

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND ABUSE STRATEGY

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FOREWORDS —→

PARTNERSHIP LEADERSHIP

This strategy sets out our shared ambition to create a safer Greater Essex for everyone. Sexual violence and abuse cause profound harm to victims and survivors, their families and loved ones, and place a significant burden on public services and the wider economy. While progress has been made across Southend, Essex and Thurrock, too many offences still go unreported, too few perpetrators are brought to justice, and too many victims wait too long for outcomes and support.

This strategy recognises that preventing sexual violence and abuse requires a whole-system and whole-society approach. We must challenge stigma, address harmful attitudes, and create environments where people feel safe to come forward. Central to this is listening carefully to victims and survivors, learning from their experiences, and ensuring services are compassionate, trauma-informed and accessible.

As organisations across policing, local government, health and the voluntary sector face significant reform and change during the life of this strategy, collaboration and leadership will be more important than ever. We are committed to ensuring that specialist services remain sustainable and that sexual violence and abuse remains a priority for our communities.



PIPPA BRENT-ISHERWOOD

BA(Hons), Pg Dip, MCMI, Co-chair of the Sexual Violence and Abuse Partnership Board

Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer to the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner

HEALTH PERSPECTIVE

Sexual violence and abuse is a major public health issue with long-term consequences for physical health, mental wellbeing, and life chances. Health services are often the first point of contact for victims and survivors, whether in primary care, emergency departments, or mental health services.

This strategy commits health partners to a trauma-informed response that prioritises early identification, effective referral pathways, and long-term recovery. Preventing sexual violence and abuse and responding well when it occurs is essential to tackling health inequalities and improving population health across Essex.

Working with partners across the system, health services will continue to strengthen workforce skills, improve integration with specialist services and ensure care is equitable and responsive to the needs of all communities.



DR GILES THORPE RN

BSc (Hons), MSc, DProf, MIHM (He/Him/His), Co-chair of the Sexual Violence and Abuse Partnership Board.

Executive Chief Nurse, NHS Essex Integrated Care Board

POLICING AND JUSTICE

Our communities deserve a justice system that responds decisively, treats victims with compassion, and holds perpetrators to account. Through this strategy, criminal justice partners are committed to improving the quality, consistency and timeliness of investigations and outcomes.

Victim confidence is central. Justice is not only defined by court results, but by victims feeling believed, informed, and supported throughout their journey. Essex Police and partners will continue to strengthen suspect-focused, victim-centered, and trauma-informed approaches, while working closely with the Crown Prosecution Service and specialist advocates.



SCOTT CANNON

Detective Chief Superintendent, Head of Crime & Public Protection Command, Essex Police

WHAT IS SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND ABUSE?

Sexual violence and abuse includes any unwanted sexual behaviour that happens without consent. It can affect anyone, regardless of age, gender, background, or circumstances. Abuse can occur in private settings, public spaces or online.

It includes rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, image-based abuse, and abuse within families or relationships. Both children and adults can be affected. Abuse may be carried out by someone the victim knows, such as a partner, family member or professional, or by a stranger.

Child sexual abuse is any sexual activity involving a child or young person under the age of 18, including physical contact or non contact abuse such as forcing or persuading a child to view sexual images or behave in sexual ways. **Child sexual exploitation** is a form of child sexual abuse where a child is manipulated, coerced or pressured into sexual activity in exchange for something they need or want, or for the benefit of the abuser or others. **Sexual exploitation of adults** involves taking advantage of a person's vulnerability, power imbalance or circumstances to coerce or control them into unwanted sexual activity.

This may be linked to threats, dependency, drugs, alcohol, money, housing or care needs.

Consent must always be freely given, informed, specific, and can be withdrawn at any time.

This strategy supports the work of the Sexual Violence and Abuse Partnership in delivering Police and Crime Plan priorities including Ensuring vulnerable people are protected; and Tackling violence against women and girls and domestic abuse. It focuses on sexual violence and abuse outside of a domestic context. Sexual abuse within domestic settings, and violence against women and girls in public spaces and online, are addressed through the Southend, Essex and Thurrock Domestic Abuse Strategy and the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy.

WHY THIS STRATEGY MATTERS



Sexual violence and abuse causes serious and lasting harm. Survivors may experience poor mental health, physical health problems, difficulties with relationships, education and work, and increased risk of further harm.

From the 1st of April 2024 to 31st March 2025:



Essex Police recorded **5,574** sexual offences, of which **2,096** were rapes



Synergy Essex recorded **6,269** cases supported; and **4,110** new referrals

Synergy Essex is a commissioned partnership of specialist rape and sexual abuse services across Greater Essex, providing community based support to victims and survivors of sexual violence and child sexual abuse, and their families, including Independent Sexual Violence and Abuse Advisors (ISVAAs) and counselling.

Across Southend, Essex and Thurrock, the estimated lifetime cost of sexual violence and abuse is £13.8 billion, reflecting demand on health care, social care, policing, criminal justice, and specialist services. Despite this impact, most offences are never reported, and many victims do not receive the support they need.

OUR VISION AND AIMS

Our vision is for Southend, Essex and Thurrock to be places where sexual violence and abuse are prevented wherever possible, where victims and survivors are believed and supported, and where perpetrators are held to account. Our aims are to:

Improve attitudes, awareness and confidence to speak up



Prevent sexual violence and abuse before it happens



Ensure access to timely, trauma-informed support



Improve justice outcomes and public safety



Strengthen partnership working and accountability across all services



WHAT WE WILL DO

The strategy focuses on five key themes:



This includes public education campaigns, strengthening referral pathways, improving support for children and adults, delivering high-quality investigations, and using shared data to improve services and outcomes. Victims and survivors will be at the centre of all activity.

RISKS AND CHALLENGES

Delivering this strategy faces challenges including funding pressures, rising demand for services, stigma and under-reporting, online abuse and exploitation, and pending organisational changes across public services.

Partners will monitor risks, share learning and work together to reduce their impact, ensuring sexual violence and abuse remains a priority during periods of change.

SERVICES AND SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS, SURVIVORS AND FAMILIES

Support is available regardless of whether you choose to report to the police or not. Help is confidential and focused on your needs.



Synergy Essex: For anyone who has been a victim of sexual violence or abuse, Synergy Essex is a partnership of rape and sexual abuse centres in Greater Essex who deliver specialist community-based services for victims and survivors of all forms of sexual violence and abuse, sexual domestic violence, sexual harassment and child sexual abuse.

Phone 0300 003 7777



Victim Support – a specialist service helping anyone affected by any types of crime, not only those who experience it directly, but also their friends, family and any other people involved.

Phone: 0808 168 9111, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.



Victim Gateway Service – a directory of services in Essex

The Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse provides several resources aimed at reducing the impact of child sexual abuse through improved prevention and better response.



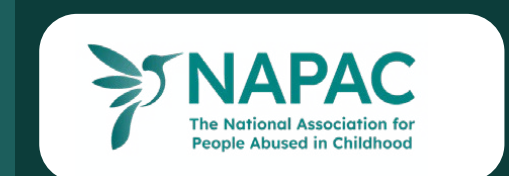
24/7 Rape & Sexual Abuse Support Line, run by Rape Crisis, is open 24 hours a day, every day of the year

Phone 0808 500 2222



Compass – a partnership of domestic abuse services providing a central point of access for callers to speak with a trained member of the team who will complete an assessment to ensure contact is made with the most appropriate support service.

Phone: 0330 333 7444



NAPAC - Supporting Recovery From Childhood Abuse provides support for adult survivors

Phone: 0808 801 0331

SVASPB



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Sexual Violence
and Abuse
Strategic
Partnership

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