, gender equality and treating others with kindness and respect.

The impact of domestic abuse and sexual violence, at home and in public, should be acknowledged and discussed throughout children's education in an age appropriate and culturally competent way. We want everyone to be included in these conversations.

- » We will maintain our commitment to ending Violence Against Women and Girls through the White Ribbon accreditation and

will encourage partners (schools, colleges, health trusts, businesses, public and voluntary sector organisations) to do the same.

- » We will promote gender equality and healthy relationships education and continue to develop work on this through youth services and with partners.

Building trust

Around 45,000 reports of abuse and violence are made to South Yorkshire Police each year, but we know that many incidents go unreported. Victims / survivors tell their friends and family (68% according to the Crime Survey For England and Wales) but when it comes to telling agencies the proportion is only 28%.

They are worried about whether they will be believed, whether it is serious enough, about being blamed themselves, are too distressed or embarrassed, don't think reporting would help or are worried about the consequences of reporting including

repercussions from the perpetrator or having their children removed.

- » We will build trust with the people we support and enable them to disclose abuse sooner by continuing to embed the [Safe and Together model](#) across our children's workforce so that they know that we will partner with the survivor to keep them and their children safe.
- » We will ensure staff are trained across the workforce on how to talk about relationships, domestic abuse and sexual violence and Violence Against Women and Girls, how to ask the right questions, how to respond to disclosures in a sensitive and trauma informed way and how to be culturally competent.
- » We will work with providers to develop networks of champions who can support their colleagues.

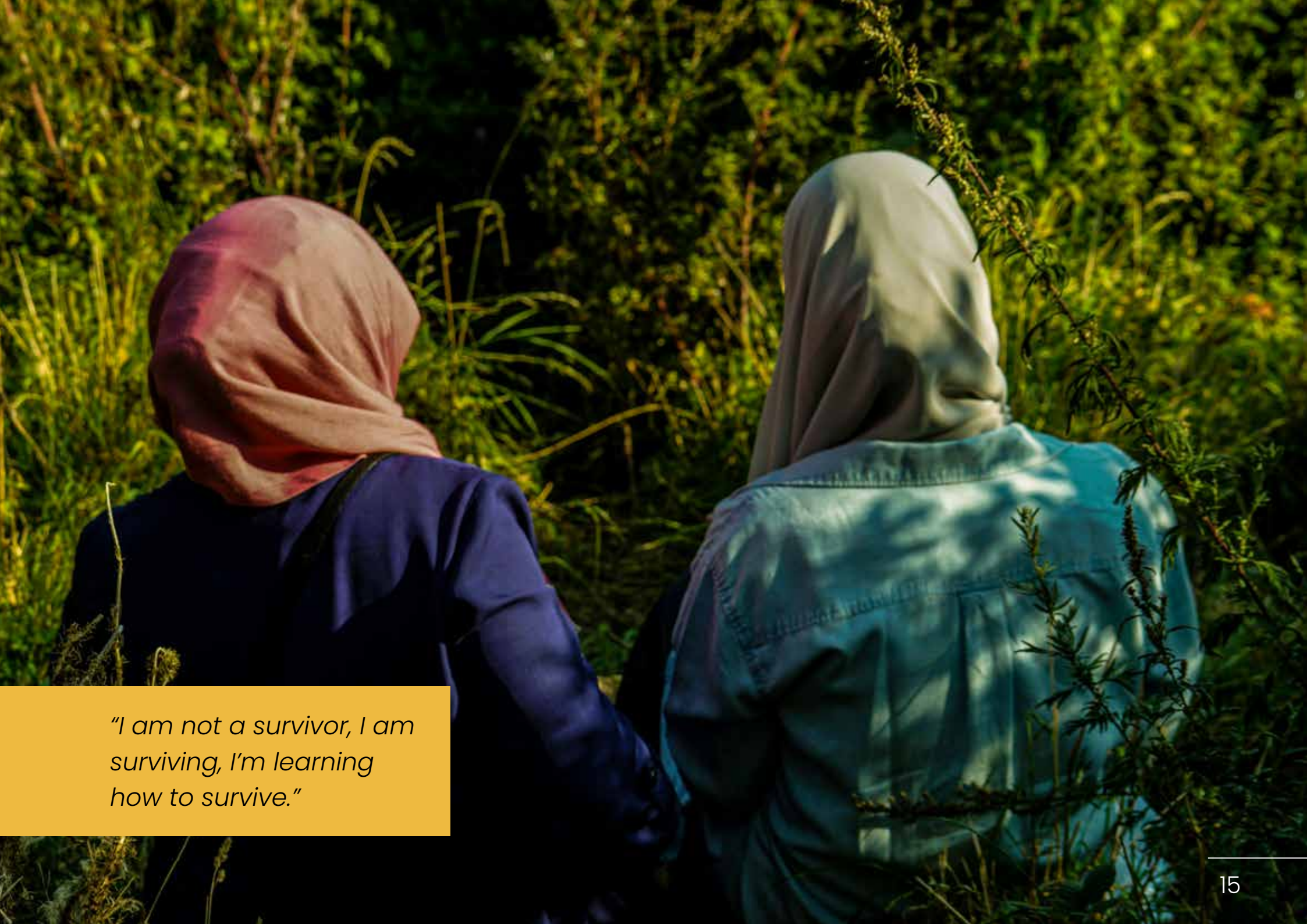
Ensuring access to support

We know that services are often responding to crises rather than helping people at an earlier stage. Underreporting of abuse can be because victims / survivors are experiencing additional barriers due to racism, homophobia, transphobia, being disabled, sexism, age, or substance misuse or a combination of these (known as intersectionality).

- » We will reach out to communities to understand barriers to reporting and accessing services and build partnerships and develop awareness raising campaigns with community based organisations that are trusted by the people they serve.
- » We will ensure that the workforce has access to high quality training on domestic abuse and sexual violence and Violence Against Women and Girls but also that they are supported to understand how to combat unconscious bias and discrimination.
- » We will continue to promote domestic abuse and sexual abuse services to the public to raise awareness of the support available, to increase awareness amongst victims / survivors but also the people they talk to and their family and friends. This will include published self-help guides.
- » We will raise awareness of different types of abuse that are sometimes overlooked or not highlighted as much in the media such as violence / abuse between adult family members.

*"In the future
no one should
ever ask 'why
didn't she
leave, why
does she put
up with him?'"*





*"I am not a survivor, I am
surviving, I'm learning
how to survive."*

Objective 2:

Safety & Support of survivors

Introduction

The scale of the issue in Sheffield is stark – for adults but also for children and young people who are now recognised in law as victims themselves if they are living in a home where a parent or carer is experiencing domestic abuse.

A large proportion of Sheffield's population has experienced abuse. And many more will be the family, friends, neighbours and colleagues of people who have experienced violence and abuse.

We have a good range of high-quality services in Sheffield including provision of single sex spaces, however there is not enough capacity to meet the demand, and for some issues such as sexual harassment the scale of the issue and the pathway to support is not yet clear.

Domestic abuse and sexual violence including sexual harassment must be recognised as key issues to be addressed in our city so that victims / survivors are believed and offered timely support by good quality trauma informed services that work together.

Statistics / data

- » Contacts to the Domestic Abuse Helpline are rising each year. The number of calls received in 2023/24 was 6171, which was 57% higher than the number of calls in 2019/20.
- » Over half the caseload of Sheffield Children's Social Care relates to domestic abuse and nearly half of all children who were classed as looked after by the Local Authority were victims of domestic abuse. However, only around 250 children and young people access specialist support to recover from domestic abuse each year.

- » Since [Domestic Homicide Reviews](#) became a statutory duty in April 2011 Sheffield has undertaken or started 21 reviews involving 22 adults. 14 domestic abuse serious incident reviews (regarding 'near misses') have also been undertaken or started. Suicides in the context of domestic abuse are increasingly identified with 6 deaths by suicide reviewed since 2019.
- » Sheffield Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre had 1,163 referrals for both adults and children in 2023, up 6.4% from 2022.
- » National estimates tell us that 1 in 6 victims of rape report it to the police, but it is only 1 in 10 for those aged 16-19.

What we're already doing / achievements

Survivors are generally positive about their experience of receiving support from services in Sheffield.

There is a good range of support options including the Domestic Abuse Helpline, recovery and support groups, one to one support from Independent Domestic Violence Advocates and Independent Sexual Violence Advocates, counselling services and support for children and young people.

However, services often struggle with the level of demand and survivors feel the duration of support is not long enough.

"Professionals need to be sensitive towards different cultures. My parents wanted me to tolerate the abuse because of the family honour, I was under a lot of pressure to remain with my abuser."

"All services that I have received support from have been good experiences, but the barriers to access these are almost impossible for people struggling with mental health."

Sheffield adopted the [Safe and Together Model](#) as an approach to domestic abuse in Children's Social Care in 2020. All social workers now access this training, and the ethos of the model is promoted to partners including education.

Children are safeguarded by partnering with survivors and holding perpetrators accountable for using domestic abuse as a parenting choice.

The [Echo Project](#) is an initiative in Sheffield with the national charity [SafeLives](#). This project aims to bring the voices of survivors, including children and young people, into service design and delivery.

What do we know about it and what we're aiming to do about it

Rising demand

Our local data, published each year as an annual report, tells us there is an increasing demand for domestic abuse and sexual violence services. And issues such as court backlogs mean that sexual violence survivors in particular are often waiting years to go to court and services must support people for longer as a result.

- » We will work with local and regional partners to seek additional funding opportunities and investment and support the bids of local providers so that they can help more people.

Changing perceptions

Incorrect perceptions persist about domestic abuse: that it's always physical abuse and it stops once the relationship ends; that victims /

survivors are all young women being abused by a male partner; that a real victim does not use alcohol or drugs or fight back against their abuser; that children and young people aren't harmed if they don't see or hear the abuse. New forms of abuse are emerging, and we see more tech enabled and online abuse. There is increasing recognition of the risks relating to non-fatal strangulation and more understanding about the higher risk if the perpetrator of abuse is a member of an organised crime gang.

- » We will raise awareness about different forms of domestic abuse such as post separation abuse, tech enabled abuse, 'honour' based abuse and non-fatal strangulation.
- » We will continue to develop whole family responses to abuse and ensure that tools that help us understand vulnerabilities, such

as the Young Person's DASH and the Karma Nirvana 'honour' based abuse risk assessment, are widely used.

- » We will review our policies, guidance, and training to reflect the recognition of children as victims in their own right in the [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#).
- » We will ensure that service provision for all forms of abuse is available to all victims / survivors including older people and younger people, LGBT+ people, those with no recourse to public funds, disabled people, those using substances or experiencing multiple disadvantages, people who are neurodivergent, and men and boys.



"They said 'Oh, she's a drinker'.... they didn't think about why I might be drinking."

"I was worried social workers would take away my child, this is what my ex threatened me with."

Underreporting

In our needs assessment we found that sexual violence, harassment and abuse is underreported – nationally and locally. This can be due to feelings of shame and stigma but also a lack of confidence in agencies to deal sensitively with disclosures. And our local survey told us that some services are not well known.

- » We will raise awareness of local adults and children's sexual assault referral centres.
- » We will raise awareness of the support that is available for victims/survivors of sexual abuse from Independent Sexual Violence Advocates through the South Yorkshire Sexual Violence Partnership.

- » We will work together to support adults affected by sexual exploitation including where this is in a context of modern slavery, and for those selling sex.
- » We will work with partners to develop coproduction opportunities for sexual violence and abuse survivors so that survivor voice is central to awareness raising campaigns, and the design and delivery of services.

Support to recover

Survivors of trauma and abuse have told us that recognition of the long-term impact on mental health is vital to their journey of recovery.

They told us that support must be trauma informed from the first time they tell someone throughout all contact with agencies. We know that survivors' strengths and resilience are often not recognised.

Survivors told us they want more peer support and wellbeing opportunities such as leisure activities, arts, and crafts to help them recover and rebuild their lives.

- » We will work with partners to ensure access to specialist therapeutic support for survivors including children and young people.
- » We will continue to train the workforce in trauma informed approaches.
- » We will encourage services to value survivors' strengths and recognise them as experts in their own lives.
- » We will work with providers to increase opportunities for positive activities and peer support for survivors.



Objective 3:

Safe Accommodation

Introduction

In Sheffield, we are proud of our history of supporting victims/survivors in high quality, domestic abuse safe accommodation.

Sheffield has one of the highest proportions in the country of those supported into domestic abuse safe accommodation (over 150 people per 10,000 population).

"Trying to access emergency housing is like calling for an ambulance but not getting one."

Statistics/data:

- » In 2022/2023, 775 individuals came to Sheffield City Council for help with homelessness because of domestic abuse, which was a 6% increase on the previous year. Of those referrals that were accepted, 86% were female and 9% were males. 66% received support following their application.
- » The data tells us that homelessness due to domestic abuse is likely to continue to rise.
- » In 2022/23, half of homelessness presentations due to domestic abuse were placed in temporary accommodation.
- » In 2022/23 53 new referrals were accepted into Sheffield Women's

Aid refuges, which includes 72 children. This is the highest number of referrals accepted since before the Covid-19 Pandemic.

- » In 2022/23 16% of those in SafeZones properties were recorded as LGB+, this is an increase from 2% in 2021/2022.

"I don't feel safe in temporary accommodation, so I have returned to the perpetrator."



"I was stuck in an abusive household for 14 years before the council intervened and took me to a safe house for my own protection, that is a very long time to be experiencing regular domestic violence and controlling behaviour from a family member."

What we're already doing / achievements

In Sheffield, we provide domestic abuse safe accommodation for all through a range of options: women's refuge, SafeZones dispersed properties, Sanctuary Scheme measures, Local Authority dispersed temporary accommodation with specialist support and specialist accommodation for young women affected by sexual abuse. Demand is always high and outcomes for those who access safe accommodation are overwhelmingly positive.

SafeZones is safe, dispersed accommodation available for male and female victims, those with more complex needs and LGBT+ victim/survivors. There are now 33 units of accommodation across the city.

Since 2022, there has been an Independent Domestic Violence Advocate who is co-located with the council's Housing Solutions Team.

This role is designed to ensure that the system works effectively by supporting housing staff to undertake Domestic Abuse Risk Assessments, looking at safe accommodation options for victims/survivors and working face to face where possible with victims/survivors if they present as homeless at Howden House.

Survivors tell us that access to specialist support in safe accommodation is essential for them to help them to recover from domestic abuse. Since the implementation of Part 4 of the [Domestic Abuse Act in 2021](#) we have commissioned domestic abuse counselling for adults, specialist debt and welfare advice, and therapeutic one to one support and trauma-based counselling for children.

We have also ensured that all those who want it have access to independent domestic abuse housing advice and support.

To ensure that continued progress is made in this area, the Council has started to work towards [Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance](#) accreditation which focuses on improving the standard of support in council housing and homelessness services for victims/survivors.



"3 months waiting for a secure door. 3 months of not feeling safe."

What do we know about it and what we're aiming to do about it

Getting the right help at the right time

The proportion of referrals from Sheffield City Council housing to domestic abuse services that are high risk is greater than from other services, which suggests that victim/survivors are seeking help with accommodation when they are experiencing serious harm. We know that intervening early is always better than waiting for a crisis, but survivors have told us that they were not aware of domestic abuse support options, such as the Domestic Abuse Helpline or safe accommodation.

- » We will continue to work on awareness raising, both around domestic abuse generally but also around Sheffield's safe accommodation offer.

Survivors tell us that the pathway into domestic abuse safe accommodation doesn't always work well, it takes a long time to get through on the phone and the process feels complicated and stressful. If a survivor is offered accommodation sometimes it can be in a hotel, with no cooking or laundry facilities. There are also times when non specialist temporary accommodation can feel unsafe for the victim/survivor and so returning to the perpetrator feels like the better option.

- » We will continue to work with partners and stakeholders to understand the pressures in the homelessness system that lead to domestic abuse survivors being placed in hotels and aim to see a decrease over the course of the strategy.

Some survivors want to stay in their own homes. In 2022/23 over 500 households were supported to access Sanctuary Scheme measures to make

their homes safer, this includes lock changes plus equipment such as solar lights, door chains and bolts lockable letter boxes and window alarms. The limited data that we have on this scheme tells us that it works to prevent homelessness, for those who had the data recorded 95% did not move to a new address.

- » We will work to improve data recording on the Sanctuary Scheme and use the findings from an evaluation currently underway by Sheffield Hallam University to evidence its effectiveness and make the case for further investment.

Making sure our services are accessible and meeting the needs of all survivors

We know that domestic abuse is both a cause and consequence of gender inequality and that women are disproportionately more affected than men. Women are much more likely to

experience the most harmful forms of domestic abuse, such as coercive control and are also more likely than men to lose their lives because of domestic abuse, either by being killed by their abuser or from dying by suicide. However, we are also aware that there are many men in the city who are victims/survivors of domestic abuse and who may need access to supported domestic abuse safe accommodation.

- » We will work to raise awareness of the SafeZones and Sanctuary Scheme as option for male victims who need it to make sure that they are supported effectively in Sheffield.

We see a disproportionate number of women from racialised communities in refuge, 48% in 2022/2023. We need to understand this in the context of what we know about systemic racism as evidenced in the [Race Equality Commission Report](#).

- » We will work with our partners and stakeholders to take positive steps to explore why there is a high proportion of women from racialised communities in women's refuge and work to support survivors from racialised, global majority communities at a much earlier stage.

Across the country, only 9.1% of all refuges are available to those with no recourse to public funds. In Sheffield, we have a firm commitment to ensuring this group of vulnerable victims/survivors are helped.

In 2022/2023 37% of women who accessed refuge had no recourse to public funds, and on average their experience of domestic abuse had lasted for five and a half years before they sought help.

We want to ensure that having no recourse to public funds is never a barrier to being safe and seeking help.

- » We will continue to work on a no recourse to public funds policy, specifically aimed at setting out clearly the support that victims/survivors of domestic abuse with no recourse to public funds can expect in Sheffield.

Whilst we know that prevalence rates are higher in younger age groups, it's also clear that there is a lack of older age women accessing support. 94% of women who were resident in 2022/23 were under 56 and the oldest survivor in refuge in the year was 62.

- » We will take steps to better understand the barriers facing older victims/survivors including using the learning from the older person's Independent Domestic Violence Advocate role to ensure that our offer is suitable for older people.

"Why should I move again?"

Children and young people

The Council commissions counselling and one-to-one therapeutic support for children in safe accommodation, demand for these services is extremely high and there is not enough capacity. When children are supported, they tell us that this helps them to feel safer and improves their relationships with their families. However, 39% of survivors who responded to a survey did not have a positive experience of getting help for their children and 22% of non-abusing parents who responded were not offered any help or support for their children.


- » We will continue to commission specialist support in safe accommodation and work with our providers and partners to seek opportunities to increase capacity throughout the course of this strategy.

Holistic support whilst in safe accommodation

Domestic abuse doesn't happen in isolation and often issues, such as substance use, and mental health difficulties are made worse by the perpetrator's behaviour and are often caused by the abuse. In 2021 71% of those who responded to a survey about refuge told us that they strongly disagreed that they were provided with support to address substance misuse issues.

A substance misuse liaison worker was identified to work in domestic abuse safe accommodation (including refuge) to ensure that residents had access to a broad range of support around their substance use in an environment that felt safe and supportive.

- » We intend to continue to ensure this post remains in place and will work closely with colleagues in substance use commissioning to monitor its effectiveness.

A man with a beard and short dark hair is sitting on a dark brown leather sofa. He is wearing a dark long-sleeved shirt and light blue jeans. He is looking off to the side with a thoughtful expression, his hand resting near his face. The background is a dark, textured wall. The lighting is soft and focused on the man.

"I'm on a conveyor belt. My grandad did this to my nan, my dad did it to my mum, and now I do it to my partner. If I don't stop this, my son will do it, and my daughter will accept it."

Objective 4:

Holding perpetrators to account

Introduction

Everyone should be able to live their lives without experiencing or fearing domestic abuse, sexual violence, or harassment. But sadly, many won't. Perpetrators of these crimes have a huge collective impact in Sheffield – in our homes, in our families, in our public spaces and in our workplaces.

But it shouldn't continue this way, and we need to get to the root cause of the issue: those who are causing this harm. Our priority is to move the focus onto the perpetrator's behaviour – preventing it, challenging it, and disrupting it.

Statistics / data

- » [The National Police Statement of 2024](#) estimates that 1 in 20 adults in England and Wales will be a perpetrator of violence against women and girls every year. That equates to 2.3 million perpetrators.
- » We estimate there were around 25,700 perpetrators of domestic abuse in Sheffield in 2023/24.
- » South Yorkshire Police data found that over the period July 2019 – June 2022 suspects for domestic abuse related crimes were predominantly male (77%), White British (86% of those with a recorded ethnicity) and aged 30-39 (32%). This data also found

that the most prolific repeat domestic abuse offenders abused both their families and intimate partners.

- » South Yorkshire Police data found that in the year ending September 2023, there were 4,552 sexual offences, with 850 recorded cases of adult rape.

Many crimes go unreported to the police, so these figures only represent the tip of the iceberg and do not show the true scale of harm in Sheffield.



What we're already doing to hold perpetrators accountable

Since 2018, South Yorkshire has commissioned a support programme for perpetrators of domestic abuse. Its aim is to reduce harm and change the behaviour of individual perpetrators. In 2023/24, out of the 144 referrals, 52% of perpetrators engaged with the programme. In comparison, only 14% of the referrals received in 2022/23 engaged with the programme.

The harm caused to children by domestic abuse can be long-lasting. In Sheffield, we recognise that behaving abusively towards a child's mother is a parenting choice. That's why since 2018, the council has been offering a 17 weeklong parenting intervention specifically for fathers, called Caring Dads. It supports those who acknowledge their behaviour and demonstrate some motivation to change. Approximately 71 children are helped by fathers attending Caring Dads per calendar year.

We're also learning from every Domestic Homicide Review carried out in Sheffield. They provide key insights into the attitudes and behaviours of perpetrators and build an evidence base as to how we can get better at reducing harm in the city.

We work with our local and regional partners, including police and probation, across the city and county to reduce sexual abuse and violence.

To try to prevent this harm in our city, we promote initiatives across the nighttime economy such as the Ask for Angela campaign, the [Walk Safe app](#), the [Sheffield Women and Girls Nighttime Safety Charter](#), and the current pilot of Safe Square.

"The main thing that needs to change is men's attitudes."

What do we know about it and what we're aiming to do about it

Preventing harmful behaviour

Survivors told us that one of the main things they want to see change is society's attitudes to domestic abuse, sexual violence and all forms of violence against women and girls. We know that education is key in preventing abusive behaviours, and there is a lack of understanding of how to intervene when witnessing harmful behaviour.

- » We will find ways to address this underlying societal level issue and encourage everyone in Sheffield to play a role in stopping it and improve the public's understanding of healthy and positive relationships.
- » We will promote local and regional campaigns that raise awareness of domestic abuse and sexual violence

and other forms of violence against women and girls.

- » We will promote awareness of how to intervene safely as a bystander where appropriate.

Increasing Sheffield's workforce confidence when working with perpetrators

Staff across Sheffield have told us they want to have more confidence when working with perpetrators. Identifying and challenging people using abusive behaviour can be complex work and requires high-quality skills.

But we also know that the earlier we identify perpetrators of abuse, the more opportunity it creates to prevent an escalation of harm. We've got to use every opportunity we have to talk to people about their relationships and what's happening in their lives.

There are many community groups and agencies involved in people's lives so it's important that this full range of

frontline professionals are supported to work with perpetrators.

- » We will do more to equip frontline professionals with the knowledge and skills to work with perpetrators safely. This will be done through developing training, toolkits and publishing material on websites so that staff are helped to identify abusive behaviour early on, challenge it in a safe way and risk assess appropriately so that more survivors are protected.

Supporting behaviour change and reducing harm

Not every perpetrator will engage with a behaviour change programme or be appropriate for one, but support should be available for those who acknowledge their abusive behaviour and wish to make change.

Local and national evidence tells us that some perpetrators have co-occurring needs – some will misuse

"He was outside his curfew, and nobody came."

substances, and some will have mental health issues. In Sheffield, we want to take the approach of looking at every issue holistically to encourage uptake of support. All of this will go alongside making sure the survivor and their children are always offered support.

- » We will continue to invest in perpetrator behaviour change programmes and improve analysis and evaluation so that the impact of these programmes can be clearly measured.
- » We will ensure our programmes are accessible to a greater diversity of people so that perpetrators from different circumstances, cultures and communities are able to engage.

- » We will increase the collaboration between our perpetrator support providers, mental health services and alcohol and drug services including encouraging the development of specialist provision.

We must also acknowledge that there is a real gap in local and national provision for perpetrators of sexual violence.

- » We will aim to find ways to bring in additional resources to reduce the harmful behaviours of perpetrators of sexual violence.

Housing

Survivors are so often forced to move away from their homes, their children's schools, and their wider support networks due to the abuse and violence they have experienced.

This upheaval greatly disrupts their lives, their wellbeing, the wellbeing of their children and their journey to recovery. They asked us clearly: *"why are perpetrators never moved?"*

- » We will consider ways in which we can increase the options for rehousing perpetrators, with the specific intention that it will reduce some of the harm caused to survivors.

Accountability and Perpetrator Management

Survivors have told us that they have little confidence in the criminal justice system and evidence shows that conviction rates for domestic abuse and sexual violence crimes are low.

We know from police and Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference data that it is predominantly male offenders causing serious harm in Sheffield, and some men abuse multiple victims year on year.

This is something we want to see reducing. This responsibility sits across multiple agencies so we will continue to work alongside our partners to address this.

"Abusers should wear a badge. They shouldn't get off scot-free."



- » We will work with our partners to ensure that survivors and professionals in Sheffield know the legal tools they can access.
- » We will work alongside our partners to intervene indirectly by gathering, sharing and acting upon intelligence so that survivors are protected even where a survivor is not able to support an investigation.

"This course has made me see that I've been abusive for years. I never realised it before. I need to change."



Objective 5:

Together we get things done

Introduction

We know from case reviews that a lack of joint working and information sharing can have harmful consequences. Vital opportunities to intervene or offer support have sometimes been missed. We know that good multi-agency working is essential for the prevention of and response to all forms of domestic abuse and sexual violence.

Within the city we have established pathways and multi-agency meetings to help reduce risk and ensure victim/survivor safety and hold perpetrators to account, including the Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) for high-risk domestic abuse cases, but we know there is more to do.

There are challenges within wider systems that greatly impact this work, including funding and resources, long waiting lists to access services, the criminal justice system backlog, and gaps in professional understanding

- » 1217 MARAC cases were heard in 2023/24, which is a 26% increase in the number of cases when compared to 2019/20.
- » Multiagency recommendations are the second most common form of Domestic Homicide Review recommendations.
- » 1314 members of the workforce across Sheffield were trained on domestic abuse by IDAS in 2022/23.

“All services have a role to play- police, council, health, education, justice system, businesses, voluntary sector etc.”





“We need partnership working between everyone providing support. Ensuring each individual offer of support is clear to the survivor. We should establish a way to share resources in the city to support victims further.”

What we're already doing / achievements

Sheffield has a strong record of multiagency working: on prevention, early identification, risk management and accountability, and considerable progress has been made since our previous strategy.

There is currently work taking place on Homelessness Prevention, new strategies in development on Hidden Harm, Multiple Disadvantage, and Female Genital Mutilation, a new regional Non-Fatal-Strangulation Pathway, the new Serious Violence Strategy and work underway to improve the criminal justice system's response to victim/survivors of rape and serious sexual offences.

The Domestic Abuse Routine Enquiry initiative to encourage GPs to ask about domestic abuse has been in place for several years, but we want to see more GPs getting involved.

Since the last strategy there have been good examples of multi-agency working to raise awareness; including regional campaigns to call out sexual harassment, and the roll out of the [WalkSafe](#) app across the county.

Our Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference process where we work together to safeguard high risk domestic abuse victims and their families is well established, and the review by [SafeLives](#) in 2023 found that Sheffield's Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference had 'many strengths...', there was 'strong commitment to the process', 'consistent and solid coordination' and 'good engagement' from agencies.

A Violence Against Women and Girls Forum meets bimonthly for networking and sharing information and ideas. The group often supports the monthly vigil held outside Sheffield Town Hall which remembers women who have died due to male violence.

Domestic abuse and sexual violence are cross cutting issues, and we will continue to work in close partnership with Sheffield's Children's and Adult's Safeguarding Partnerships and coordinate the Violence Against Women and Girls theme group for the Safer Sheffield Partnership. We will also continue to share good practice and work on problem solving on a county basis.



What do we know about it and what we're aiming to do about it

Learning from Reviews

We know from Domestic Homicide Reviews and from what survivors told us that we need to address specific areas as a system, including professional understanding and information sharing, and ensuring that we are embedding learning from when things go wrong.

- » We will continue to implement findings from the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference Review to improve multi-agency work to reduce risk and protect victims.
- » We will continue to implement and share learning arising from statutory case reviews to reach a wider audience and monitor impact.

- » We will continue to work with partners to develop professional understanding through a range of methods, including learning briefs, e-learning and training, and advocate for training to be mandatory where appropriate.
- » We will share information to protect the most vulnerable e.g. through sharing information about children living with domestic abuse via [Operation Encompass](#) with schools and education settings.
- » We will ensure maximum added value by aligning our work to other local strategies being developed including, Hidden Harm, Multiple Disadvantage, Homelessness Prevention, and Serious Violence.

"Join it up... there needs to be much greater communication across the board "

Improving data collection

We know from our needs assessments that there are gaps in the data we collect, and that less data is held regarding sexual violence. These gaps, alongside barriers to data sharing between organisations limit some of the work we do.

- » We will work with our partners to generate better quality data in all areas, including improving data collection around protected characteristics and specific demographics.
- » We will work with partners regionally to increase our understanding of the scale, nature, and impact of sexual violence, including sexual harassment, in South Yorkshire.

Working Together for a Safer Sheffield

We want our city to be a welcoming, thriving place for people to live, work and enjoy themselves:

- » We will work together to make our streets and public spaces safer and reduce Violence Against Women and Girls including sexual harassment in our city.
- » We will work to embed good practice across the night-time economy in Sheffield and encourage local venues to access training on responding to Violence Against Women and Girls and sexual harassment.
- » We will use our White Ribbon status to highlight Violence Against Women and Girls as a pressing societal threat and encourage action.

Overcoming barriers

We know from survivors and providers that there are cross-cutting factors that impact the identification, and response to these forms of harm by services. These include a national lack of resources and funding, criminal justice backlogs, the cost-of-living crisis, and specific barriers minoritised victims/survivors face when seeking support.

We will work with partners in the Integrated Care Board and Mayoral Combined Authority to embed the Duty to Collaborate requirement of the Victim and Prisoners Act which supports collaboration on commissioning of community support services in England for victims of domestic abuse, sexual abuse, and serious violence.



- » We will continue to seek to work in new ways with partners to identify barriers to accessing support and seek joint solutions.
- » We will undertake work to understand the impact of national scale issues on local services and victim/survivors e.g. the rate of suicides related to domestic abuse.

This strategy supports the Sheffield City Council plan objectives in relation to:

- » Children and young people
- » Great neighbourhoods
- » Caring and engaged communities

An action plan will be developed in partnership with stakeholders for the implementation of the recommendations. Progress will be monitored by the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategic Board and reported to the Safer Sheffield Partnership Board.

"People think information is shared more than it is which leads to people feeling let down by the system and things get missed."

