

Pan-Sussex Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment Refresh 2026

East Sussex and West Sussex | Needs Assessment 2026 refresh with annexes

Executive Summary

This Pan Sussex Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment provides evidence-based analysis of domestic abuse need across East Sussex and West Sussex. It integrates service data, referral pathway analysis, homelessness statistics, safe accommodation returns and national context to identify unmet need, system pressures, and inequalities in access and outcomes. The findings in this report are based primarily on 2025 service data, supplemented by the most recent statutory housing and safe accommodation returns covering 2024–25 and early 2025–26ⁱ.

1. Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this needs assessment is to provide a snapshot of the current local landscape across East and West Sussex - this is used, alongside the strategic priorities and recommendations, to inform Pan Sussex commissioning, service development, and partnership governance. It supports delivery of the Pan-Sussex Domestic Abuse Strategy, and meets statutory duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and the Equality Act 2010.

2. Population Context (ONS)

West Sussex has a population of approximately 915,000 residents, with 23.3% aged 65 and over. East Sussex has a population of approximately 560,882 and one of the oldest age profiles in England, with several districts having over 30% of residents aged 65+. This ageing profile has significant implications for domestic abuse risk, disclosure, and access to services.

3. Overview of Domestic Abuse Demand

Demand for domestic abuse support remains high across Sussex. Police-led pathways continue to be the primary route of entry into services, while community, health and adult social care

referral routes remain comparatively under-utilised. Service providers report that survivor support needs remain complex and significant, with increasing demand around mental health support, incidences of self-harm, suicidal ideation and support requirements around problematic substance use.

4. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Needs

Assessment

4.1 Older Victims and Survivors

Older people are significantly under represented across domestic abuse services and high-risk pathways when compared with local population profiles. Despite nearly a quarter of residents being aged 65+, only a small proportion of service users and MARAC cases involve older survivors, indicating hidden harm and late disclosure.

4.2 Disabled and Neurodivergent Survivors

Disabled and neurodivergent survivors are overrepresented at crisis points, including MARAC and safe accommodation services. High levels of co-occurring mental ill-health, neurodivergence and suicidal ideation indicate complex need within this demographic.

4.3 Referral Pathways and Equity of Access

Analysis of WORTH referral data demonstrates a prevalence of police-led referral routes. Lower referral volumes from adult social care, health and community services suggest barriers to access for groups less likely to engage with police.

5. Safe Accommodation – West Sussex

Safe accommodation services in West Sussex are experiencing increasing demand and capacity pressures. A growing number of households are unable to be supported due to lack of bedspaces, particularly families with children and survivors with complex needs. This need continues to be addressed via the introduction of self contained safe accommodation units, however, the recommended number of units has still not been met.

6. Children and Young People (CYP) Domestic Abuse Support – West Sussex

CYP domestic abuse services in West Sussex show sustained high demand, with increasing waiting lists for one-to-one support. A significant proportion of children accessing support have additional needs or disabilities.

7. Domestic Abuse, Homelessness and Safe Accommodation – East Sussex

Statutory homelessness data demonstrates that domestic abuse is a major driver of homelessness in East Sussex, particularly at the relief duty stage. In several districts, domestic abuse accounts for between 14% and 20% of households owed a relief duty.

In East Sussex there are two commissioned refuge services, delivered by one specialist provider. They are referred to as the multiple compound need (MCN) refuge and community provision and mainstream refuge.

The MCN refuge and community support service provides 12 units for women with no children. This service opened in November last year and is a 365 days a year, 24 hour staffed service for women with three or more multiple compound needs. Support workers are part of the East Sussex multi-disciplinary as additionally to women residing in the refuge, they carry a community caseload, leading on people where domestic abuse is identified as the main need.

Mainstream refuge: There are currently 42 units with a planned expansion to 55 across 5 buildings. This is an inclusive service, with provision for male and trans survivors, and survivors with pets.

8. National Context and Comparison

Nationally, domestic abuse accounts for around one quarter of all relief-stage homelessness cases among households with children. Comparison with East Sussex data suggests potential under-identification of domestic abuse at crisis point, while West Sussex safe accommodation pressures mirror national trends.

9. Summary of Identified Needs

| Theme | Identified Need |
|---------------------------|---|
| Older people | Earlier identification and age-appropriate pathways – East and West |
| Disability | Accessible, specialist and trauma-informed support – East and West |
| Referral pathways | Stronger non-police access routes - West |
| Safe accommodation | Increased capacity and improved move-on provision - West |
| Children and young people | Reduced waiting lists and additional capacity – East and West Improved specialist provision - East |
| Data and insight | Improved EDI data quality and consistency – East and West |

10. Strategic Recommendations

Pan-Sussex partners should strengthen prevention and early intervention, expand safe accommodation capacity, embed EDI requirements into commissioning and enhance intersectional approaches within service delivery. Improve integration between domestic abuse, housing, health and adult social care services, and enhance data quality and capture to support ongoing assurance.

Annex A: Board Pack Summary

This annex provides a concise summary of key quantitative findings for Board oversight.

| Area | Key Pressure Identified |
|-------------|---|
| West Sussex | Rising safe accommodation demand and capacity constraints |
| East Sussex | High levels of DA-related homelessness at relief stage |
| Pan-Sussex | Police-dominant referral pathways limiting equitable access |

Annex B: Executive Briefing

This Executive Briefing summarises the headline findings of the needs assessment. Key messages include under-representation of older survivors, over-representation of disabled survivors at crisis points, significant pressure on safe accommodation, and the need to strengthen non-police referral pathways.

Annex C: EDI Annex for Scrutiny and Assurance

This annex provides a focused Equality, Diversity and Inclusion analysis to support scrutiny and assurance. It demonstrates compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and highlights where inequalities in access and outcomes persist.

Annex D: Alignment to Pan-Sussex Action Areas

| Pan-Sussex Action Area | Aligned Recommendation |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Prevention and Early Intervention | Strengthen identification through housing, health and adult social care |
| Safe Accommodation | Increase inclusive and family-suitable provision |
| Children and Young People | Expand capacity and reduce waiting times |
| Workforce and Practice | Embed trauma-informed and EDI training |
| Data and Insight | Improve completeness and consistency of EDI data and embed data dashboard |

ⁱ The needs assessment uses a combination of datasets covering different reporting periods. Community-based domestic abuse service data, including commissioned services and the WORTH service in West Sussex, covers the 2025 calendar year (1 January to 31 December 2025).

Safe accommodation data is drawn from Domestic Abuse Act Part 4 quarterly returns, covering January–March 2025, July–September 2025 and October–December 2025, representing the most recent confirmed accommodation data available at the time of analysis.

Housing and homelessness data for East Sussex covers the 2024–25 financial year (1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025), reflecting statutory homelessness reporting requirements.

National comparator data is drawn from England-level statutory homelessness statistics for 2024–25.

All figures represent service episodes or household identifications rather than unique individuals.