

**BIRMINGHAM**

# Domestic Abuse Prevention Strategy 2018-2023

Changing Attitudes Changing lives



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# Foreword

Welcome to the Birmingham Domestic Abuse Prevention Strategy 2018-2023. Domestic abuse is a serious issue, both nationally and here in Birmingham. It has a drastic, negative and long lasting impact upon the safety, health and wider life chances of women, children, and families; and drives wider crises such as homelessness and financial exclusion.

Tackling domestic abuse must become everyone's business. The way we respond to domestic abuse as a city is a reflection of our values. We are making a commitment to becoming a trauma informed city; leading the way in tackling domestic abuse, the fear it creates and the harm it causes.

As partners, together we are sending a clear message that:

- We will not tolerate domestic abuse;
- We will take robust, appropriate action against abusers;
- We will make the significant culture change required to influence the behaviours of organisations and future generations.

In doing so, we will ensure that women, their children and families are liberated from fear, insecurity and harm, and can lead the safe, happy, healthy and fulfilling lives that they deserve.

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## Introduction

Domestic abuse touches the lives, directly or indirectly, of most people in Birmingham. The sheer scale of domestic abuse causes untold harm to individuals, children and families, communities and damages the social fabric of the city.

This strategy adopts the Government definition of domestic abuse as:

*“Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality”.*

Birmingham has a strong history of partnership working in addressing domestic abuse. Despite this, there is now evidence that domestic abuse in the city, as elsewhere, is increasing and more people are known to be at risk than ever before. At the same time, our public services are shrinking and we need to find new ways to keep our population safe and healthy, and enable our communities to thrive.

We know a great deal about domestic abuse, not least that left unchecked, domestic abuse gets worse over time. As such, the case for identifying victims and intervening earlier to reduce harm is clear. However, our long-term ambition is for a city free from domestic abuse and we must therefore take all practicable steps to eliminate domestic abuse, reducing harm and demand for services along the way.

This will require everyone to expect equality and respect in their relationships; and every agency understanding the fundamental nature of coercive control within domestic abuse and responding effectively as a result.

## Scope of the Strategy

This strategy responds to the Government's commitment to reduce domestic abuse, as set out in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, and to support the Mayor's vision for Birmingham to be a city free from domestic abuse.

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# Ensuring Equality in Our Response to Domestic Abuse

**We know that domestic abuse can happen to anyone, from any background, in any relationship.**

The majority of domestic abuse is perpetrated by men against women, or against other men that they are in a relationship with. Male violence accounts for the vast majority of serious harm and deaths through domestic abuse.

The national strategy Ending Violence against Women and Girls (2016) emphasises the importance of recognising the gendered nature of domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse is the systematic abuse of power and control, and is fundamentally linked to inequality. Inequality between men and women not only increases the opportunity for the abuse of power, it also makes it harder for women to live free from violence. It is clear that effectively responding to domestic abuse requires a response that takes account of broader gender inequalities.

This does not discount the responsibilities instilled by the Public Sector Duty (s149) of the Equalities Act 2010 to have due regard for the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between people from different groups.

As such, this strategy also takes account of and responds to the needs of population groups sharing the following protected characteristics:

- Age;
- Disability;
- Gender reassignment;
- Marriage and civil partnership;
- Pregnancy and maternity;
- Race;
- Religion or belief;
- Sex;
- Sexual orientation.

To reflect this, here after, this strategy will use the language of women, children, and groups sharing protected characteristics.

# Defining and Understanding Domestic Abuse

## Defining Domestic Abuse

**Controlling or coercive behaviour** was written into law under Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 and helps us to better understand the Government definition of domestic abuse (p5).

**Controlling behaviour** is behaviour that makes people sub-ordinate or dependent by isolating them from friends and family and other sources of support, taking control of their resources and depriving them of their independence.

**Coercive behaviour** includes acts of assault, threat, humiliation or intimidation that are used to harm, punish or frighten another person.

**Coercive control** is 'the micromanagement of everyday life. Micromanagement crushes the spirit even more fundamentally than the deprivation of basic necessities because it leaves little space for a person to breathe'. (Stark, 2007)

## Domestic Abuse and Legislation

Wider legislation helps us to understand the nature of domestic abuse from a statutory context.

For example, the **Adoption and Children Act 2002 (s120)** extended the definition of harm to include 'impairment suffered from seeing or hearing the ill treatment of another'; which required children who witness domestic abuse at home to be considered in need of help and protection from the Local Authority, as well as those that are directly injured or abused.

Likewise, the **Care Act 2014** sets out a clear legal framework for how the Health and Social Care system should protect adults at risk of abuse

or neglect. It specifies that freedom from abuse (and neglect) is a key aspect of a person's wellbeing.

In this way, the responsibility to respond to domestic abuse is held by all statutory agencies (to understand legislation, to provide support and to safeguard).

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- When we think a victim is unsure or indecisive, we need to understand the threats and manipulation that she may face combined with the assault on her self-confidence by constant undermining, put-downs and challenge to her self-worth,
- We need to stop blaming the victim but understand the safety strategies that are being used and respond to the threat and control which the victim and family faces,
- We need to rethink how we keep children safe. At the moment, we rely too heavily upon an abused mother to keep her children safe and think too little about how we, as agencies, can keep the family safe. We need to empower our staff to know that they can make a difference without the need to take a child into care,
- When child contact is granted, we need to understand that the abuser may be continuing to perpetrate abuse through the children by undermining the non-abusing parent, overwhelming their mother; monitoring and checking up on her or by actual threats to the children,
- When a victim has no access to money, we need to recognise the control that an abuser will likely have had over the family's finances and the debts that he may have incurred,
- We need to understand the threat that an abuser poses to those close to him. This is particularly true for mental health and substance misuse services who will often be working closely with an abuser and not want to jeopardise their relationship by enquiring too closely about domestic abuse,
- We need to stop domestic abusers from being invisible to our services and we need to control and manage them more effectively. Too often we are not tying up an abuser's history of violence with their current behaviour and then not being able to correctly identify the threat that the abuser poses,
- We need to understand that domestic abusers are most violent when their victim tries to end a violent relationship or seeks help. The majority of our domestic homicides (intimate partners) have been killed when they have sought help or tried to leave. If a victim is taking these brave steps, we must wrap protection around them.



- Birmingham is the largest local authority area in Europe and growing faster than the UK average. At the same time, domestic abuse is increasing in the city with an estimated 41,000 individuals experiencing domestic abuse, the vast majority of whom are women.<sup>1</sup>

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- Every child deserves the best start in life. Yet one in six pregnant women will experience domestic violence, and around 30% of domestic violence starts or worsens during pregnancy. Domestic abuse is a significant factor in the onset of pre-term labour, and maternal and perinatal mortality and morbidity. <sup>1</sup>
- Growing up in an abusive environment and living in a constant state of control, abuse and terror can have profound consequences on a family's well-being, long into their future. The majority of victims and their children will live with their abuser between two and ten years. <sup>vi</sup>
- The impact of domestic abuse on the mental health of victims and their children is severe; dealing emotionally with the abuse and trauma they have experienced or witnessed often results in depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorders. More than a third (36%) of women who have experienced severe physical and sexual violence have attempted suicide. <sup>vii</sup>
- Victims of domestic abuse, and their families, are often subjected to financial abuse. In a recent survey, 52% of women respondents who were still living with their abuser said they could not afford to leave because they had no money of their own. <sup>viii</sup>
- Victims of domestic abuse may have looked to alcohol or drugs in order to cope with the abuse that they were experiencing, or have been forced into dependency by their abusers. Women experiencing significant domestic abuse are more than twice as likely to have an alcohol problem and eight times more likely to be drug dependent than others. <sup>ix</sup>
- By virtue of their marginalisation in society, some groups, particularly those with protected characteristics, will face additional barriers to receiving the support that they need. As a result they will often face an escalating risk of harm.
- This impact of domestic abuse upon society, community and economy is rarely given due consideration despite the fact that domestic abuse fractures families, communities, workplaces and local economies. Public services such as the Police, Health, Housing and Children's Services are increasingly overwhelmed by responding to domestic abuse.
- Despite these increasing demands for services, domestic abuse still remains hidden. Without effective support and protection, women and children will be subjected to escalating abuse. On average, four women are killed by their abusers each year in Birmingham. The majority of these were trying to leave or end the relationship at the time.

# Our Vision

Birmingham is a place where domestic abuse is not tolerated; where everyone can expect equality and respect in their relationships, and live free from domestic abuse.

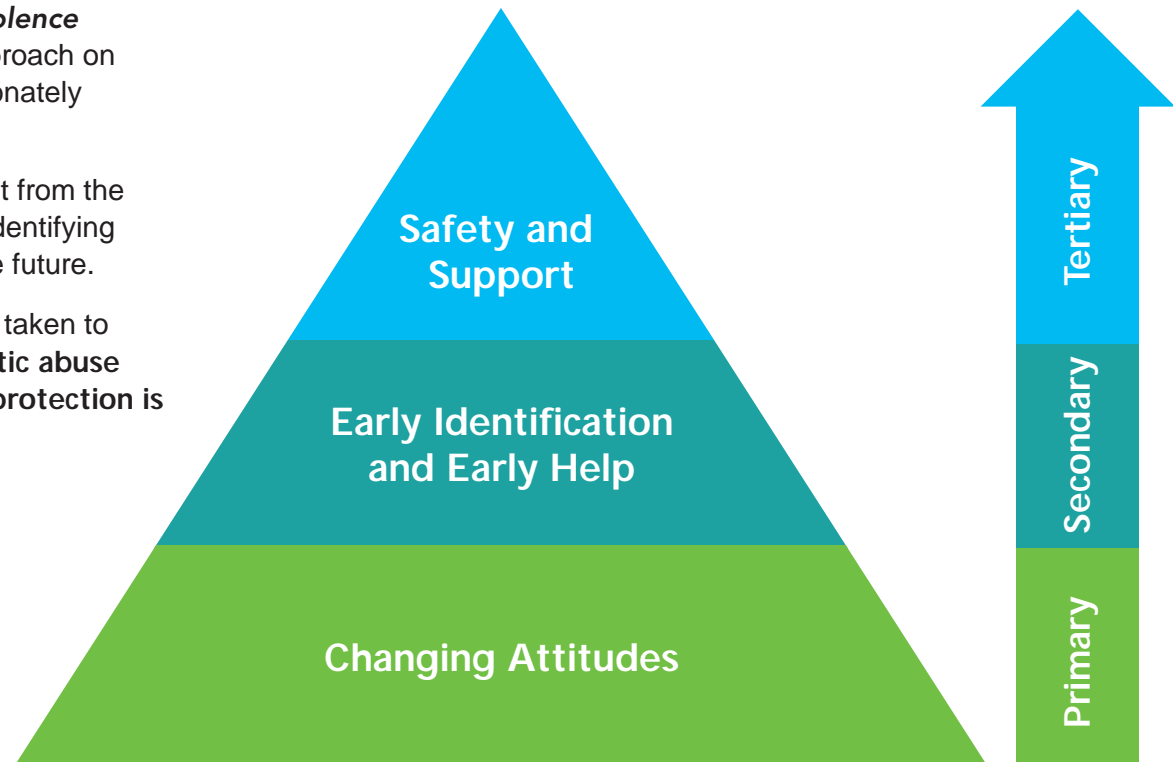
Our vision is rightly ambitious and cannot be achieved by a single agency in isolation. To be successful, **domestic abuse must become everyone's business**.

Our strategy sets out the city's commitment to tackling domestic abuse. Guided by the principles of the national strategy **Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (2016)**, we are focusing our approach on women and children – recognising that they are disproportionately affected by domestic abuse.

As a result, the starting point for our new strategy is different from the past as the focus shifts towards pro-active prevention and identifying domestic abuse as early as possible to limit its impact in the future.

To do this, a very careful and considered approach must be taken to rebalance our collective efforts towards **preventing domestic abuse happening in the first place whilst ensuring safety and protection is available where there remains a threat of risk or harm**.

Our new strategy outlines a layered prevention model and focuses on three key priorities:



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Early identification and early help means strengthening our first

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## Strategic Oversight

Birmingham Health and Wellbeing Board and Birmingham Community Safety Partnership are jointly responsible for, and committed to, ensuring that Birmingham's vision for domestic abuse becomes reality.

## Strategic Assurance

The Birmingham Safeguarding Adults Board and the Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board will seek assurance together, and through their respective governance structures, on the effectiveness of partnership working in the development and implementation of the Joint Action Plan.

## Monitoring Progress

The Strategy Monitoring Team will report progress against the Joint Action Plan to the Violence Against Women and Children Steering Group who will oversee the implementation of the Strategy.

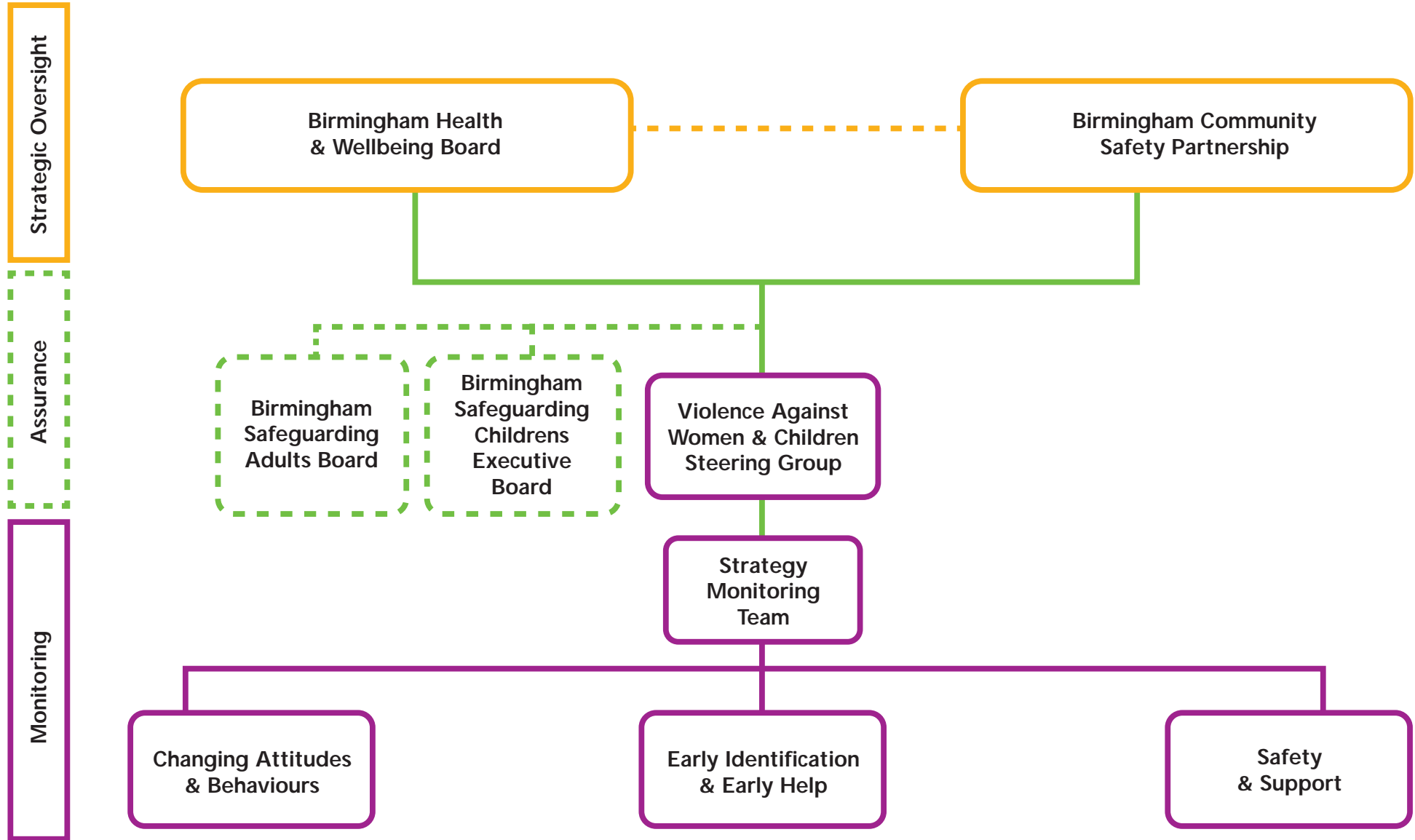
The Citizens Panel will continue to have an active role in helping to

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# Governance

The strategy will be monitored through the following governance structure:





# Joint Action Plan

## Delivering the vision

Our Joint Action Plan is set in the context of the following essential principles:

- There is a strategic, system wide approach to responding to domestic abuse and preventing it in the future;
- Women, children, and groups sharing protected characteristics, who experience domestic abuse are at the centre of any action or intervention;

- There is a clear focus on abusers in order to keep victims safe;
- Communities are involved, engaged and empowered to seek, design and deliver solutions to domestic abuse.

The vision is ambitious and to be successful, significant system and organisational culture change is required. The following action plan sets the strategic direction for the next five years. The actions have been split into whole system and priority specific actions; the detail of which will continue to develop over a period of time.

## Whole Systems Actions

Whole Systems Actions	Lead Partner/s	Date for Completion
<p>Transform Birmingham's approach to domestic abuse and coercive control in line with the findings from DHRs through the design and implementation of a trauma informed Birmingham workforce development strategy that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertakes a domestic abuse training needs analysis for all organisations and delivers both multi-agency and service specific training,</li> <li>• Draws on the expertise of the specialist domestic abuse sector,</li> <li>• Designs best practice guidelines and toolkits to support mainstream workers,</li> <li>• Delivers against the learning from domestic homicide reviews,</li> <li>• Enables staff to work with domestic abuse to understand the multiplicity of need and respond effectively to prevention, early identification, early intervention and the safety and support needs of women and children according to their function.</li> </ul>		

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Whole Systems Actions	Lead Partner/s	Date for Completion
<p>Ensure the quality of domestic abuse service provision through the design and implementation of a quality assurance framework that incorporates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment of agencies against the new Kite Mark Accreditation informed by West Midlands Domestic Abuse Standards,</li> <li>• Specific analysis of domestic abuse through the Children's Safeguarding workforce through Section 11 Safeguarding Audit,</li> <li>• Specific analysis of domestic abuse response across the Birmingham Workforce through the Adult Safeguarding Assurance process,</li> <li>• Quality assurance of Domestic Homicide Reviews and child safeguarding reviews where domestic abuse is a feature.</li> </ul> <p>Ensure strategic leads across the city work together to collaboratively shape and drive key priorities and actions across related strategy areas including Housing, Homelessness, Early Help, Financial Inclusion, Safeguarding, Health and Wellbeing, and LGBT to recognise, enable and ensure a robust response to domestic abuse.</p> <p>Strengthen evidence and intelligence gathering and sharing to inform policy, practice and priorities for future action. This includes ongoing collation of intelligence to better understand areas of underreporting in particular cohorts e.g. groups sharing protected characteristics.</p> <p>Develop and implement an integrated and multi-agency commissioning model in line with the Violence Against Women and Girls: National Statement of Expectations (2016). This should strike the balance between provision for safety and protection, as well as earlier intervention and recovery models for both adults and children.</p> <p>Recognise and build upon Birmingham based projects that are effective in their response to domestic abuse and are supported by a strong, locally developed, practice informed evidence base.</p> <p>Develop and implement a Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) Action Plan to monitor progress and hold the whole system and / or specific organisations to account in responding to recommendations made in DHRs.</p> <p>Work with strategic leads in Housing, Homelessness and Safeguarding Adult leads to drive improvement in</p>		

Priority:	Aim:	Prevention Level:	Priority-Specific Actions:	Lead Partner/s	Date for Completion
Changing Attitudes and Behaviours	Prevent domestic abuse by challenging the attitudes & behaviours that foster it.	Primary	<p>Widen community engagement and public awareness of domestic abuse, including forced marriage and honour-based violence, by encouraging community-led preventative approaches.</p> <p>Undertake targeted community engagement with groups currently underrepresented in services such as BME communities, LGBT communities, disabled and /or older women.</p> <p>Explore potential of practices and programmes to raise awareness and develop young people's expectations of healthy and positive relationships.</p> <p>Refresh and roll out guidance to schools, colleges, universities and youth settings on dealing with domestic abuse, including the use of nationally available campaign materials and the local development of curriculum materials.</p> <p>Develop and implement campaign and public awareness methods</p>		
Early Identification & Early Help	Intervene early to prevent harm and reduce the impact of domestic abuse on victims and families.	Secondary	<p>Strengthen the city-wide understanding of need by accessing and analysing available data, evidence, service standards and intelligence with input from victims and key partners including the City Council, Health, Criminal Justice, Education, Housing, Specialist and wider Third Sector.</p>		

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Priority:	Aim:	Prevention Level:	Priority Action:	Lead Partner/s	Date for Completion

Priority:	Aim:	Prevention Level:	Priority Action:	Lead Partner/s	Date for Completion
Safety and Support	Ensure that those individuals experiencing domestic abuse are protected from harm and supported to recover.	Tertiary	Ensure there is access to refuge and effective community based support. efn		

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# Evidence and Intelligence

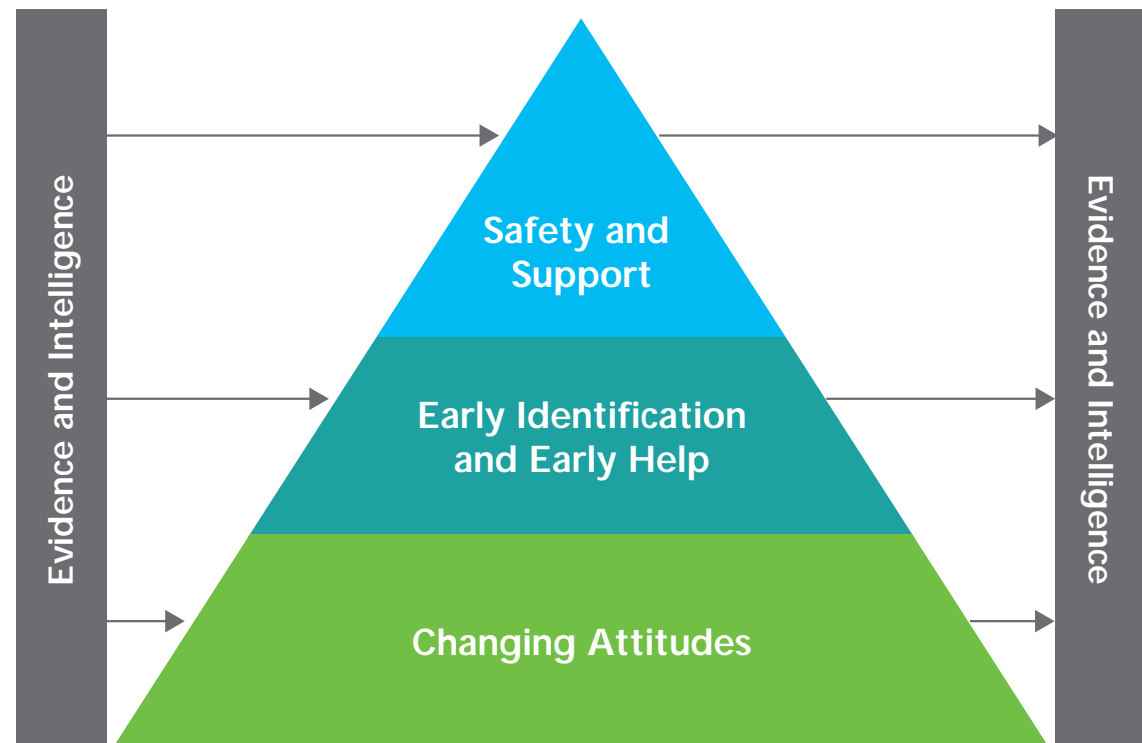
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There is a clear evidence and intelligence theme which underpins the whole system actions along with all three priority areas within the joint action plan.

To inform and drive continued improvement and innovation in tackling domestic abuse throughout the strategy period, we must ensure that collectively we have access to, utilise and learn from the best available evidence base.

Birmingham is nationally recognised as a leader in the field of domestic abuse and as such, we must ensure that the strength of local, practice-based evidence is recognised and considered alongside evidence based practice.

The following diagram demonstrates the flow of evidence and intelligence into and out of the strategy model:



# References

- i Domestic Abuse Needs Analysis Update 2016
- ii Domestic Abuse Needs Analysis Update 2016
- iii Domestic Abuse Needs Analysis Update 2016
- iv

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