

Sandwell  
**Partnership**

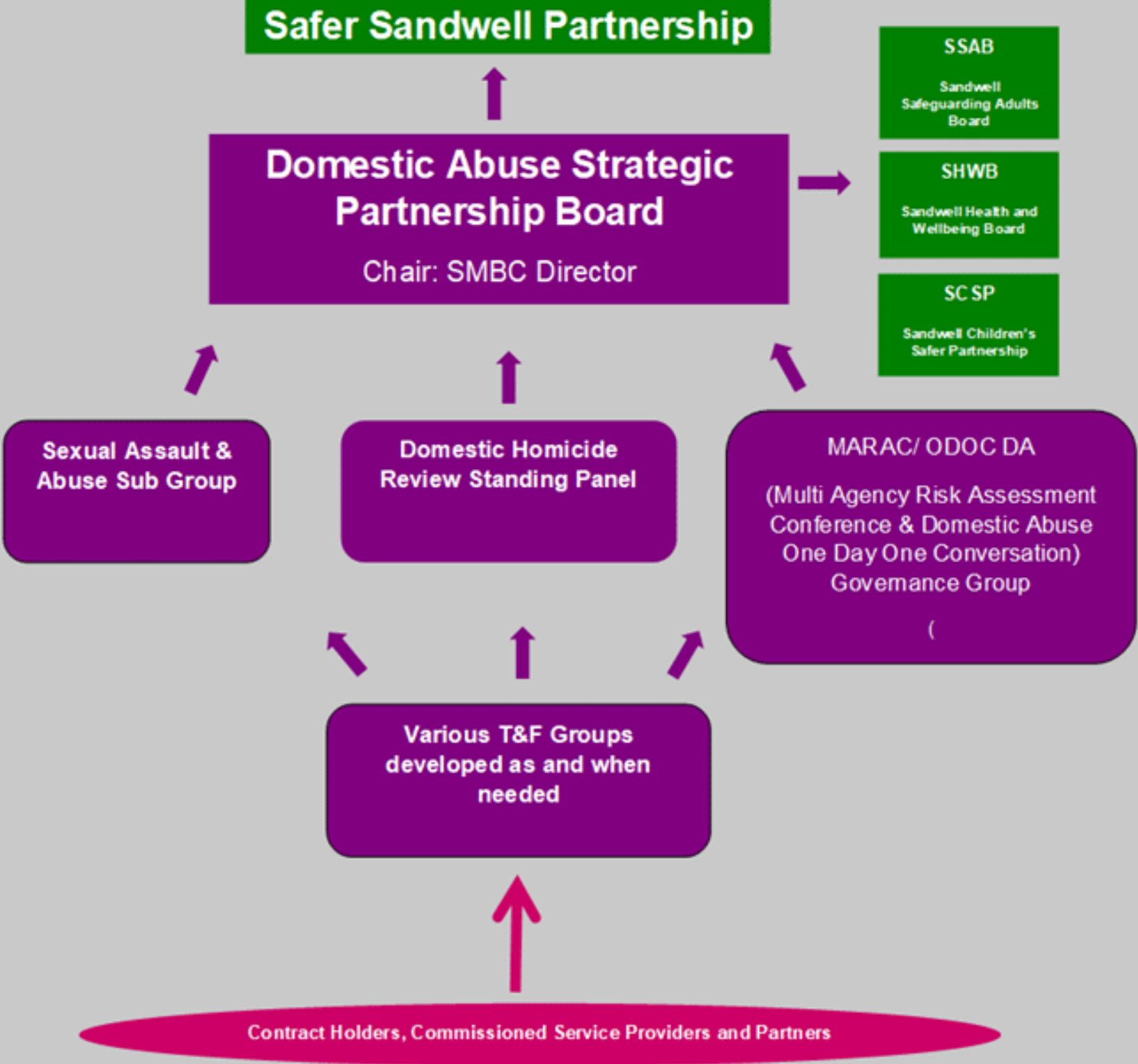
MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN

Safer Sandwell  
Partnership

Local Police and Crime Board

# SANDWELL SEXUAL ASSAULT AND ABUSE STRATEGY 2022 - 25

# Governance



The Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership (DASP) recognised Sexual Assault and Abuse as a pervasive issue that needed particular focus and therefore the Sexual Assault and Abuse (SAA) Sub Group was formed. The DASP has responsibility for the Sandwell SAA Strategy and has oversight of the strategic decisions and work completed by the SAA Sub Group. A Sandwell Sexual Assault and Abuse Needs Assessment has been completed and has informed this Strategy. A comprehensive multi-agency implementation plan will be developed to outline how the Strategy will be delivered. This will be regularly monitored by the SAA sub group and reported to the DASP. Sandwell also works closely with regional partners and contributes to the delivery of the West Midlands Sexual Assault & Abuse Strategy and also reflects the priorities in the national Strategic Direction for Sexual Assault & Abuse Services.

# CONTEXT

West Midlands Definition of Sexual Assault and Abuse (Sexual Violence) is as follows:

Sexual violence' and/or 'sexual abuse' can both be defined as any behaviour perceived to be of a sexual nature that takes place without consent or without understanding. It encompasses a broad range of activities, physical, visual and verbal, that are: of a sexual nature; take place without consent or without understanding; are experienced, at the time or later, as a threat, invasion or assault and that take away the ability to control intimate contact. Whilst sexual violence has been recognised as a cause and a consequence of gender inequality disproportionately affecting women and girls, we recognise there are heterosexual male victims, and victims within the LGBT+ community.'

Sexual assault and sexual abuse is a form of exploitation. The previously established West Midlands definition of exploitation is as follows;

An individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child, young person (under the age of 18), or adult and exploits them a) through violence or the threat of violence, and/or b) for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator and/or c) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants. The victim may have been exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Exploitation does not always involve physical contact, it can also occur through the use of technology.

The NSPCC categorise Child Sexual Abuse as when a child or young person is forced or tricked into sexual activities. They might not understand that what's happening is abuse or that it's wrong and they might be afraid to tell someone. Sexual abuse can happen anywhere and it can happen in person or online.

- Sexual Assault and Abuse are hidden crimes that often go unreported so it is sometimes misleading to rely on police data to estimate the prevalence of the issue. It is estimated that 773,000 adults aged 16-73 experienced SAA in the year ending March 2020.(Crime Survey England and Wales)
- However since 2015 there have been **3384** recordable offences relating to sexual assault and abuse in Sandwell. (Rape and Serious Sexual Offences (RASSO) Data). This include adult and child victims with the majority of victims being female.
- Black Country Women's Aid's (BCWA) quarterly reports indicate that after a spike last year (2019/20) to **197** referrals there has been a noticeable decrease to **153** referrals this year which could be attributed to the Covid Lockdown and victims feeling unable to report. This is backed up by the fact that the majority of referrals **41%** were self referrals in 2018/19. This decreased dramatically to **29%** in 2019/20 and reduced again to **25%** in 2020/21.
- Sexual Assault (**88%**) and Rape (**56%**) continues to be the primary reason for referral into BCWA's independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA) service.
- The Paediatric Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) supported **46** victims of SAA in the last year specifically in Sandwell **70%** of which were young women and girls .Of all the referrals **29%** were from a minority background. **4%** were from LGBTQ community.
- The Adult SARC were only able to provide West Midlands wide data they have supported **272** adult victims of SAA from April 20 to Mar 21 **92%** of those supported were female. **45%** of those were from a minority background (significantly higher than the percentage of ethnic minority across the West Midlands of **16.5%**)

Sexual Assault and Abuse are serious crimes, however some social and cultural attitudes can negatively impact on how victims/survivors are viewed and whether they access the support they need. This can lead to the victims/survivors credibility being questioned, victim blaming and can strengthen myths and false beliefs about what constitutes sexual assault and what causes it. It is important that time is invested in ensuring the needs of victims/survivors are being met in a way that is beneficial for them, allows the best outcomes and has a successful impact so as to support a healthier society.

As well as support for victims/survivors, Sandwell are committed to putting a heavy emphasis on the prevention of sexual assault and abuse by tackling the crime at it's conception. We want to do this through education, around misogynistic attitudes, addressing sexually harmful behaviours as soon as they become apparent and ensuring young people are fully aware of consent and the importance of gaining it.

# THE VISION


Our vision is that Sandwell is a place where:

- **sexual assault/abuse is not tolerated**
- **Everyone can expect equality and respect in their relationships and live free from sexual assault/abuse**
  - **The voice of victims/survivors (adults and children) are central to and fully inform our work**
- **Victims/survivors and families are supported by excellent organisations working in partnership to ensure a co-ordinated community response where victims feel protected, safe and secure and recover from trauma**
  - **Perpetrators are held accountable for their actions and supported to change their behaviour**
- **Communities are aware and are actively engaged in preventing and reducing sexual assault and abuse**





Established Independent ISVA and Children's ISVA Service & Counselling services through BCWA



Multi-agency working and collaboration



Formulation of SAA Sub Group that will oversee this work



New projects are being implemented meeting the needs of Male Victims/Survivors and LGBT Victims/Survivors



Regional strategic input and collaboration



**ACHIEVEMENTS SO FAR**

## LOCAL STRATEGIC AIMS

### PROTECT

#### Victim Pathways

We will provide an appropriate pathway for victims to access support that is effective, robust and follows best practice. We will use victims' feedback to improve services and outcomes.

### PREVENT

#### Tackling Attitudes

We will implement robust preventative measures from early childhood to adulthood

### PREPARE

#### Raising Awareness

We will raise awareness of SAA across all partners and ensure that all organisations fulfil their responsibilities to address SAA and provide appropriate responses to victims

### PURSUE

#### Challenging Perpetrators

We want perpetrators of sexual assault and abuse to be held accountable for their actions and supported to change their behaviours

## References

West Midlands Sexual Assault and Abuse Strategy

Solihull sexual assault and abuse needs assessment – Caroline Murray Domestic Abuse Services Coordinator

Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy - July 2021

Sexual offences prevalence and trends, England and Wales: year ending March 2020

Strategic Direction for Sexual Assault and Abuse Services, Lifelong care for victims and survivors: 2018-2023, NHS England

## Useful Contacts

[www.blackcountrywomensaid.co.uk](http://www.blackcountrywomensaid.co.uk)

[www.horizonsarc.org.uk](http://www.horizonsarc.org.uk)

[www.westmidscyps.co.uk](http://www.westmidscyps.co.uk)

[www.barnardosbeacon.org.uk](http://www.barnardosbeacon.org.uk)

[www.brook.org.uk](http://www.brook.org.uk)

[www.sandwell.gov.uk](http://www.sandwell.gov.uk)

[www.sandwellchildrenstrust.org](http://www.sandwellchildrenstrust.org)

[www.victimsupport.org.uk](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk)

[www.kooth.com](http://www.kooth.com)

[www.sandwellhealthyminds.nhs.uk](http://www.sandwellhealthyminds.nhs.uk)