

Summary of West Berkshire domestic abuse consultation feedback

Introduction

Scope

This report provides an overview of the public consultation carried out as part of the development of the Domestic Abuse Strategy. The consultation sought to gather feedback from residents, community groups, service providers, and local organisations on key aspects of the draft strategy. The insights gained from this consultation have been instrumental in shaping the final version of the strategy, ensuring that it reflects the needs and concerns of the wider community. By incorporating the feedback received, we have worked to create a more inclusive, practical, and effective strategy to address domestic abuse in West Berkshire.

Who responded

As part of the consultation process, we engaged with a broad range of respondents, including individual residents, council employees, and representatives from local councils and service providers. The following table outlines the breakdown of respondents by category, showing the diversity of perspectives we gathered:

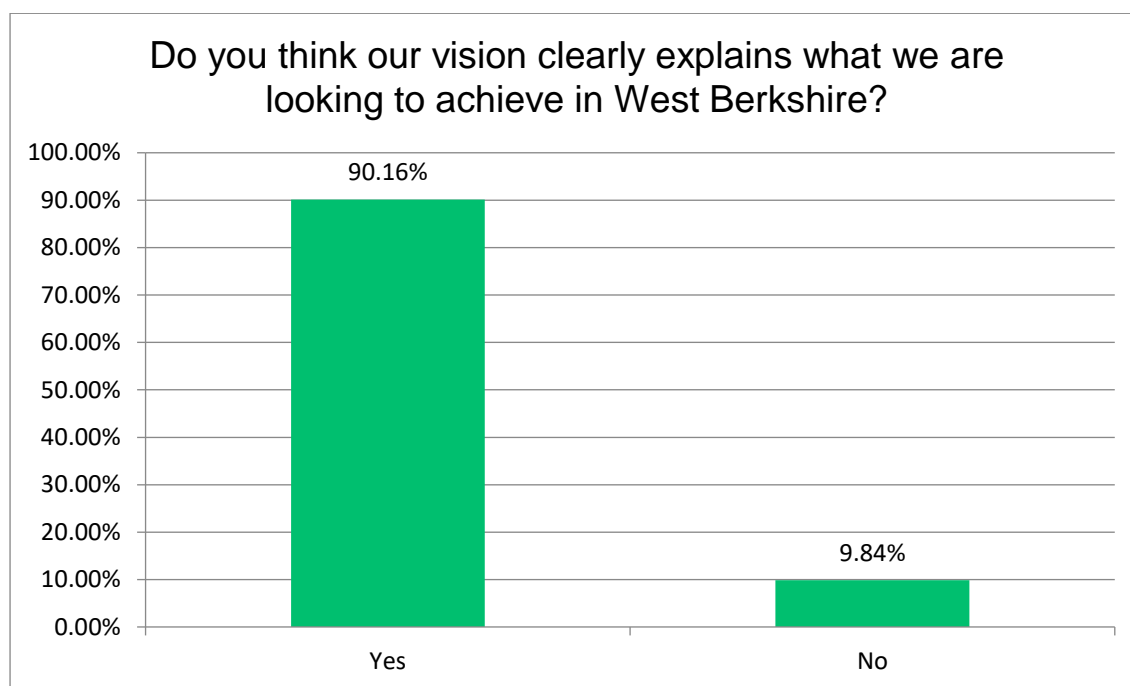
| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|--|-----------------|-----------|
| | Percentage | Number |
| Individual resident of West Berkshire | 84.62% | 55 |
| Individual non-resident of West Berkshire | 1.54% | 1 |
| Employed by West Berkshire Council | 9.23% | 6 |
| Parish or Town Council | 3.08% | 2 |
| District Councillor | 1.54% | 1 |
| Service provider | 3.08% | 2 |
| Partner organisation, e.g. Police / Fire Authority | 0.00% | 0 |
| Community group | 1.54% | 1 |
| Charity organisation | 1.54% | 1 |
| Other - please specify below | 1.54% | 1 |
| Additional information e.g. group/organisation name (if applicable): | | 3 |
| | Answered | 65 |

Throughout this report, we will first give an overview of the feedback received in relation to the strategy, and conclude each section by providing a summary of how the feedback has been incorporated in to the final version.

Feedback on the vision

Overall over 90% of respondents were confident the vision is clear. The feedback on the clarity of the strategy's vision suggests that while the overarching goals are understood, there are concerns regarding the lack of concrete, actionable steps. Several respondents expressed frustration with what they perceive as the use of “buzzwords” and vague language, without clear explanations on how the strategy will be implemented effectively.

Do you think our vision clearly explains what we are looking to achieve in West Berkshire?



Key themes from the feedback

Vagueness and lack of specificity: Multiple respondents noted that while the strategy talks about tackling domestic abuse, it fails to offer specific, tangible actions. The strategy's reference to domestic abuse as a “hidden crime” was pointed out as a contradiction, as the plan does not clearly explain how it will address something that by its nature is difficult to detect and prevent. One comment highlighted the absence of detail around key preventative measures, such as how the strategy will make residents feel safer or how colocation of services would be made feasible. This lack of specificity leads some to feel that the document is simply paying lip service to the issue.

Realism and practicality: There was a strong call for the strategy to offer realistic, concrete solutions. A respondent questioned the effectiveness of the plan in the face of real-world challenges, such as the leniency of sentencing for domestic violence offenders and the rarity of long-term incarceration for these crimes. One suggestion was made to create a public register of abusers, both those with convictions and those who have received warnings. This would offer a tangible, actionable step towards increasing public safety.

Action vs. Words: Several respondents expressed frustration with what they see as the strategy's focus on vision and high-level statistics, rather than clear guidance on what changes will be implemented. One comment noted that "It's just words...actions are what is needed," underscoring the sentiment that the strategy must go beyond rhetorical commitments to real, measurable outcomes. Another respondent drew attention to a friend's experience in a different county, where despite positive-sounding strategies, the police were unresponsive, and the domestic abuse situation was not effectively managed. This highlights a fear that the strategy, while well-meaning, might not translate into effective action.

Focus on prevention and outcomes: The lack of clarity around preventative measures was a recurring theme. Respondents expressed a desire to know more about how prevention would be tackled, particularly how the strategy aims to deter domestic abuse before it occurs. There were calls for the strategy to outline more clearly the specific differences it aims to achieve in the community, with a focus on measurable outcomes, rather than remaining a high-level document.

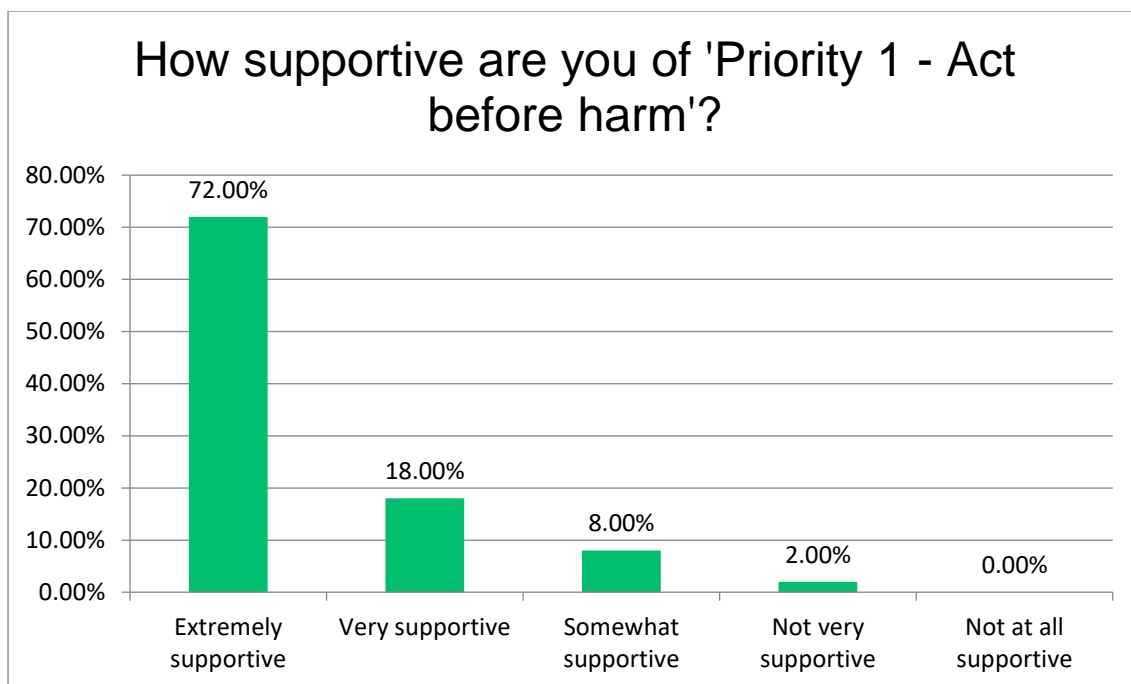
How has the feedback been incorporated into the final version?

Overall, the critical feedback on the vision statement, whilst useful is more applicable to the domestic abuse action plan which is supplementary to the strategy. As such all of the comments provided have fed into the development of the delivery plan which sits behind the strategy. As most respondents agree with the vision, no material changes were made. A key learning point moving forward in terms of how this plan is delivered which may like to be considered in terms of alleviating some of the fear that the strategy will not be actionable, will be for the Board to publish annual (or quarterly) reports outlining progress.

Feedback on our priorities

Priority one

The feedback on Priority One: Preventing Harm Before it Occurs offers a rich and varied set of perspectives. While there is broad support for the idea of prevention, a minority of respondents raised several important concerns about the practicalities of implementing such a strategy and the barriers that exist in effectively preventing domestic abuse.



1. Realistic Implementation and Challenges of Prevention

A recurring theme was scepticism about whether domestic abuse can be effectively prevented, particularly since it often occurs “behind closed doors.” Several respondents expressed concern that harm typically occurs before outside agencies, such as schools, can detect it. They questioned how the strategy plans to act before harm when many victims are too controlled or afraid to seek help.

Respondents also noted that while the strategy’s concept of “acting before harm” is aspirational, it requires strict rules and guidelines to be effective in practice. Without detailed, actionable steps, they fear the strategy remains theoretical, and its lofty goals may be difficult to achieve in the real world.

2. Addressing attitudes towards gender and violence experienced by younger people

Several respondents raised concerns about how attitudes towards girls and violence are shaped early on, especially in schools, due to exposure to harmful content on social media, porn, and violent videos. Examples like Andrew Tate videos were cited as influencing young boys, leading to problematic behaviours towards girls. Respondents emphasised the need for immediate action, such as restricting mobile phone use during school hours, to reduce exposure to such content and protect girls from assault and sexual violence in schools. They felt the strategy currently does not address this critical issue.

3. Support for Male Victims

A common point raised was the lack of attention given to male victims of domestic abuse. While acknowledging that women are statistically more likely to experience domestic abuse, respondents highlighted the significant number of men affected and the lack of refuge spaces available for them. One respondent pointed out that there are only 12 refuge bed spaces for men in all of England, underscoring the need for the strategy to be more inclusive and provide support for all victims, regardless of gender.

4. Alienation as a Form of Abuse

Alienation, particularly post-divorce, was another issue respondents felt was missing from the strategy. One respondent shared their personal experience of living with alienation for 19 years, explaining how it affected their family dynamic and relationship with their child. They argued that alienation is a serious issue affecting over 30% of the population and that it needs to be recognised as a form of abuse that has profound effects on families and communities.

5. Practical Solutions for Victims

Several respondents called for more practical solutions that would allow victims to leave abusive situations without sacrificing their entire lives. One suggested that many victims are deterred from leaving because they fear losing their home, pets, and stability. The feedback stressed the need for a strategy that helps victims without forcing them into hostels, which may not be a viable option for many.

Additionally, respondents expressed frustration with the lack of specific, actionable steps in the strategy. There were calls for a clear implementation guide that explains exactly how the objectives would be achieved in practice, especially for victims and local agencies.

6. Psychological Harm

Domestic abuse was not only framed as physical violence but also as psychological harm. Respondents emphasised the mental manipulation that often occurs in abusive relationships, particularly by narcissistic individuals. This type of abuse can erode victims' confidence, leading to mental health decline, and in severe cases, suicidal thoughts. The strategy needs to address these psychological dimensions of abuse, which affect both men and women.

7. Focus on Education and Evidence-Based Approaches

Several respondents felt that the strategy lacked a focus on psychological education. They argued that understanding the psychological roots of abusive behaviour is essential to preventing it and fostering healthier relationships. Additionally, respondents expressed a desire for the strategy to be grounded in evidence-based practices, wanting to see the research and data supporting its objectives. They felt this would provide greater confidence that the strategy's actions would be effective.

8. Addressing Systemic Issues and Perpetrators

Some respondents were concerned that the strategy does not focus enough on challenging and ultimately ending abusive behaviour by perpetrators. While supporting victims is crucial, they wanted the strategy to address the root causes of abuse and prevent reoffending. This would involve fostering a culture that understands and tackles the underlying causes of violence while promoting healthy behaviours and communication.

Respondents also stressed the need for systemic changes, including addressing the attitudes of authority figures, such as the police. One respondent shared their experience of being discouraged by police from pursuing a prosecution, indicating a need for better training and cultural shifts within services that handle domestic abuse cases.

9. Protection of Families and Legal Rights

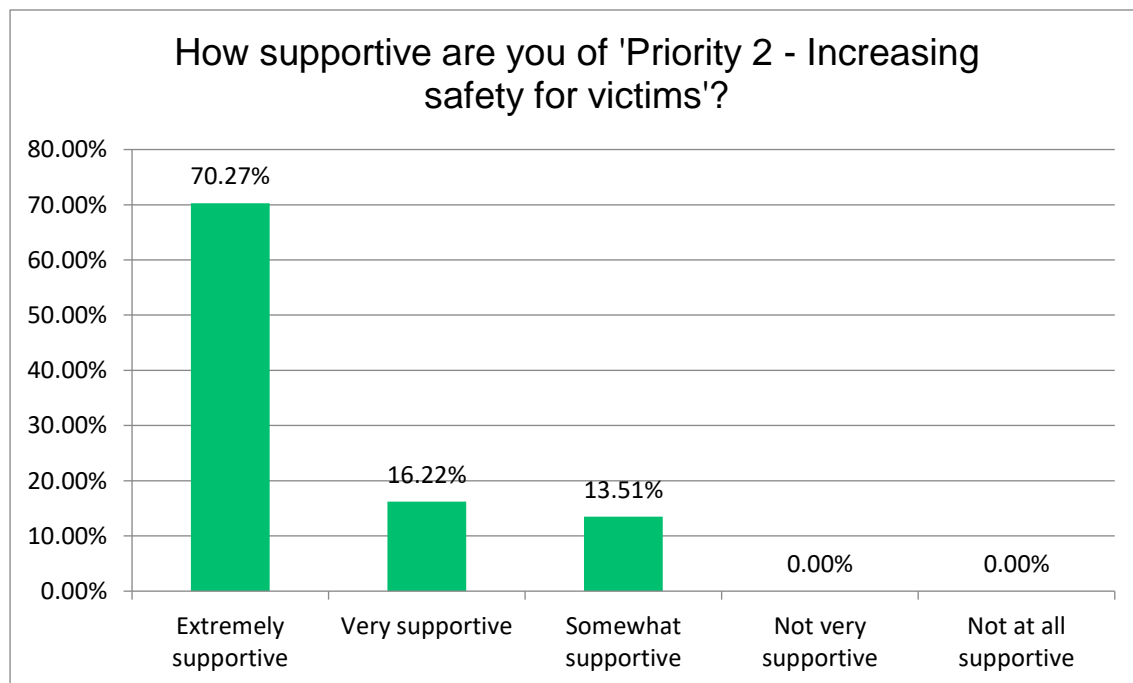
Another key theme was the protection of families, especially ensuring that victims can remain in their homes rather than being forced to move. Respondents highlighted cases where victims had to leave their homes because the abuser had legal rights to the property. This often disrupts children's lives, forcing them to change schools and healthcare providers. Respondents called for legal reforms to protect victims' rights to stay in their homes and maintain stability for their families.

How has the feedback been incorporated in to the final version?

Only 2% of respondents were not supportive of the priority. The feedback received was all invaluable in terms of the development of the delivery plan and has been incorporated into this. Some of the feedback on this priority was focussed around support for victims which has been picked up in other priorities across the strategy.

Priority two

Feedback on Priority Two highlighted a variety of concerns and recommendations from respondents, emphasising the importance of safety, clear communication, and culturally competent support for victims. Respondents also called for more practical and accessible solutions to ensure that victims receive timely and effective help when they need it.



1. Importance of Safety and Support

Safety is paramount: Many respondents stressed that safety is the cornerstone of any domestic abuse support system. Victims are unlikely to come forward if they do not feel safe, and if they are not convinced that disclosing their abuse will lead to protection. Without a robust safety framework, respondents believe that the entire strategy will fail.

Feeling safe before speaking out: Respondents pointed out that victims who do not feel protected are unlikely to disclose their experiences. Several comments also highlighted the

critical risks faced by victims around the time they leave their abusive relationships, which is often the most dangerous period for them. Respondents emphasised the need for early intervention during this period to ensure victims are adequately supported.

High levels of support: Respondents noted that victims of domestic abuse need high levels of support and need to know exactly where and how they can access it. If victims are not aware of the services available or do not believe they will receive appropriate help, they are less likely to reach out.

2. Community Involvement and Risks

Reluctance to intervene: Some feedback expressed concern that the strategy relies too heavily on the community to speak up and act when they see signs of domestic abuse. In practice, respondents explained that people in some communities are reluctant to get involved due to fear of retaliation or putting themselves and their families at risk, particularly when the abusers are well-known and dangerous individuals within the community. This raised questions about the practical application of community-based interventions and the need for systems to protect those who report abuse.

Empowering communities to act safely: While community empowerment is an important goal, respondents stressed the need to ensure that people can report abuse safely, both for the victims and those reporting the abuse. Suggestions included adding the words "effectively and safely" to objectives around empowering communities to intervene when domestic abuse is observed. This would ensure that actions taken by community members do not inadvertently make the situation worse for the victim.

3. Cultural Competence and Accessibility of Services

Cultural competence: Several respondents expressed concern that the strategy does not adequately address the need for culturally competent services. West Berkshire is becoming increasingly diverse, and victims from minority ethnic backgrounds may face additional barriers to accessing support if they feel that services are not sensitive to their cultural needs. Respondents emphasised the importance of ensuring that victims meet with professionals who understand and respect their cultural differences.

Visibility of services: Feedback indicated that victims, especially those in coercive and controlling situations, may not be aware of the services available to them. To address this, respondents suggested increasing the visibility of domestic abuse support services through regular advertising in the press and public campaigns, including the use of simple text numbers similar to the "See it, Say it, Sorted" campaign used by the Transport Police. The aim would be to make services easy to access and highly visible to those who need them.

4. Practical Challenges in Supporting Victims

Safe spaces and housing provision: A major challenge highlighted in the feedback was the shortage of safe spaces and housing provision for victims, particularly given the broader pressures on housing in the district. Respondents felt that without adequate refuge options, victims may struggle to escape abusive situations, which compromises their safety and ability to recover.

Coordination between police and local authorities: Feedback also called for stronger coordination between the police and West Berkshire Council (WBC) to provide more consistent and reassuring support to victims. One respondent shared a recent experience

where communication between services was poor, leading to a lack of support for securing property and uncertainty about the perpetrator's whereabouts. They stressed the need for a clearer, more consistent process to ensure victims feel supported and safe, particularly in the critical hours following an incident.

5. Improving Support from Authorities

Changing attitudes among authorities: Respondents felt that attitudes among police, judges, and other authorities need to change, particularly when dealing with mental abuse. They emphasized that domestic abuse is not just a physical issue, but also involves psychological and emotional harm. Authorities must be trained to recognise all forms of abuse, and their responses must be sensitive to the complexities of domestic abuse cases.

Judicial system's role in DA cases: Some feedback highlighted the need for greater judicial awareness of domestic abuse. Respondents felt that the court system plays a crucial role in protecting victims but is often not held accountable for the outcomes of domestic abuse cases. Suggestions included educating judges on domestic abuse and introducing mechanisms for victims to request a second opinion on judicial decisions, similar to the "Martha's Rule" in hospitals.

6. Importance of Early Intervention and Protection of Children

Early intervention: Respondents strongly supported the need for early intervention, as delays in recognising or addressing abuse can have serious consequences. In cases involving children, respondents noted that perpetrators often use children to maintain control over the other parent, making early intervention even more critical.

Protecting children: Feedback emphasised that children need to feel that they will be believed and supported if they report abuse. Respondents stressed that children are often witnesses or victims of domestic abuse, and their protection must be a key component of the strategy.

7. Family-Centred Support and Long-Term Recovery

Support beyond staying together: Respondents urged that the family-centered approach should also include support for families who do not stay together. Perpetrators often continue to use children as a means of controlling the other parent, even after separation. As a result, the strategy must account for the ongoing risks and provide support for parents and children in these situations.

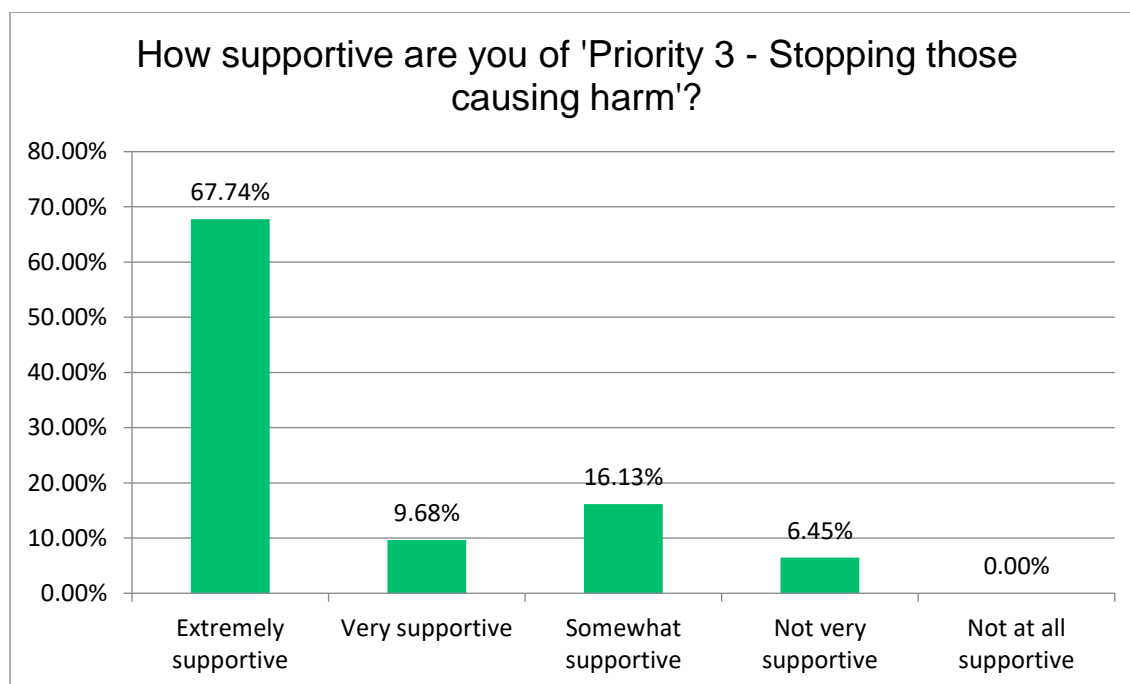
Long-term recovery and mental health support: Many respondents raised the importance of addressing the long-term mental health impacts of domestic abuse. Recovery from domestic abuse involves more than just escaping the situation—it requires ongoing support to rebuild victims' lives and address trauma. Respondents stressed the need for mental health services to be integrated into the support provided to survivors, ensuring their full recovery and well-being.

How has the feedback been incorporated in to the final version?

There were no respondents that did not support this priority. The feedback provided has been considered in the development of the action plan.

Priority three

Feedback on Priority Three revealed various concerns about how the strategy addresses those who cause harm in domestic abuse situations. Respondents highlighted issues around gender neutrality, the complexities of addressing abusive behaviour, the need for more robust interventions, and the lack of practical steps in the current strategy.



1. Gender Neutrality and Acknowledging All Forms of Abuse

Gender neutrality: A key concern raised by several respondents is the need for the strategy to be fully gender-neutral. While the strategy acknowledges that women are disproportionately affected by domestic abuse, respondents stressed that men can also be victims and that women are also capable of emotional and physical violence. They urged the strategy to avoid reinforcing the perception that only men are perpetrators and called for a more balanced approach that recognises abuse is not gender-specific.

Challenge problematic language: Several respondents noted that while the strategy claims to use gender-neutral language, it includes terms such as “masculinity” when discussing problematic behaviours. They felt this undermines the strategy's claim to be neutral and fails to acknowledge that abuse can be perpetrated by either gender, including false allegations by female abusers.

2. Understanding and Addressing the Behaviour of Perpetrators

Trauma-informed approach: Some respondents advocated for a more nuanced understanding of perpetrators, recognising that many offenders have been traumatised themselves and may be repeating cycles of abuse they have experienced. These respondents called for the strategy to include more focus on the rehabilitation and healing of offenders, rather than demonising them.

Perpetrators as manipulators: However, many other respondents expressed strong scepticism about the potential for reform among perpetrators. They highlighted how abusers are often masters of manipulation, putting on convincing façades and continuing their abusive behaviour even after legal action has been taken. Respondents were concerned that the strategy does not adequately address the reality of how difficult it is to change abusive behaviours or ensure perpetrators cooperate.

Focus on prevention and consequences: Several respondents stressed the importance of early intervention and clear consequences for perpetrators. They argued that perpetrators need to be made aware that their actions will not be tolerated and will have legal consequences. There was also a call for increased prison terms for domestic abuse offenders to serve as a stronger deterrent.

3. Robustness of the Strategy and Practical Implementation

Lack of detail and practical steps: A recurring theme in the feedback was the perceived vagueness of the strategy. Respondents noted that while the objectives are well-intentioned, they are often too high-level and lack clarity about how they will be achieved. Statements such as “develop campaigns and initiatives to challenge problematic views” were criticised as being too abstract. Respondents wanted to see more concrete, practical steps, such as removing known offenders from the family home to protect victims and their families.

Enforcing change: Many respondents questioned how the strategy could be enforced, especially where children and families are involved. One suggestion was to create mandatory programmes for perpetrators, including therapy, anger management, and psychological testing, before they can be allowed to return to the family home. This would ensure that the risk posed by offenders is properly assessed and mitigated.

Sharing information between agencies: There was a call for better systems for sharing information between agencies about high-risk individuals. Respondents felt that without effective communication between the police, social services, and other relevant bodies, it would be difficult to protect victims and prevent repeat incidents of abuse.

4. Education and Societal Change

Education and prevention: Many respondents agreed that education is key to stopping abuse before it happens. However, they also pointed out that changing societal attitudes is a long-term process, and there needs to be more immediate action alongside efforts to shift cultural norms. Respondents wanted to see the strategy include education on healthy behaviours and relationships, both for those causing harm and for the community as a whole.

Programmes for families and children: Several respondents highlighted the need for family-centred interventions that go beyond simply keeping families together. In cases where families do not remain together, respondents emphasised that children are often at increased risk of violence as perpetrators seek revenge on the parent who has left them. The strategy should ensure that children are protected and that the cycle of abuse is not allowed to continue through the next generation.

5. Barriers to Reporting and Accessing Support

Fear of reporting: Respondents highlighted the challenges victims face in coming forward, particularly when perpetrators have threatened them or their children with consequences if they report the abuse. It was noted that children, in particular, need to feel that they will be believed and kept safe if they come forward about the abuse they are experiencing or witnessing.

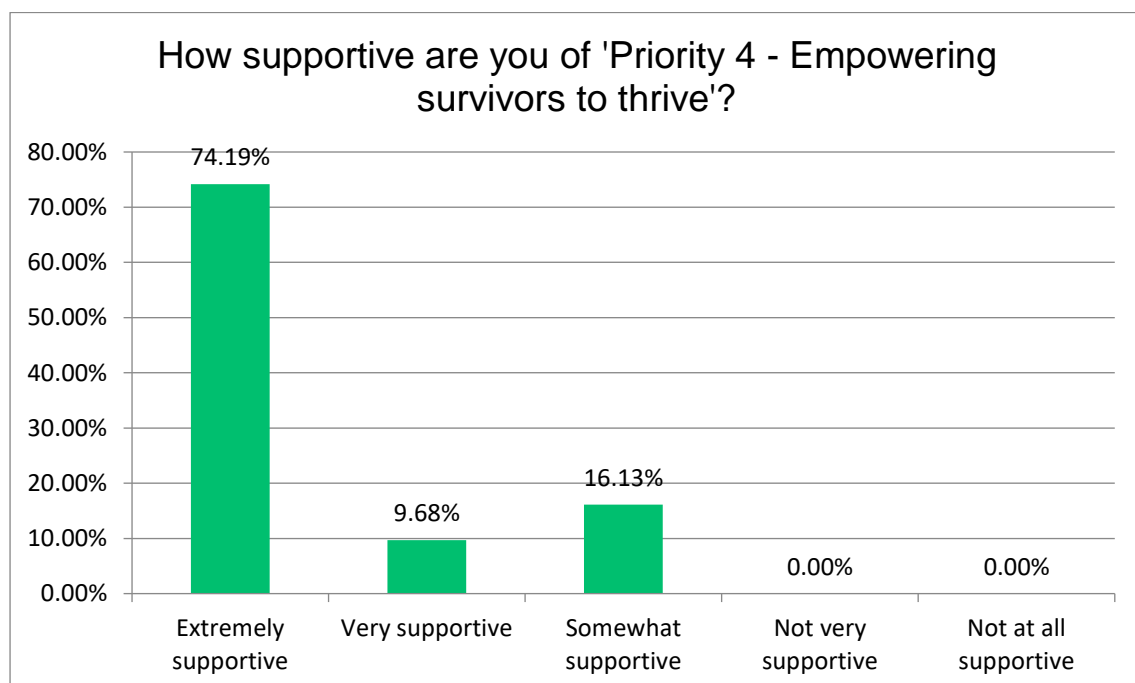
Support for victims: Several respondents pointed out that victims need to feel that their situation will not worsen if they report abuse. Guaranteeing that perpetrators will be questioned and dealt with is crucial to ensuring victims feel safe enough to speak up. Without this assurance, victims may remain trapped in dangerous situations, unable to seek help.

How has the feedback been incorporated in to the final version?

Overall the vast majority of respondents supported this priority. Based on the feedback we amended under the 'whole person' element of the priority 'adolescents' as a specific group to ensure that the strategy incorporated issues such as Child and Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse (CAPVA). Other feedback has been considered in the development of the delivery plan.

Priority four

Feedback on Priority Four reflects a deep understanding of the importance of comprehensive, long-term support for survivors of domestic abuse. Respondents highlighted the need for practical, individualised assistance that goes beyond immediate safety to include financial stability, education, and emotional recovery. They emphasised that supporting survivors to rebuild their lives is a crucial part of the strategy.



1. Personalised, Long-Term Support

Individualised approach: Many respondents stressed that survivors need to be treated as individuals. They highlighted the importance of avoiding a "one size fits all" mentality, as each survivor's experience and needs are unique. Survivors will require varying levels of support, and the strategy should be flexible enough to accommodate this.

Lifelong safety mechanisms: Several respondents mentioned the need for lifelong support mechanisms that ensure survivors feel safe and secure, not just immediately after leaving an abusive situation but well into the future. This would help survivors maintain the progress they have made in rebuilding their lives.

Ongoing support is vital: Early intervention and long-term support are essential for survivors. Respondents noted that knowing from the outset that ongoing support will be available can provide victims with the confidence to leave abusive situations. Many highlighted the complexity of emotional recovery, stressing that survivors often continue to deal with the effects of abuse long after they have left the relationship.

2. Signposting and Access to Services

Better signposting: Several respondents felt that, although there are many services available both nationally and in West Berkshire, survivors often struggle to find them. They stressed the importance of clear and effective signposting, so that survivors know exactly where to go for help. Survivors should not have to be overly proactive in seeking out support, as this can be overwhelming, especially in the immediate aftermath of abuse.

Advocacy and support networks: Respondents mentioned that some survivors may need advocates to help them navigate the support systems in place. This could be someone who helps them access resources, such as legal advice, housing, and financial support, without the added stress of doing it alone. One suggestion was to introduce an advisor or expanded McKenzie Friend role to help survivors navigate the legal and financial complexities of leaving an abusive relationship.

3. Financial Stability and Housing

Financial planning support: Respondents identified financial planning as a critical aspect of helping survivors rebuild their lives, especially for those who have experienced coercive control or financial abuse. Many survivors have had their financial independence stripped away and may not know the state of their finances or how to manage them. Suggestions included providing fast-tracked financial support, such as Universal Credit, as well as assistance with budgeting and setting up independent financial systems.

Housing support: The strategy's focus on housing was generally welcomed, but respondents raised concerns about how it would be implemented given the already high demand for social housing. Survivors often have to leave their homes and start from scratch, so secure, long-term housing options are essential for their recovery. Respondents also suggested that access to housing should be tied to financial stability, with collaboration between councils, social housing providers, and financial support services.

Fast-track family courts: Some respondents proposed fast-tracking cases involving domestic abuse through the family courts, particularly those requiring emergency financial settlements. This would alleviate some of the immediate financial pressures survivors face and provide a smoother transition to independence.

4. Education, Retraining, and Future Growth

Education and retraining: One of the most significant points raised was the need for survivors to have access to education and retraining opportunities. Many survivors not only lose their families and friends but also their jobs and financial independence. Respondents suggested that providing education and retraining programmes could help survivors rebuild their lives, offering them hope for the future and the ability to support themselves and their children.

Empowering survivors: Respondents emphasised the need to empower survivors by showing them they have the potential to change their lives and grow into the people they want to become. Many survivors have lost their sense of identity, and offering them opportunities to explore personal growth and development would help them regain confidence and self-worth.

5. Mental Health and Therapy Services

Dedicated mental health services: Respondents called for a dedicated therapy service for victims of all ages, with early access to mental health support being a priority. They noted that if mental health issues are not addressed early, the long-term effects can be more severe and costly in terms of both the individual's well-being and the demand on public services. Mental health support should be an integral part of the recovery process, with survivors having access to professional counselling and therapy tailored to their specific experiences.

Understanding trauma: There was a call to integrate modern scientific understanding of trauma and how it can be healed into the strategy. Survivors need access to psychological tools that help them manage the long-term effects of abuse, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Respondents suggested that the strategy could do more to address the root causes of trauma and offer pathways to healing, not just for survivors but also for perpetrators where appropriate.

6. Social and Community Integration

Community and socialisation opportunities: Respondents pointed out that survivors often face isolation after leaving abusive relationships. They suggested that offering survivors access to adult education, hobbies, and social activities, such as sports, would help them rebuild their social networks in a positive environment. These opportunities could be vital for helping survivors regain confidence, form new friendships, and reintegrate into the community.

Healthy community development: Some respondents highlighted the importance of developing healthy community connections for survivors beyond their immediate family. This could involve fostering "families of choice," where survivors build supportive relationships outside traditional family structures. Such initiatives could help survivors feel connected, supported, and empowered in their recovery.

7. Legal and Judicial Support

Legal advice and wider support: Respondents agreed that access to legal advice is crucial, but questioned whether this should be the only legal support provided. There were calls to expand legal support to include guidance on financial settlements, child contact arrangements, and protection orders to ensure survivors are legally equipped to rebuild their lives.

Post-separation abuse: Another area of concern was post-separation abuse, particularly in cases involving child contact. Respondents wanted to see increased awareness among social

workers, the police, and judiciary about the risks associated with child contact in domestic abuse cases, to ensure that children are not used as tools of control by the perpetrator.

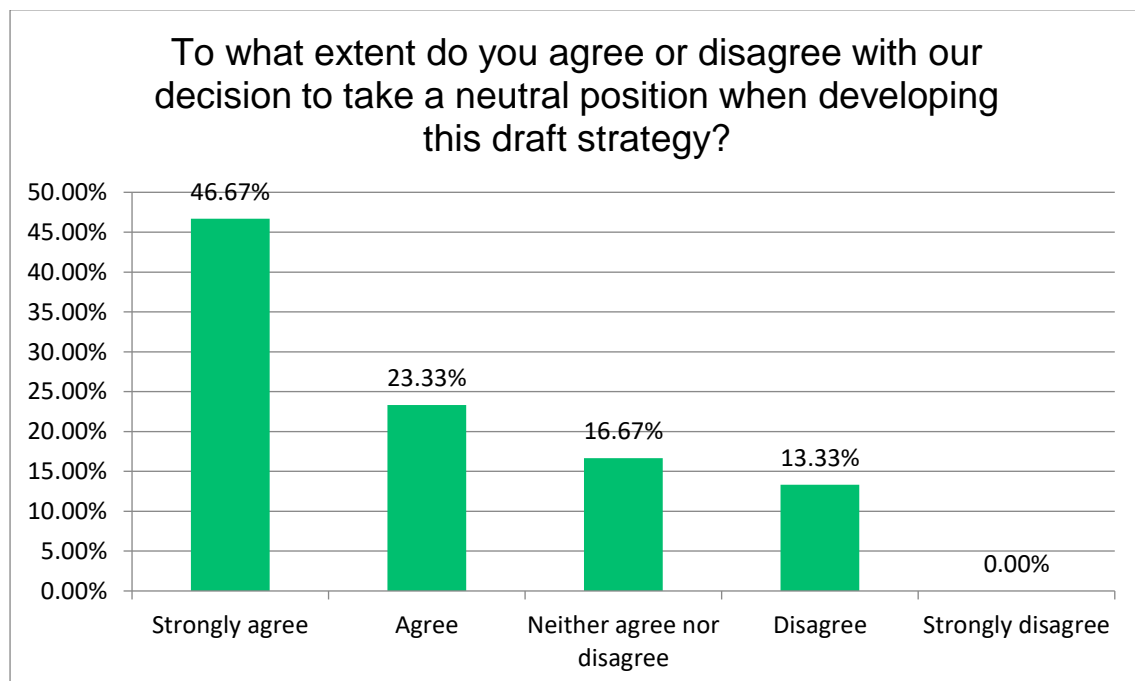
How has the feedback been incorporated in to the final version?

No respondents disagreed with this priority; however they did provide useful feedback which has been incorporated in to the delivery plan as they focus more on specific deliverables. There was some feedback around children’s education being incorporated in to the strategy and so the following objective was added: Develop and implement initiatives to support children impacted by domestic abuse in their education by collaborating with schools and wider stakeholders to address their unique challenges to ensure children receive the necessary support to thrive academically and emotionally.

Broader questions and feedback

To what extent do you agree or disagree with our decision to take a neutral position when developing this draft strategy?

In response to the question about the decision to take a neutral position in developing the domestic abuse strategy, feedback from respondents was mixed, reflecting a broad spectrum of opinions. Some supported the idea of neutrality, while others felt that the strategy should explicitly prioritise certain groups, particularly women and girls, who are statistically more likely to experience domestic abuse.



1. Support for a Neutral Approach

- **Inclusivity for all victims:** Several respondents supported the neutral approach, stating that it is vital for ensuring that support services are accessible to all victims of domestic abuse, regardless of gender. These respondents felt that taking a non-gendered stance would prevent any potential backlash or feelings of exclusion among male victims, who may already struggle to come forward due to societal stigma.

- **Hidden male victims:** Some highlighted that male victims are under-reported, and a gender-neutral approach may encourage more men to seek help. They emphasised that domestic abuse affects all genders and that a neutral strategy would be more inclusive in recognising and addressing the needs of both male and female victims.
- **Supporting non-binary victims:** One respondent pointed out that domestic abuse involving victims who identify as other than female is often hidden within an already hidden crime. They argued that using non-gendered language could encourage more people, particularly those who don't identify as female, to come forward and seek support.

2. Concerns About Gender Neutrality

- **Prioritising women and girls:** Many respondents felt that, while a neutral approach is important, the strategy should still recognise the disproportionate impact of domestic abuse on women and girls. Statistics show that the majority of victims are female, and some argued that this needs to be reflected in the provision of services. They felt that centring women and girls does not mean ignoring male victims, but rather addressing the specific, documented needs of the majority.
- **Safe spaces for women:** A few respondents raised concerns about the need for safe spaces for women and girls, particularly those that are exclusively for biological females. They argued that these spaces are crucial for survivors to feel secure and that the strategy should ensure their protection.
- **Acknowledging the difference in violence:** Some feedback stressed that although men can also be victims of domestic abuse, the level of violence and severity is typically higher for women. Respondents felt that while men need support, it is important to recognise the significant disparity in the experiences of men and women when it comes to abuse.

3. A Balanced and Nuanced Approach

- **Recognising harmful norms:** A key point raised by several respondents was that the strategy should not only be neutral but also address harmful norms and stereotypes that affect both men and women. While the strategy highlights issues such as problematic masculinity, respondents suggested that it should also acknowledge harmful stereotypes about women and other gender norms that contribute to abuse. They called for a broader, more inclusive discussion about societal expectations and how they perpetuate domestic abuse for all genders.
- **Both abusers and victims need support:** Some respondents went further to suggest that the strategy should recognise the humanity of both abusers and victims. They argued that many abusers are themselves victims of trauma and may need support to break the cycle of violence. A balanced approach would, therefore, not only support those who have been abused but also provide interventions for those who perpetrate harm, in order to help them heal and change their behaviours.

4. Statistical Evidence and Targeting Support

- **Data-driven approach:** A few respondents felt that the strategy should be data-driven. If research shows that women and girls are disproportionately affected by domestic abuse, then the strategy should be designed accordingly, without neglecting male victims. These respondents suggested that services should be targeted where the need is greatest, and that gender-neutrality should not come at the expense of addressing the specific needs of female victims.
- **Equality versus equity:** One respondent noted the difference between equality and equity, arguing that treating everyone equally does not necessarily lead to fair outcomes. Instead, equity—providing more support to those who need it most—should

guide the strategy. They felt that prioritising services for women and girls does not negate the need to support male victims, but reflects the reality that women experience domestic abuse at much higher rates.

How has the feedback been incorporated into the final version?

This question received the most mixed response in terms of whether people supported our approach to keep the strategy as gender neutral. To balance this we kept the strategy as gender neutral, but included an explanation on this at the beginning of the strategy:

We acknowledge women are disproportionately affected by domestic abuse. We have used neutral language throughout to recognise anyone can experience abuse. However our delivery plan will include specific approaches based on the needs of different communities.

As well as this, there was feedback throughout all priorities around the terminology and language used. As such we also added at the beginning the following:

We interchangeably use these terms to respect diverse experiences. We recognise that individuals with lived experience may relate differently to these terms. In most cases we have used the term “victim” to reflect ongoing abuse, and “survivor” to reflect victims journeys to recover from abuse. In all instances where we refer to victim-survivors this encompasses all ages, aligning with the DA Act’s recognition of children as victims in their own right.

Feedback on the Colour Palette

Accessibility concerns were raised regarding the strategy’s original colour palette, which was based on green tones, alongside whites and greys, in line with West Berkshire’s branding. Respondents pointed out that this palette was not accessible for visually impaired individuals. Given this feedback, and acknowledging that this is a **partnership strategy**, the colour palette was revised to a blue colour to improve accessibility and ensure the strategy is inclusive of all audiences.