

Maldstone Together: A Community Discussion



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At the start I was nervous to contribute thoughts outside the enclaves but towards the end I felt more comfortable.

Now I feel great, like faith in humanity has hit me.

—YOUNG WOMEN’S ENCLAVE PARTICIPANT

Maidstone Together: A Community Discussion is the collective contribution of local people coming together over many months to discuss and deliberate about the reality of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) in Maidstone, and what actions are needed to stop it.

This report is written with thanks to the 37 participants, who contributed their time, experiences and ideas to Maidstone Borough Council and partners.

With further thanks to speakers who work in the field of VAWG as researchers, MPs, MBC representatives and service providers. The Advisory Group, Outreach Group and VAWG Action group who supported raising awareness about this project for recruitment and helped shape the Community Discussions.

Thank you to the Maidstone Council team, Mid Kent Mind, and the Involve UK delivery team whose dedication and hard work helped bring this project to life.

Finally, thanks to the readers of this report who, it is hoped, will listen to, learn from, and build on the work from this community discussion.

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Foreword

Maidstone Borough Council
In December 2024,
Maidstone Borough Council
passed a motion to address
Violence Against Women
and Girls through action
grounded in the experiences
of residents, and built on
genuine listening.
That commitment led
directly to this report.

—COUNCILLOR DAVID NAGHI
CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY COHESION AND SAFETY



We commissioned Involve UK, a leading organisation in deliberative democracy, to design and deliver a citizens' deliberation that would bring the voices of our community into this work in a meaningful way — informed by an initial survey of residents and young people to capture their experiences and concerns.

Their findings and recommendations will be invaluable in shaping how the Council and its partners approach this issue in the years ahead.

Over four sessions, 37 Maidstone residents — selected to reflect the diversity of our community in terms of age, background and identity — gave their time, their insight, and in many cases their personal experiences, to help shape what a safer borough could look like.

Working with Involve UK's skilled facilitation, participants heard from international, national and local experts, explored the full breadth of the issue, and developed practical recommendations together. At times they worked as a whole group; at others, they came together in smaller groups based on age and gender, creating the conditions for honest and open conversation.

The recommendations that follow will be considered by the Safer Maidstone Partnership's VAWG Action Group, which brings together the local Councils, partner agencies, professionals and local charities in a joined-up approach to prevention, support and long-term change. Partners will use these recommendations to shape their ongoing work — determining together how best to turn the community's ideas into concrete change, resulting in a new action plan for the borough.

The Council's survey of over 1,250 residents and young people had already made the scale of the issue in Maidstone undeniable. But it also showed something equally important: that our community wants to be part of the solution. This deliberation has honoured that willingness.

The insight gathered here will inform our approach to VAWG for years to come — not just in the immediate actions we take, but in how we work with communities on issues that matter most to them.

This is not the end of a process. It is the beginning of one — and we are committed to making sure it leads to real, lasting change.

Executive summary

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is a serious and widespread issue that affects the safety and wellbeing of people across Maidstone.

It impacts daily life at home, in public spaces, online, in schools, and workplaces. VAWG is a broad spectrum that includes physical, sexual, psychological and financial abuse, and its effects are often long lasting for the individuals, families, and communities involved.

Evidence gathered by Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) in a [recent resident survey](#) shows the scale of the issue locally. Of the 664 adult respondents, 205 reported being victims of physical or sexual abuse, and 245 reported experiencing emotional or psychological abuse.

This prevalence of VAWG impacts everyone's day to day life, with 71% of respondents having changed their daily routes to protect their safety.

In response to the seriousness of this issue, MBC committed in December 2024 to taking stronger, evidence-based action to prevent VAWG and improve the safety of women and girls across the borough. This includes:

Developing a broader VAWG Strategy that will outline concrete steps to increase the safety of women and girls in Maidstone, with a particular focus on vulnerable populations.

Promoting a Women's Night-Time Safety Charter to improve the safety of women in public spaces after dark.

Leveraging Licensing Tools, including a focus on taxi and pub/bar licensing to enhance the safety of women and girls in Maidstone.

Making Women's Safety Central to Town Planning to ensure public spaces are designed with safety in mind.

Achieving White Ribbon Accreditation to promote the role of men and boys in ending VAWG. In December 2024, MBC committed to taking stronger, evidence-based action to address VAWG.

To ensure this work is shaped by the experiences, priorities, and values of local people, MBC launched a groundbreaking citizen deliberation project in partnership with [Involve UK](#): a community discussion on VAWG. This project brought together 37 residents and young people from across the borough to learn, deliberate, and decide on practical actions MBC, its partners, and the wider Maidstone community can take to address VAWG.

The 37 participants were selected to be broadly demographically reflective of Maidstone's residents. Participants were organised into four enclave groups: women, young women, men, and young men. Across four facilitated discussions, participants heard evidence from a carefully selected range of local, national, and international experts, including frontline charities, academics, policy specialists, and politicians. The evidence shared with the participants was designed to provide balanced, robust, and high quality information on the causes, impacts and prevention of VAWG.

Together, the 37 participants developed eight final recommendations in response to the question: *'What can we all do as a community to stop Violence Against Women and Girls before it starts and ensure their ongoing safety?'*

The process was supported by an independent Advisory Group made up of local partners and VAWG specialists, who helped ensure the discussions, evidence, and final recommendations were credible and well informed. During the final session, participants worked directly with MBC councillors to test the feasibility of their ideas, strengthening the process and the impact of the recommendations.

Their final recommendations focus on prevention through education, culture change, accountability, and reflect a strong shared belief that addressing VAWG is everyone's responsibility. As one participant put it: "There is no such thing as an innocent bystander". These recommendations reflect that truth, that accountability for VAWG sits with all of us.

These recommendations will now be taken forward by the [Safer Maidstone Partnership's VAWG Action Group](#), an expert multi-agency group — including Kent Police, Kent County Council, housing associations, domestic abuse services and local charities — who work collaboratively on prevention, support and interventions to address VAWG. By using these considered recommendations to inform future policy, partnership working, and action across the borough, MBC have ensured that community voices remain central to Maidstone's long-term commitment to ending VAWG.



I felt that I have learned a lot that I wouldn't have learned anywhere else and have understood how to help and change.

—YOUNG MEN'S ENCLAVE PARTICIPANT

Final Recommendations

The recommendations are presented in the order of how they were prioritised, with Recommendation One receiving the most votes.

The wording and language of the recommendations are from participants directly.

It is important for the recommendations to remain in participants' own words to reflect their ideas and intentions without interference or bias.

** These recommendations were identified by participants as areas for further public engagement*

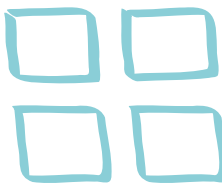


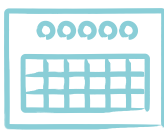
 Lifelong learning* (25 votes)	Recommendation One: Statement
	Learning about VAWG should be lifelong, engaging and accessible – through formal, informal and non-formal education, the workplace, and in community spaces. Learning must be relevant to people's real experiences. There should be equal access to lifelong learning.
 Government action* (23 votes)	Recommendation Two: Statement
	MBC should advocate and lobby central government for a VAWG Lead Coordinator in every parish and district, and eventually county council to make sure VAWG is high on every political agenda.
THREE  Women's representation in positions of decision making (21 votes)	Recommendation Three: Statement
	There is proportional representation of women and gender minoritised people in positions of decision making.
 Support to increase disclosures and provide long term support for survivors (19 votes)	Recommendation Four: Statement
	Create a single, trusted 'STAR' (Safe, Trained, Action, Response) support system that enables safe disclosures, provides immediate support, delivers coordinated long-term care, and empowers survivors of VAWG to access justice and healing.

 Poverty reduction and cycles of abuse (16 votes)	Recommendation Five: Statement
	We must break the cycle of poverty by investing in families to stop abuse continuing.
 Public spaces (16 votes)	Recommendation Six: Statement
	Make our public spaces places where everyone feels safe and can enjoy being outside. Ask communities what would improve spaces for them, run public awareness raising campaigns in public spaces to discourage poor behaviour and signpost to support. Improve visible security (e.g. clean streets lighting, CCTV, patrols).
 Difficult / uncomfortable conversations about VAWG* (14 votes)	Recommendation Seven: Statement
	Through education and facilitated discussions we can actively encourage conversations in our community about important, and difficult topics like VAWG. If we don't have these conversations, public awareness decreases and gives VAWG the opportunity to fester and grow into a big social issue.
 Shared social spaces for young men and women (14 votes)	Recommendation Eight: Statement
	Bring back free youth clubs, run as a charity, with local government funding.

Maidstone Together: A Community Discussion in Numbers

37 participants 

4 enclave groups 

4 sessions 

20 individual hours of learning and deliberation 

740 collective hours of learning and deliberation 

14 speakers 

8 prioritised recommendations 

Understanding Maidstone Together: A Community Discussion

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I was blown away by the connectedness of the participants ...for the expertise of facilitation and the sheer positivity and ownership of a community determined to implement change in their community.

I was honoured to have played a tiny part in this today and it will be a memory I will carry for a long time.

—COUNCILLOR RACHEL RODWELL, ALLINGTON AND BRIDGE



Why a community discussion on Violence Against Women and Girls?

VAWG is a deeply rooted societal issue that touches every part of community life. Lasting change requires more than legislation or service provision alone, it requires shared understanding, community involvement, and solutions shaped by the experiences and values of local people. That's why MBC took a deliberative approach to their community engagement on VAWG.

Conventional engagement methods like surveys and focus groups capture top-of-mind opinions. They offer snapshots of what people already believe before they've had the chance to learn, question, or listen to others. Deliberation offers something different. It gives people the time, the evidence, and the space to engage well, to examine their assumptions, hear perspectives different from their own, and work towards a shared understanding.

By creating space for respectful disagreement and informed reflection, deliberation helps people move beyond immediate, often polarised, responses and work towards practical, shared solutions, grounded in people's own experiences. Through this process, participants were able to learn directly from experts and each other, consider the realities of VAWG in Maidstone, and develop recommendations grounded in evidence and lived experience. The result is a stronger foundation for long-term action, partnership working, and community ownership of efforts to address VAWG.

Who else was involved in the community discussion?

In addition to the 37 participants, the community discussion brought together a wide range of partners, each contributing distinct expertise. This combination of lived experience from the participants and professional knowledge created the conditions for a set of strong and informed recommendations.

MBC VAWG Survey

As a first step towards building an informed picture of VAWG in Maidstone, MBC conducted a borough-wide online survey to better understand people's experiences and perceptions of VAWG. Over 1,250 adults and young people responded to the surveys, with the findings underlining the need for urgent action on VAWG. The survey results formed part of the evidence base shared with participants of the deliberative process, ensuring their discussions were grounded in the wider experience of Maidstone residents.

[More information about the survey results can be found here.](#)

Design and Facilitation Team

Involve, the UK's leading public participation charity, designed and facilitated the process. Involve UK worked in close collaboration with the MBC team throughout the design phase, ensuring that every design decision served the project's goals and created a clear pathway to real impact.

Outreach Support

Outreach Support was provided by charities, faith based organisations and community groups already established in Maidstone. They played a vital role in spreading the word about the community discussion, helping to reach a wide and diverse group of participants. A full list of those who supported the outreach can be found in the [appendix](#).

The Advisory Group

To strengthen the rigour of the process, Involve UK established an Advisory Group made up of Councillors, MBC officers, charities, service providers and community leaders. The Advisory Group shaped the project's scope and design, ensured evidence presented was balanced and relevant, and provided key feedback on the final recommendations. This in-built scrutiny rooted the project firmly in its local context and networks – making the process more robust and ensuring a direct route to impact. A full list of Advisory Group members can be found in the [appendix](#).

The VAWG Action Group

The VAWG Action Group is a sub-group of the [Safer Maidstone Partnership](#), a coalition of partners working to reduce crime and disorder in Maidstone. The VAWG Action Group represents an established network of partners from across Maidstone, united by a shared goal of ending Violence Against Women and Girls. They played a key role in shaping the speaker programme, ensuring that the evidence presented to participants was balanced, relevant, and well grounded in the latest research. The VAWG Action Group will own and take forward the recommendations.

Speakers

Across the four sessions, the participants heard evidence from 14 carefully selected speakers. Their wealth of knowledge informed the deliberations, complimenting the participants' lived experience, so the final recommendations were grounded and considered. Speakers included Jess Phillips MP and former Secretary of State for Safeguarding and Violence Against Women and Girls, VAWG specialists, community leaders, academics, and policymakers. As well as presenting during sessions, speakers made themselves available to answer follow up questions from participants by email between sessions. A full list of speakers can be found in the [appendix](#).

Councillors

MBC Councillors played an important role in both the Advisory Group and supporting the process. By attending the final session, they were able to offer practical insight into how participants could sharpen their ideas in light of the Maidstone context. This gave participants a valuable opportunity to test the feasibility of their recommendations and helped ensure their final ideas had a genuine route to implementation.

Observers

Representatives from the Advisory Group and MBC attended all four sessions as observers. This gave them firsthand experience of the process, watching 37 residents from across Maidstone engage seriously with a difficult topic, navigate disagreement constructively, and arrive at a set of shared recommendations.

What was the methodology?

Involve designed this process as an enclave deliberation, a structured deliberative approach where some of the discussions take place within groups that share a particular identity, experience or perspective. For this project, the four groups were organised by age and gender: women, young women, men, and young men. All groups were trans and non-binary inclusive.

For a topic as sensitive and complex as VAWG, enclave deliberation is an effective way to support honest, substantive discussion. Enclave deliberation allows for deeper discussion within communities that may otherwise struggle to have their voices heard in broader deliberative processes. It promotes the creation of two types of spaces: *brave spaces* and *safe spaces*.

Brave spaces are spaces where openness and respectful challenge is encouraged, where people come together from different backgrounds and build across differences

Safe spaces are spaces that primarily aim to protect the health, wellbeing and dignity of everyone involved. They are built along shared identities and experiences, enabling people to be more honest and creates space for learning and reflection.

Taking an enclave approach to this project enabled learning and discussion to happen in safe places to better deepen understanding and learning, whilst then enabling brave deliberation in whole group settings.

Recruitment and who took part?

Working in collaboration, Involve and MBC recruited 37 people through a combination of community outreach, paid social media ads, local newsletters, college drop-in sessions and market research in underrepresented areas.

Applicants were asked to complete a short survey with their demographic information to inform selection.

Of the 109 people who applied, 37 people were randomly selected based on the criteria below. They were selected to be broadly demographically reflective of the population of Maidstone, based on the following areas:

- Age
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Social and economic background
- Urban and rural areas

Local demographic data was measured against data from the [Office of National Statistics \(ONS\)](#), [2021 Census](#) and [Index of Multiple Deprivation](#) and recent council engagement.

The recruitment criteria was designed to maintain the group's diversity by oversampling minoritised groups, to ensure that if a person dropped out the group, they would still be represented. Demographics traditionally underrepresented in MBC's consultation and engagement activity, included people under 35 and those from lower socio- economic backgrounds. This approach ensured that any services, frameworks or interventions recommended by the participants were built with a wide range of needs in mind. To reach a broad number of young people, a decision was taken to extend outreach to young people who study in Maidstone even if their home address is outside of the borough. It was not a requirement for participants to have lived experience of VAWG.

After selection, Involve UK worked with each person individually to help prepare them for taking part. Through 1-1 phone calls, texts, and emails, Involve UK identified and responded to accessibility needs, shared information on what was required, and offered information on where to seek support if they were experiencing VAWG.

Participants were committed to the process; only one person withdrew due to personal reasons. This high retention rate demonstrates the level of interest and support for this work amongst participants.

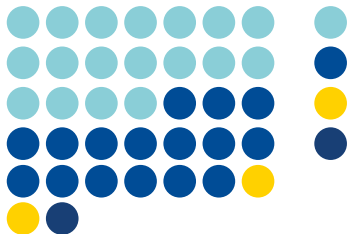


Participants demographics at a glance

GENDER

37

Participants



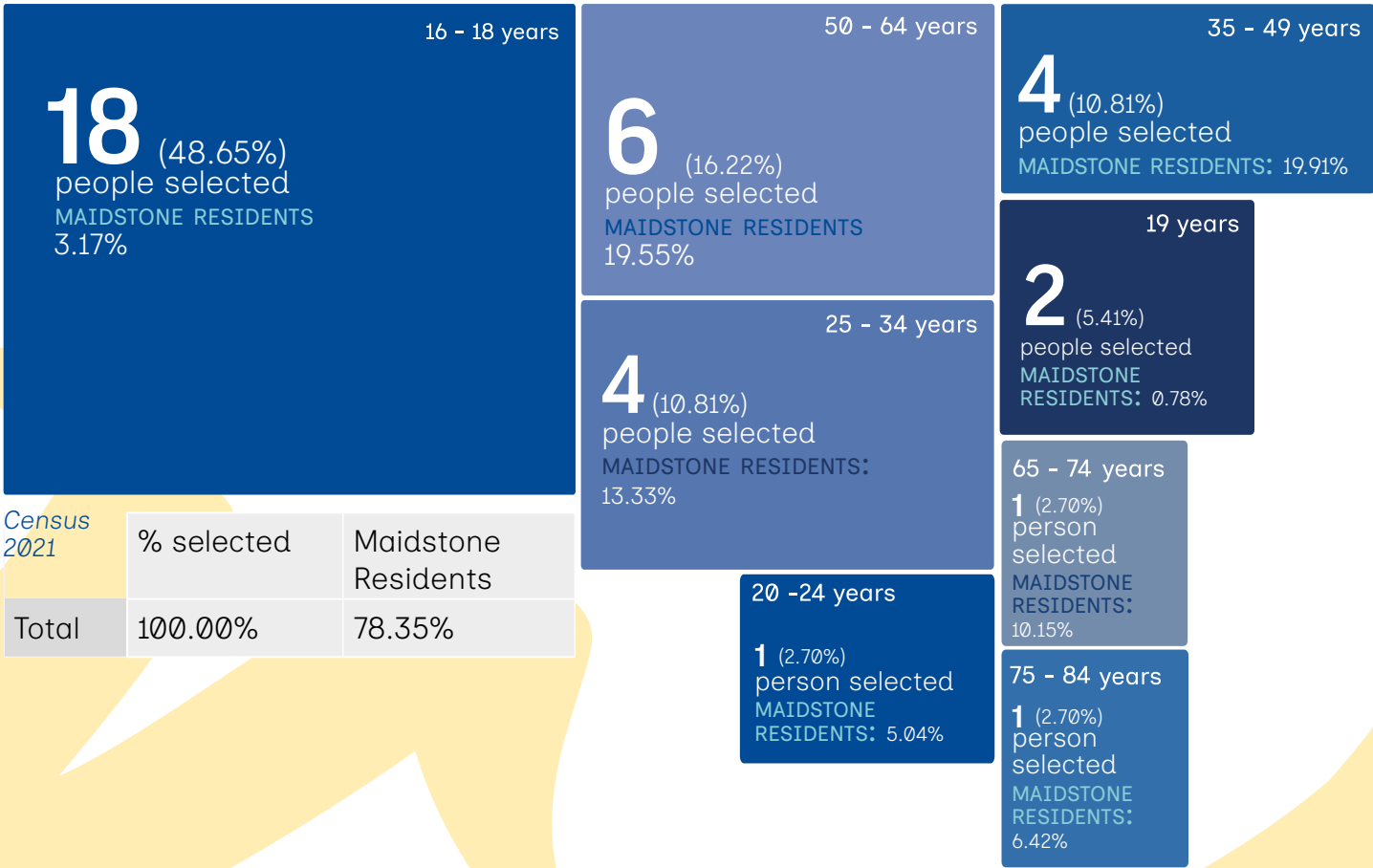
	% selected	Maidstone Residents
Male	48.65%	49.47%
Female	43.24%	50.53%
Non-binary	5.41%	0.06%*
Trans woman	2.70%	0.08%
Total	100%	100.14%

Census 2021

*All other gender identities (including non-binary) were not listed as predefined options and were captured through write-in responses.

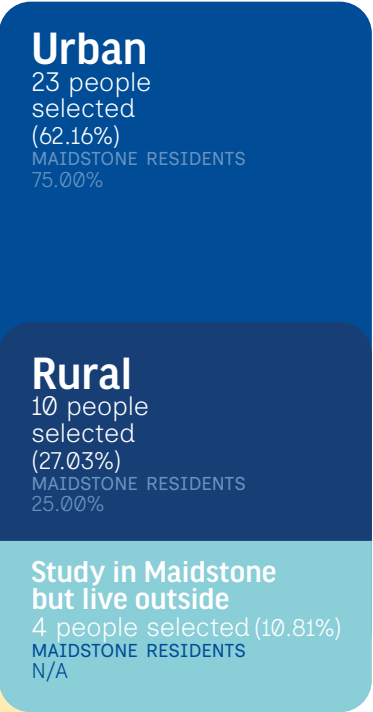
Totals exceed 100% as respondents were required to select male or female, followed by a separate question asking whether this aligns with their gender assigned at birth.

AGE



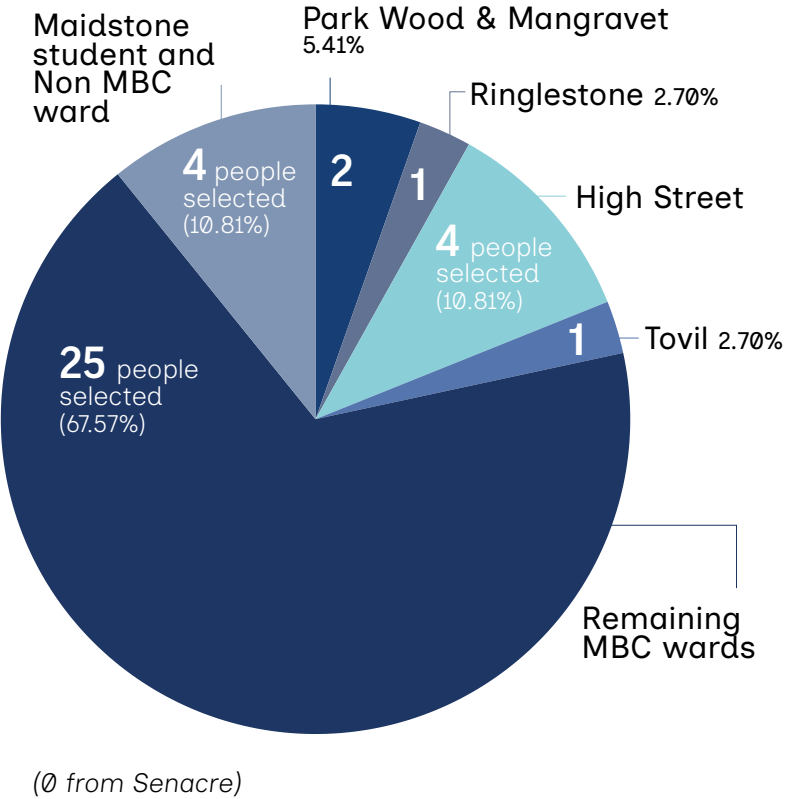
Census 2021

URBAN AND RURAL AREAS

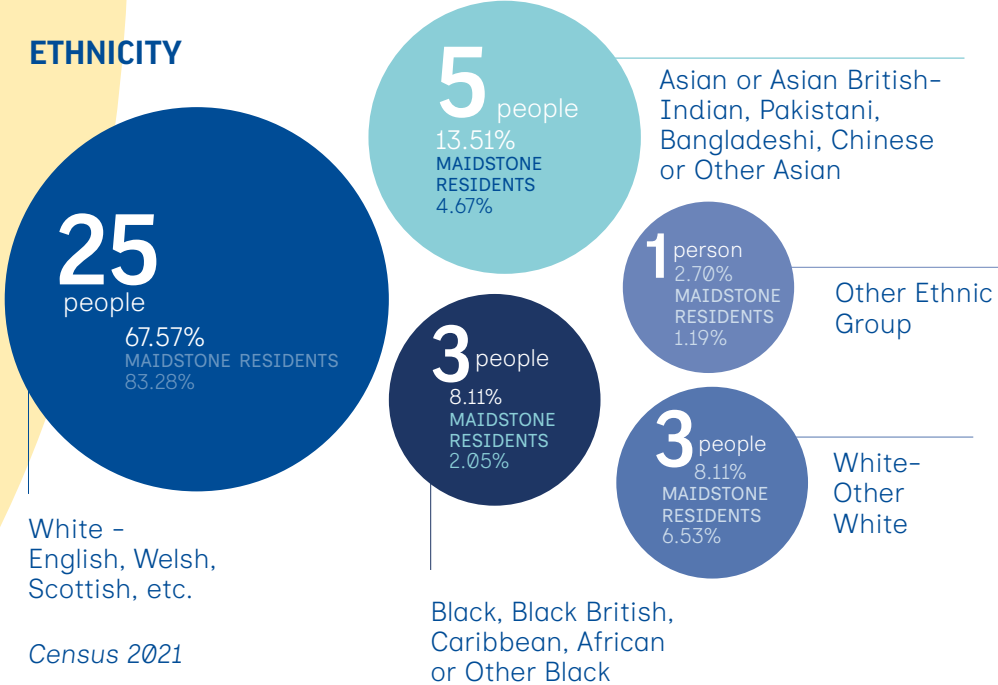


2021 RUC released by ONS March 2025

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BACKGROUND (PRIORITY WARDS)



ETHNICITY



A detailed table of recruitment's considerations, KPIs and outcomes can be found in the appendix

The Process

Session 1: Learning and Initial Reflection

- > Introductions to process
- > Building collective ways of working well together
- > Table discussions in age and gender groupings
- > Speakers on a range of issues
- > Initial reflections

Sessions 2 & 3: Group Discussion

- > Separate events for each age and gender grouping
- > Hearing further perspectives and evidence to form solutions
- > Group forming, information sharing, dialogue and deliberation

Session 4: Deliberate and Decide

- > Table discussions in groups
- > Whole group sharing, reflection and deliberation
- > Final full group recommendation
- > Presenting back



The calling question

Through the community discussion, participants answered the question: *What can we all do as a community to stop Violence Against Women and Girls before it starts and ensure their ongoing safety?*

To support this discussion, participants identified a number of key questions and tensions to help focus the deliberations towards root causes and practical steps for change. These questions and tensions were co-developed across the four enclave groups, ensuring they reflected diverse views and concerns.

These questions and tensions were co-developed across the four enclave groups, ensuring they reflected diverse views and concerns.

Key Questions: Women’s enclaves

- Why does VAWG happen?
- How do gender norms contribute to VAWG? How can they be challenged?
- What does better feel like? (more equal)
- How can men and women better understand each other and work together?

Key Questions: Men’s enclaves

- Why does VAWG happen?
- What is our part in contributing to it continuing? What causes/ enables us to accept it?
- How do gender norms contribute to VAWG? How can they be challenged?
- What does better feel like? (more equal) What would need to change, in us?
- How can men and women better understand each other and work together?

Key tensions

- What different routes to change do we want to examine? What are the route causes and how do we address VAWG before it happens? What could limit or restrict VAWG/potential solutions or deterrent? What happens after VAWG occurs, what are the punishments or rehabilitation that needs to take place?
- Where should we target education and awareness raising? Who is it most effective to target? How should we educate and raise awareness?
- What are the perceived risks of intervening or not? How do we build confidence to intervene and challenge safely?

66

I’ve been really encouraged by the number of young men wanting to get involved in this topic, and from what Martyn [Safer, Stronger Communities Manager] said, [contributed] really positively towards this.

I’m also very encouraged by how much knowledge and enthusiasm that has come through from everyone.

—COUNCILLOR LOTTIE PARFITT, COXHEATH AND FARLEIGH

Session One: Connection and Learning. 28th February 2026.

The first session brought all 37 participants together for a full day in Maidstone Town Hall. It had three clear aims: establish a safe and productive space, build a shared understanding of VAWG; and begin to identify the important questions and tensions to consider for the remainder of the process.

Participants sat at their enclave tables – one for each grouping: women, young women, men, and young men. Each table was supported by an independent facilitator from Involve UK. Throughout the day, participants had the opportunity to mix and discuss with people from different tables. This approach created space for safe and brave discussions as a whole – both essential for the success of this project.

The day opened with a welcome and overview of the deliberative process: why it matters, what participants would be asked to do, and how the sessions would work. A dedicated wellbeing officer from Mid Kent Mind led participants through guidance on how to care for themselves during what could be challenging conversations.

Participants then watched a keynote speech from Jess Phillips MP, former Secretary of State for Safeguarding and Violence Against Women and Girls. Ms Phillips grounded the project in terms of its national significance, and within the government's current work to tackle VAWG. She recognised the significance of this project and empowered participants to make the most of the opportunity.

With thanks to Jess Phillips MP for her support of this important project.

Before deep deliberations, participants took time to get to know each other and agree how they would like to work together. In a process dealing with sensitive and sometimes personal issues, trust and shared ways of working matter. Participants agreed on the following principles to build a curious, reflective and brave space for conversations:

- We all give space for views different from our own
- We are here to contribute and learn
- Address the point and not the person
- Confidentiality

Nurturing these conversations at the start of the process was vital to the success of later sessions, where participants were able to engage in honest discussion and deliberation across a range of perspectives.

After a short wellbeing exercise, three speakers gave presentations to ground participants on what VAWG is, how it is experienced locally, and why this community discussion is happening now.

A speaker carousel followed, giving each participant the chance to ask questions directly and informally to speakers.



It was daunting at first being very quickly it felt relaxed, motivating and encouraging to see the council wants to listen and hear from the community.

—WOMEN'S ENCLAVE PARTICIPANT

With thanks to our speakers:

- Professor Fiona Vera Gray, Professor of Sexual Violence and Co-Director of the Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit, London Metropolitan University
- Anna Collier, Head of Policy, Transformation and Insight, MBC
- Elisa Page, Domestic Abuse and Safeguarding Coordinator, MBC

Participants worked through a structured card-based learning activity to explore how VAWG operates across the Maidstone ecosystem. The activity prompted them to consider six interconnected topics:

1. spaces and places
2. feelings
3. attitudes, and culture
4. politics and funding
5. education and awareness
6. wider context and outcomes.

Participants drew on both the expert input from the morning and their own lived experiences to inform their learning.

This exercise fed into a **silent conversation** — a collaborative learning technique where participants map their thinking together on a large shared mural without speaking.

We did this to slow down reflection and surface connections and disagreements that can get lost in fast-paced verbal discussions.

It proved particularly effective at drawing out shared concerns and points of tension across the group.

A second round of speaker presentations and questions followed, focusing on the root causes of VAWG and outlining the work already underway by MBC and Kent Police to address VAWG in Maidstone.

With thanks to our speakers:

- Professor Nicole Westmarland, Director of the Durham Centre for Research into Violence and Abuse, Durham University
- Martyn Jeynes, Safer Stronger Communities Manager, MBC
- CH/Insp Lizzie Jones, Director of Kent and Medway Violence Reduction Unit

To close the day, participants mixed across tables to identify questions and tensions they felt were most important for the whole group to address. Each mixed group developed up to three ideas, perspectives, or questions they believed should underpin all subsequent discussions. These formed the foundation for the enclave group discussions in Sessions Two and Three. This was important to build connection and understanding across enclaves.

The session ended with a wellbeing cooldown exercise led by Mid Kent Mind. Participants also completed anonymous reflective diaries – an evaluation tool used at the end of each session to help the facilitation team understand what was working and how to improve as the process developed.

Sessions Two and Three: Enclave Deep Dives. 9th-10th and 17th-18th March 2026.

Sessions Two and Three were at the heart of the deliberative process. The 37 participants worked in four enclave groups: women, young women, men, and young men, meeting separately to explore VAWG in depth and develop their initial ideas for change.

Each enclave session took place on a weekday evening and opened with a grounding exercise led by the Mid Kent Mind wellbeing officer, followed by a reconnection activity to help the group build on the relationships started in Session One.

Across the two sessions, participants heard from expert speakers on five topics selected in partnership with the Advisory Group and the VAWG Action Group to ensure balance and that relevant topics were explored.

These topics included:

- Abuse of women and the consequences
- Public spaces
- Social media and online safety
- Interventions, identity and culture
- Accessing services and partnership working

After each set of presentations, participants had the opportunity to ask speakers questions to deepen their understanding. Where speakers presented via a pre-recorded video, questions were collected and answered by email after the session.

With thanks to our speakers:

- Tim Woodhouse, Suicide Prevention Programme Manager, Kent County Council
- Sue Dunn, Co-CEO, Protection Against Stalking / Alison Bird, Protection Against Stalking
- Dr Anna Barker, Associate Professor in Criminal Justice & Criminology, University of Leeds
- Susannah Walker, co-Founder of Make Space for Girls + Consultant at In Her Place
- Leyla Buran, Research Fellow in Policy and Practice and co-lead for the Law and Policy Stream at the Centre for Protecting Women Online (formerly White Ribbon UK)
- Dr Alishya Dhir, Research Fellow in Law and a co-lead of the Law and Policy stream at the Centre for Protecting Women Online
- Elisa Page, Domestic Abuse and Safeguarding Coordinator, MBC
- Dr Stephen Burrell, Lecturer, Co-chair Melbourne Research Alliance to End Violence against Women and their Children

Drawing on core elements of the calling question, participants reflected on the prompts:
What are the route causes to VAWG?
What could solutions look like?

They drew on the learnings from speakers, their own lived experiences and the questions and tensions identified in Session One. Facilitators captured their reflections as emerging ideas, which formed the basis for the recommendations developed in Session Four.

Shortly before Session Three, there was a spike in meningitis cases in Kent. Involve UK and MBC took the decision to move Session Three online as a precautionary measure whilst awaiting further public health guidance.

The core structures remained the same online. To support the transition, the team offered 1:1 tech calls for participants who were less confident with online tools, and opened each session with a short conversation about what working well online looked like for the group. The process adapted without losing momentum with all participants attending online.

Between Sessions Three and Four: Advisory Group Feedback

Between Sessions Three and Four the facilitation team clustered the ideas generated across Sessions One to Three. 15 themes emerged and each was given a short heading. These 15 themes, with clustered ideas in participants' own words, were taken to an Advisory Group meeting where members reviewed the ideas. The Advisory Group offered direct feedback, additional context, and expertise to strengthen participants' thinking. This feedback was shared with participants in Session Four.

This step was essential as it helped ensure the emerging recommendations were ambitious and grounded in the realities of delivering change in Maidstone.



The process has and will give validation to some of the work we already do, but will also help us put pressure on the decision makers to help prioritise some of the things that have been more system-based or aspirational.

—MARTYN JEYNES SAFER, STRONGER COMMUNITIES
MANAGER, MBC



I felt helpless at the start and inspired after today.

—MEN'S ENCLAVE PARTICIPANTS

**Session Four: Deliberation and Final Recommendations.
21 March 2026.**

Session Four brought the whole group back together for the first time since Session One. The purpose of the day was to deliberate on, prioritise, and finalise the recommendations that would be presented to MBC and partners to inform their new VAWG Strategy.

A short active listening exercise warmed up the group for the deliberative work ahead. Respectful disagreement was explicitly encouraged, recognising that wisdom is often found in tension as well as consensus.

Participants then spent time individually reconnecting with the 15 idea themes clustered between Sessions Three and Four. Each cluster was presented in participants' own words, alongside feedback from the Advisory Group on how to develop it further. Printed handbooks gave participants space to make notes and form their own views before group discussions began.

To ensure that the final recommendations reflected the full range of voices, experiences and perspectives in the room, participants took part in a deliberative carousel.

Participants discussed the 15 cluster ideas, in groups of four, made up of one person from each enclave. They considered questions such as:

- Why does this idea matter?
- What would need to happen to bring it to life?

Participants captured key points of consensus and disagreement on post-it notes, and as a group rotated, they could read and build on what others had written..

The participants then had the opportunity to share if any ideas should be combined. They collectively agreed to combine two ideas, so the final number of ideas taken forwards for prioritisation went from 15 to 14.

After lunch, participants reviewed all clustered ideas, Advisory Group feedback, and deliberation notes one final time before casting their individual votes. Each participant had six votes to identify their top priorities and two further votes to indicate which areas they would like to see broader public engagement on.

With votes cast, participants self-selected into small groups to develop the top eight ideas into full recommendations. Each group worked to produce a recommendation that covered:

- a headline statement,
- why it matters,
- what needs to happen in the short, medium and long term,
- who needs to be involved
- what difference it would make if it came to life.

Five MBC Councillors joined participants for this part of the session to help them test their ideas for feasibility, answer questions about who holds the levers for change, and receive honest feedback about scope for change.

It was also an important opportunity for Councillors to meet the participants in person and see their hard work and commitment to change through the deliberative process.

With thanks to:

- Cllr Stuart Jeffery, Allington & Bridge Ward - Leader of the Council and the Green Party
- Cllr Dave Naghi, Penenden Heath Ward - Cabinet Member for Community Cohesion and Safety
- Cllr Ciaran Oliver, Bearsted & Downswood Ward - Deputy Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee
- Cllr Rachel Rodwell, Allington & Bridge Ward - Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Biodiversity
- Cllr Claudine Russell, Marden & Yalding Ward - Leader of the Conservative Party and Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Following discussion with the Councillors, the participants developed their first drafts of the recommendations. They then shared these drafts with other groups in a feedback carousel, offering constructive challenges across the whole group before returning to refine and strengthen their work.

The final recommendations, set out in participants' own words, are in this report.

The session ended with each group presenting their recommendations to the whole room with councillors present. This was an important moment of celebration and demonstrated what collaborative decision making can produce.



Feedback and Evaluation

To continue to iterate and improve the process throughout, participants were asked to complete a short reflective diary after each session. This diary had four questions that aimed to dig into their experiences of what happened in the session, how it made them feel, what worked well and could be improved, and their hopes for future sessions. All responses were anonymous.

Involve UK collated responses after each session and took active steps to adapt the design and support available to reflect feedback from the group.

Wellbeing support

Involve and MBC placed a high level of emphasis on providing robust wellbeing support throughout the project. This was important for two main reasons: the sensitive nature of the topic and potential lived experience in the room, and the process involved young people under 18.

Wellbeing support started before participants entered the room. During onboarding, in addition to discussion about accessibility needs, participants were taken through the process and what would be expected of them, offering them the chance to ask questions and build relationships with the support team. The support team held individual calls with participants under 18, followed by a separate call with their parent or guardian. Safeguarding procedures were clearly explained and information sign posting to further support was made available in the welcome handbook and on the online microsite.

During each session, a trained mental health professional from Mid Kent Mind was present as the designated wellbeing officer. They were available during and between sessions for 1:1 conversations and signposted to further wellbeing and mental health support. They also led regular grounding and wellbeing exercises – including breathing exercises and body scans – that helped participants manage their responses to difficult information and discussion and look out for each other.

A quiet room was available to all participants at every session. Content warnings were given in advance when sensitive topics were covered, for instance around domestic abuse and suicide.

This level of care was essential to the success of the process, supporting participants to engage deeply with a complex and challenging topic.



The Recommendations

The list on this page are the final recommendations developed by the 37 participants in Session 4.

Each recommendation contains:

- a recommendation statement,
- an explanation of why it matters,
- time bound actions for what needs to happen next,
- who has a role to play in bringing the recommendation to life (this ranges from active participants, to responsible organisations or individuals,
- And what difference people would experience if the recommendation became a reality.

The wording and language of the recommendations are from participants directly. It is important for the recommendations to remain in participants' own words to reflect their ideas and intentions without interference or bias.

Participants also voted to identify three recommendations they would like to see further public engagement on. These are highlighted with an asterisk. (*)

-  **Lifelong learning***
(25 votes)
-  **Government action***
(23 votes)
-  **Women's representation in positions of decision making**
(21 votes)
-  **Support to increase disclosures and provide long term support for survivors**
(19 votes)
-  **Poverty reduction and cycles of abuse**
(16 votes)
-  **Public spaces**
(16 votes)
-  **Difficult / uncomfortable conversations about VAWG***
(14 votes)
-  **Shared social spaces for young men and women**
(14 votes)

The Recommendations

Lifelong learning* (25 votes)

Recommendation One: Statement

Learning about VAWG should be lifelong, engaging and accessible — reaching people from prenatal all the way through school, the workplace, and in community spaces.

It must go beyond passive learning and be relevant to people's real experiences.

Everyone in Maidstone should have equal access to lifelong learning, regardless of where you live.

Why does this recommendation matter?

- » Education is the most universal sector and will cover the biggest demographic and so have the most impact
- » Not enough people understand the specifics of VAWG, that it includes small microaggressions to systemic issues
- » We can't rely just on parents or caregivers to educate - learning needs to take place in lots of different places and with lots of different people

What needs to happen?

Who needs to be involved?

Short term

- Free bystander training from the council
- Self-defence classes
- Posters, leaflets, video campaign calling out the easy stuff e.g. gender norms, everyday misogyny and sharing opportunities to learn more (e.g. bystander training)
- More engaging PHSE classes on relationships, harassment, sex and porn

- Everyone!
- Anyone who works with children, companies and businesses, parents and caregivers, religious groups, community groups, healthcare professionals
- Kent County Council and Maidstone Borough Council outreach and lobbying
- Government

Medium term

- People with lived experience run talks and training for teachers, youth workers, and community workers
- Forum theatre to educate people in schools and workplaces
- Social media campaigns to raise awareness of the different types of VAWG and that everyone has a role to play in ending it (empowering ordinary people to intervene and take action)

Long term

- Compulsory VAWG education across every sector (e.g. schools, workplaces, sports clubs)
- Curriculum specifically focuses on VAWG
- All schools should be mixed gender

What difference will this recommendation make?

- » More awareness to the specifics of what VAWG is so we can identify poor behaviour and challenge it (in ourselves and others)
- » Stop VAWG before it happens
- » Safer society with less crime
- » Better life for everyone, more equality and better mental health
- » Less strain on the NHS

 **Government Action***
(23 votes)

Recommendation Two: Statement
MBC should advocate and lobby central government for a VAWG Lead Coordinator in every parish and district, and eventually county council to make sure VAWG is high on every political agenda.

Why does this recommendation matter?

- » Having a VAWG Lead Coordinator brings awareness and safety to a local level
- » It means all residents, charities, and other people working in VAWG have someone specific to talk to, give advice, deliver training, and support coordination to better address VAWG

What needs to happen?		Who needs to be involved?
Short term	• Lobbying to implement a VAWG Lead Coordinator in each parish and district council • Have the VAWG Lead Coordinator present and active in all local communities to build support and awareness for addressing VAWG	• Communities • Councillors • MPs
Medium term	• VAWG Lead Coordinator does work further in the community by linking up with schools, businesses, gyms, and help centres • Gender-inclusivity becomes a core policy within MBC and KCC and this is put into practice by the VAWG Lead Coordinator	What difference will this recommendation make? » We will have safer lives, schools, and communities » There will be a better understanding of VAWG and confidence that something is being put in place as proof that the government cares about this issue and is taking active steps » VAWG services and communities are better connected and coordinated so action and awareness can be raised and happen quicker
Long term	• VAWG Lead Coordinator is rolled out nation wide	

 **Women's representation in positions of decision making**
(21 votes)

Recommendation Three: Statement
There is proportional representation of women and gender minoritised people in positions of decision making.

Why does this recommendation matter?

- » Need for different perspective and solutions to create strong powerful role models, increase self-worth and confidence
- » Men are making decisions about women's bodies and healthcare
- » VAWG would receive the attention it deserves if more women were in positions of power

What needs to happen?		Who needs to be involved?
Short term	• Outreach to girls in schools to increase their confidence and give them skills to lead • Posters, media, social media campaigns to show there is a pathway to power • The council should celebrate their own representation of 70% female leadership team • Show what is possible regardless of your gender or race	• MBC and KCC • Lobby up to national government and down to parish level • Communities including through clubs, churches, schools - everywhere there are leaders
Medium term	• Embed this approach into the curriculum • Teach that feminism equals equality • Improve accessibility e.g. cover childcare expenses for women running for political positions • Create women only apprenticeships, coaching and mentoring!	What difference will this recommendation make? » Create more opportunities for women to access these roles » Sufficient women in power effects change, leads by example, and inspires the next generation
Long term	• Make the pathway to power a 'given' - it just is • Educate to break gender norms and stereotypes around who should be in positions of power • Hold more engagement like this and also include community groups	

Support to increase disclosures and provide long term support for survivors (19 votes)

Recommendation Four: Statement

Create a single, trusted ‘STAR’ (Safe, Trained, Action, Response) support system that enables safe disclosures, provides immediate support, delivers coordinated long-term care, and empowers survivors of VAWG to access justice and healing.

STAR ★ – Safe, Trained, Action, Response

- One stop VAWG hotline where you can receive informed, confidential help from trained STAR responders
- All STAR responders are well trained
- Trained STAR responders are connected with: police, emergency services, forensics, legal, IDVAs, therapy, charities, taxis, and safe places
- STAR responders work with you throughout your VAWG journey, coordinating with other services, so that everything is in one place and you can focus on healing not navigating the system
- STAR responders gather long term impact data to help advocate for legal change and to secure more funding

Why does this recommendation matter?

- » It is easy, simple – ‘STAR’ advice held in one place
- » Not constantly repeated – retraumatised, delaying closure
- » Reducing impact on victim
- » Impact for family is minimal
- » Available to bystanders to report
- » Training improves services and education
- » This currently doesn’t exist

Support to increase disclosures and provide long term support for survivors (19 votes)

What needs to happen?		Who needs to be involved?
Short term	• Trained team – emergency services, IDVAs, partnerships, charities, skills to listen, schools, links to police, emergency services, forensics, media • Accredited with identify badge – visible on person in workplaces / schools / GPs • Develop hotline • Connect services through partnership working • Inform policy, funding, education, planning, crime prosecution	• Maidstone Borough Council and Kent County Council, Business, Central government, fundraisers and campaigners to make STAR happen • Funding from MBC / KCC / central gov new VAWG strategy
Medium term	• Build team links – MBC / KCC and national government	
Long term	• Address CPS blocker • Feed info to change CPS criteria • More cases are heard, part of justice closure for the victim • Change the law to inform harsher sentences as an effective deterrent for offenders / repeat offenders	

What difference will this recommendation make?

- » Freedom, relief, just be you and feel valued!
- » Reduced shame
- » Effective action
- » Victims who are traumatised don’t have to think / know / find out what they don’t know
- » Quick, responsive, builds confidence
- » Effective, easy, available to everyone
- » Deters perpetrators
- » Feeds community / builds community
- » Build support to national change – laws and culture
- » More people helped get what they need

 Poverty reduction and cycles of abuse
(16 votes)

Recommendation Five: Statement
We must break the cycle of poverty by investing in families to stop abuse continuing.

Why does this recommendation matter?

» Poverty cycles are linked to VAWG – if we stop poverty we can address VAWG

What needs to happen?		Who needs to be involved?
Short term	• People must be supported to know their situation can change and how they can access this support • Issues with addiction should be treated with care and empathy as a medical issue not a legal issue	• National Government • MBC • Families • Education system • Social workers and youth provision • Mental health and addiction services
Medium term	• Financial aid for women escaping abusive situations so they have better opportunities to move on and can break out of cycles of poverty • Provide better pathways for jobs and employment opportunities for children in poverty • More events like this (citizen deliberation) on how to address the root causes of poverty that draw on the vast amounts of local knowledge we have	What difference will this recommendation make? » Young people being the best versions of themselves so they don't become trapped by their families situation » Ending stigma around addiction and poverty so people can access support » Create financial independence for survivors and children of survivors of VAWG so they can start new lives
Long term	• Take active steps to address the root causes of poverty – this needs heavy focus and funding	



Public Spaces
(16 votes)

Recommendation Six: Statement

We want to make our public spaces places where everyone can not just feel safe but enjoy being outside. To do this we need to ask communities what would improve spaces for them, run public awareness raising campaigns in public spaces to discourage poor behaviour and signpost to support, and improve visible security (e.g. clean up streets, better lighting, CCTV, patrols).

Why does this recommendation matter?

- » So that women and girls ENJOY going outside
- » So people feel safer and cared for
- » Enforce accountability and reminder everyone of their responsibility
- » Accessible information that forms confidence in the public
- » Public education
- » Decreased response times for crimes
- » It will make it clear to everyone that they are being watched, photos are being taken and will be used to prosecute those in the wrong



Public Spaces
(16 votes)

What needs to happen?		Who needs to be involved?
Short term	• Surveys to find out what needs to change and get feedback from people and build the needed public good • Learning from past crimes to know where in Maidstone to make changes first • Making public spaces cleaners, presentable – is effective at increasing safety • Posters around informing everyone what is not acceptable behaviours • Incentive to come out and report crimes • Lighting in all alleyways to reduce crime • Central call point number to be placed in communal areas	• Community to shape and drive change – it is important to be included in change • Volunteers – litter picking / planting flowers • Council – build and maintain the space (repair lights) • Businesses – sponsor cameras
Medium term	• Increased funding so projects can start • Encourage people to come and volunteer to make our public spaces nicer • More patrol cards / civic wardens to make people feel safer especially at night • Both female and male police officers – women may feel more comfortable with women officers • Redesign of cameras (360 degrees) to tackle blindspots and panic buttons in parks	What difference will this recommendation make? » Involvement will foster acceptance of change and behaviour change as a whole » Peace of mind in going out – no doubt in whether/when to go out or not » Reduce crime and abuse against women in public » Somebody to contact if worried or concerned about safety – as cameras can check » Foster positive behaviour » Empower the public to come up and report concerns » Public knowledge increased
Long term	• Employ maintenance workers to keep these public good working • Plan and record results to keep new projects going and increase unity in the community • Local drone in an emergency	

Why do we need further engagement?
It is evolving all the time to see if there are new ways that can bring safety even closer to home.

Difficult and uncomfortable conversations about VAWG
(14 votes)

Recommendation Seven: Statement

Through education and facilitated discussions we can actively encourage conversations in our community about important, and difficult topics like VAWG.

If we don't have these conversations, public awareness decreases and gives VAWG the opportunity to fester and grow into a big social issue.

Why does this recommendation matter?

- » Society needs to change
- » Change can't happen without these uncomfortable topics and diversity of thought and background
- » If we don't address this, then the more people irrationally blame each other
- » What happens behind closed doors will stay behind closed doors
- » This is our opportunity to influence and educate youth to create culture change and a new normal
- » Making society more resistant to hateful ideologies (e.g. manosphere)
- » Breaking down the initial barriers can help it not to be so uncomfortable or taboo
- » Talking about uncomfortable subjects, especially with anecdotes, in schools can help children to internalise it

Difficult and uncomfortable conversations about VAWG
(14 votes)

What needs to happen?

Who needs to be involved?

Short term

- Make VAWG something the council has to consider (like biodiversity) in each decision
- Making everyone aware of the importance of discussing VAWG
- Make our goals more explicit / clear so that the message doesn't lose meaning - if it does then this can backfire and it will be worse for women and girls
- In these discussions there has to be a focus on young men
- Create spaces for local facilitated conversations on VAWG

Medium term

- Creating safe spaces for discussion about VAWG
- Making it easier to discuss in facilitated talking spaces
 - Parents and older generations to understand youth perspective
- With anecdotes /stories from lived experience
- In person
- Focus on solutions
- National discussion in government to spread out ideas across the country
- Stop sugarcoating when children get to secondary school - they are old enough to understand the gravity of the situation

Long term

- Education in the curriculum creating long term change
- The students need to talk about difficult topics if they want to learn and internalise it all

Creating positive role models

- Anecdotal evidence in facilitated discussions
- People with influence over youth - teachers
- Social media influences / platforms

Schools and students

- The drive to farrow and challenge perspectives
- Students are well behaved at school so you can't assure don't disregard this there all good 24/7

MBC

- More conversations like this
- VAWG is something they have to consider in all policies (like biodiversity)

Government

- National discussion

Peers e.g. fellow students or parents

Who supervises / facilitates these discussions?

- Government funding
- Charities
- Victim speakers and their stories

What difference will this recommendation make?

- » Normalisation of hard discussions
- » Makes it easier to address VAWG
- » Better lives for those who come after us
- » Makes it a better environment for survivors to address and disclose
- » Younger generations can take this to heart
- » Much lower rates of VAWG / Domestic abuse



Shared social spaces for young men and women

(14 votes)

Recommendation Eight: Statement

Bring back free youth clubs, run as a charity, with local government funding.

Why does this recommendation matter?

» Gives a free space for young people to hang out and meet others

» Better mixing of genders, leading to better understanding of other perspectives

» Young people crave community, this leads them online which is bad for mental health

» Help encourage young people into sport

What needs to happen?

Who needs to be involved?

Short term

• Sourcing location

• Talk to young people to find out what activities / things they want at youth clubs

• Location must be central / easy to get to for free

Medium term

• Source finances

• Source charity to run scheme

Long term

• Ensure sustainability

• Keep volunteers

• Work with girls to ensure inclusion and that they feel safe travelling to and from the club

• Charities willing to run the club

• Local people

• Local and national government funding

• Social services (for safeguarding and dealing with problematic youth)

What difference will this recommendation make?

» Increase sense of community and community cohesion

» Reduce youth boredom and delinquency

» Better physical and mental health for young people

» Gives people a sense of belonging

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A photograph of a community meeting taking place in a grand, ornate hall. Several people are seated at long tables, looking towards a large screen at the front of the room. The hall features high ceilings with decorative murals, large windows, and a chandelier. The atmosphere appears to be a formal yet community-oriented discussion.

The Recommendations

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Experience and insights

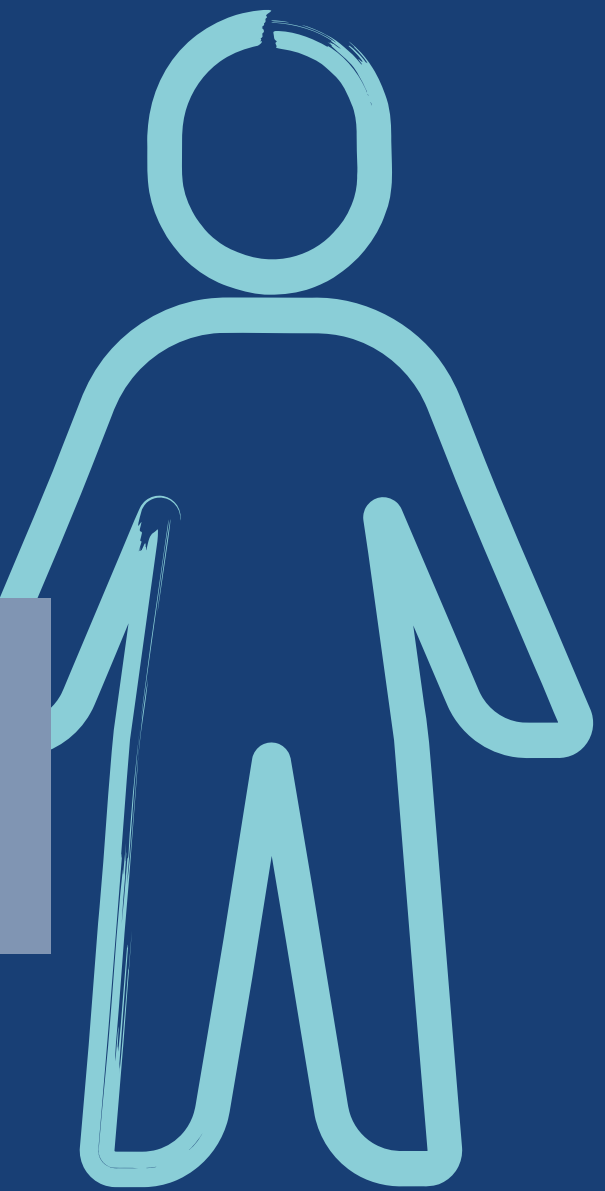
Participant experience

Without participants, the community discussion would not have been possible.

Their voices and perspectives not only shaped the recommendations for tackling VAWG, but also the process itself.

Involve UK encouraged participants to write anonymous reflections about their experience of the process after each session.

The following is a summary of their reflections from across the sessions. Included are some excerpts in participants' own words.



At the start I was nervous to contribute thoughts outside the enclaves but towards the end I felt more comfortable. Now I feel great, like faith in humanity has hit me.

—YOUNG WOMENS' ENCLAVE PARTICIPANTS

Session One

People felt excited, curious, nervous, and apprehensive. Some people felt challenged and an impulse to want to change both personally and to support change in wider society. Some people realised they had more views than they expected.

Others realised they had experienced VAWG more than they had thought.

"I feel like I live in a place that does want change"

"Helpless at the start but empowered after today"

"It surprised me how much I had to say / knew. Also made me realise I have experienced VAWG more than I had thought"

"I felt excited to take part in the beginning and now I feel privileged to be part of this important process"

People appreciated having separate groups to speak in and also valued speaking outside their table groups.

Many members found talking to people in other groups insightful and enjoyed hearing different perspectives.

Confidence increased throughout the session.

"I liked the discussions in our enclave and found them useful"

"I was curious on what contribution the male[s] would make and their views, and I learned that as a society both men and women are needed to make change"

"I really loved talking to people in other groups as it was really insightful to hear other people's ideas and different perspectives, as they are of different ages and genders so it was really cool to see how they viewed things"

"At the start I was nervous, however I enjoyed it overall and became more confident in speaking throughout"

Sessions Two and Three

As participants began to explore key questions and tensions, they began to feel that there are outcomes from the process that can be implemented.

During some of the presentations members felt emotional about the severity of the consequences of VAWG.

"I felt heartbroken during the suicide part but I'm feeling better now"

"The speakers were very powerful and impactful, [they] brought light to serious issues"

Several participants commented on the benefits of deliberations across generations, and how much they learned from each other.

Participants also commented on feeling comfortable to have free and open conversations in their groups.

"Working with the younger guys and listen to their views works"

"At the start I came tired, slowly found my energy as we shared heartfelt convos"

There was sometimes frustration and disagreement with each other's views. Many members in these sessions expressed a desire to have more time to talk with one another and with the speakers.

"We first need more time"

"I'd like to see people be more introspective about their own experiences and behaviours (e.g. at the workplace or school, with friends etc) when discussing how we enable VAWG and what needs to change"

Experience and insights

Session Four

People noted that difficult conversations were had and this helped the group reach recommendations.

Collaboration between the different groups was positive for a lot of members.

"The mixing of groups allowed people to experience different perspectives and have disagreements. This disagreement felt important to the process of coming up with recommendations"

"disagreement is great! We must all work together to address [VAWG]"

There was hope and optimism for change.

"I felt there are actual outcomes from each recommendation and actions can be implemented after the day"

"I am taking hope from this process"

Some members felt reassurance that Councillors from MBC were involved in session 4 when finalising recommendations.

"felt very important and reassuring to involve members of the council"

"what worked well as after all discussions of all four sessions there are actual outcomes and people [Councillors] that can carry this forward here to listen and consider in their future policy"

Many members expressed their gratitude for the young people who took part in the community discussion.

People felt that they left with more knowledge. Some people left with a mixture of pride and also tiredness after a busy final session.

"seeing what young people can contribute to days like this, we must listen to

them and not ignore their thoughts"

"without doubt the best of the four sessions, very enjoyable, great input by the young people"

"I felt excited at the start of fully engaged throughout, I feel proud of all we have achieved in the short space of time and exhausted as well"



We would like to extend our sincere thanks to all participants and partners involved in bringing this groundbreaking citizen deliberation project to life.

By giving residents a direct voice in shaping Maidstone's response to VAWG, this project marks an important step towards creating a community where everyone can feel safe, supported, healthy, and able to thrive.

To find out more about the progress of this work, you can find out more [here](#).

To find out more about how deliberation can help you address important societal challenges, please contact: info@involve.org.uk or visit our [website](#).

Appendix



Really thoughtful ideas and the determination to end VAWG. Thank you to MBC for taking this initiative forward and for Involve's delivery, ensuring this [is] successful.

—SARAH CARNELL, SATEDA

Advisory Group

Advisory Group members were selected to ensure key perspectives and areas of expertise are present to provide balanced advice and ensure diverse community needs are considered.

The Advisory Group Members:

- **Helen Hook**, Student Support & Care-Experienced Coordinator, MidKent College
- **Caroline Wingfield**, Service Manager, Kent Domestic Abuse Services, Clarion Housing Group
- **Sarah Carnell**, Head of Support Services, SATEDA
- **Rachel Jones**, Director of Strategy, Planning & Partnerships, Maidstone & Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust,
- **Georgina Pennicott**, Head of Neighbourhoods, Golding Homes
- **Steve Kent**, Community Safety Unit Inspector, Kent Police
- **Cllr Claudine Russell**, Chair Overview & Scrutiny Committee
- **Cllr Ciaran Oliver**, Vice-Chair Overview & Scrutiny Committee
- **Clara Citro**, Head of Engagement & Partnerships, Involve Kent
- **Tim Woodhouse**, Suicide Prevention Programme Manager, Kent County Council
- **Martyn Jeynes**, Safer, Stronger Communities Manager, MBC
- **John Littlemore**, Head of Housing and Regulatory Services, MBC
- **Nick Chadwick**, Regimental Sergeant Major, Invicta Park Barracks
- **Laura Weaver**, Operations Manager, Victim Support

Recruitment criteria

Criteria	Considerations	Maidstone Population % <u>ONS data, Census and IMD</u> 2025	KPIs (% of the overall group and no. of participants)	KPI achieved or unsuccessful
Age (key criteria)	A need to understand and develop recommendations that address the distinct challenges of VAWG that young people face and improve pathways to support. Taking into account an equal split for the four age groupings, means recruitment KPIs will not align with the broader population of Maidstone. Women under 34 are a priority group as they are least heard from for the council.	16-19 years old 3.9% Aged 19 and upwards: 18.3% - aged 19- 34 19.9% - aged 35 - 49 19.6%- aged 50 - 64 19% - aged 65+ *19.10% 0-15 years old	Minimum expectation: 50% 18 people- aged 16-18 50% 18 people- aged 19 and upwards Additional expectations: Out of the 18 people aged 19 and upwards 23.83% 4 people* - aged 19- 34 25.91% 5 people*- aged 35-49 25.52% 5 people*- aged 50-64 24.74% 4 people*- aged 65+ *Normalised percentage and rounded up or down to whole person	Achieved
Gender (key criteria)	Taking into account an equal split for the 2 gender groupings, means recruitment KPIs will not align with the broader population of Maidstone. Women under 34 are a priority group as they are least heard from for the council. To support better pathways by including people who hold a gender identity different from their sex registered at birth. Often targeted for forms of gender-based violence for example gender expression or identity. <u>This targeting is also based in gender inequality.</u>	ONS: Male 49.2% Female 50.8% Census: Gender identity same as registered at birth 94.46% Gender identity different from sex registered at birth 5.49% Not answered 0.05%	Minimum expectation: 50% 18 people- Female 50% 18 people- Male Additional expectations: To prioritise applications of people who hold a gender identity different from sex registered at birth. 5.49% of the population 2 people (rounded up from 1.97%).	Achieved



Recruitment criteria

Criteria	Considerations	Maidstone Population % ONS data, Census and IMD 2025	KPIs (% of the overall group and no. of participants	KPI achieved or unsuccessful
Social and Economic Urban and rural communities (Wards)	Wards acts as our indicator for both recruitment criterias – Social and economic (IMD) and Urban and rural communities. Priority to hear from people living in the wards that will receive funding from the <u>Trailblazing neighbourhood</u> (Park Wood and Senacre) so the recommendations from the discussion can be acted on. To support better pathways by exploring the link between VAWG and social economic factors which creates both risk factors, <u>in leaving domestic violence situations, being susceptible to experiencing VAWG, and a means of actual abuse.</u> Priority to hear from people from lower social economic areas, particularly urban wards, as they are least heard from for the council.	Out of 22 wards • 50% are urban • 50% are Rural Areas in Maidstone that are the most deprived (IMD 2025): • Parkwood and Senacre • Ringlestone and Central Maidstone • Tovil	Minimum expectation A mixture of people from Urban and Rural Wards To prioritise applications from • Park Wood & Mangravet • Senacre • Ringlestone • High Street • Tovil	Partially Achieved– While 17 applications were received from priority wards, final selection was limited to 8 to ensure a balanced representation across broader diversity KPIs
Ethnicity	Maidstone is predominantly and ethnically white. It has a strong Nepalese community. To support better pathways by exploring the link between intersecting racialised and sexualised violence that target minoritised ethnic women. To debunk myths of who is <u>perpetrating sexual violence.</u> For deliberative processes no one person can be the sole representative of their communities. The retention of participants within deliberative processes from ethnic minority groups is statistically lower.	English, Welsh, Scottish, etc. 84.20% Other White, 4.80 % Indian, 1.40 % Pakistani, 0.40 % Bangladeshi, 0.20 % Chinese, 0.40 % Other Asian, 2.00 % African, 1.30 % Caribbean, 0.50 % Other Black, 0.20 % White and Black Caribbean, 1.00 % White and Black African 0.40% White and Asian, 1.20% Other Mixed, 1.00% Other Ethnic Group, 1.00%	Minimum expectation Over sample minority ethnic groups*: Asian or Asian British– 4.4% 3 people Black, Black British, Caribbean or African– 2% 2 people (rounded up from 0.72) Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Groups– 3.6% 2 people * (rounded up from 1.296) * rounded up to a whole person and at least 2 or 3 people from the same ethnic groupings Additional expectations: Out of the remaining 29 people English, Welsh, Scottish, etc., 94.60%* 27 people Other White, 5.39%* 2 people *Normalised percentage and rounded up or down to whole person	Achieved the majority of minimum expectations, except for mixed or multiple ethnic group

Outreach

Voluntary and Community Organisations played an essential role in promoting recruitment.

The following organisations were contacted and received a communication pack to share with their networks.

Age UK Maidstone
All Saints Church
Citizens’ Advice Maidstone
DAVSS
Fareshare
Golding Homes
Involve Kent
Fusion
MADM
Maidstone Community & Islamic Centre
Maidstone Interfaith Network
Mid Kent Mind
Porchlight Be You
The Vine Church
YMCA Maidstone
Young Lives Foundation
BSL Community
Celebration Church
Cohesion Plus
Cobtree Mens Shed
Fareshare
Kent Association for the Blind

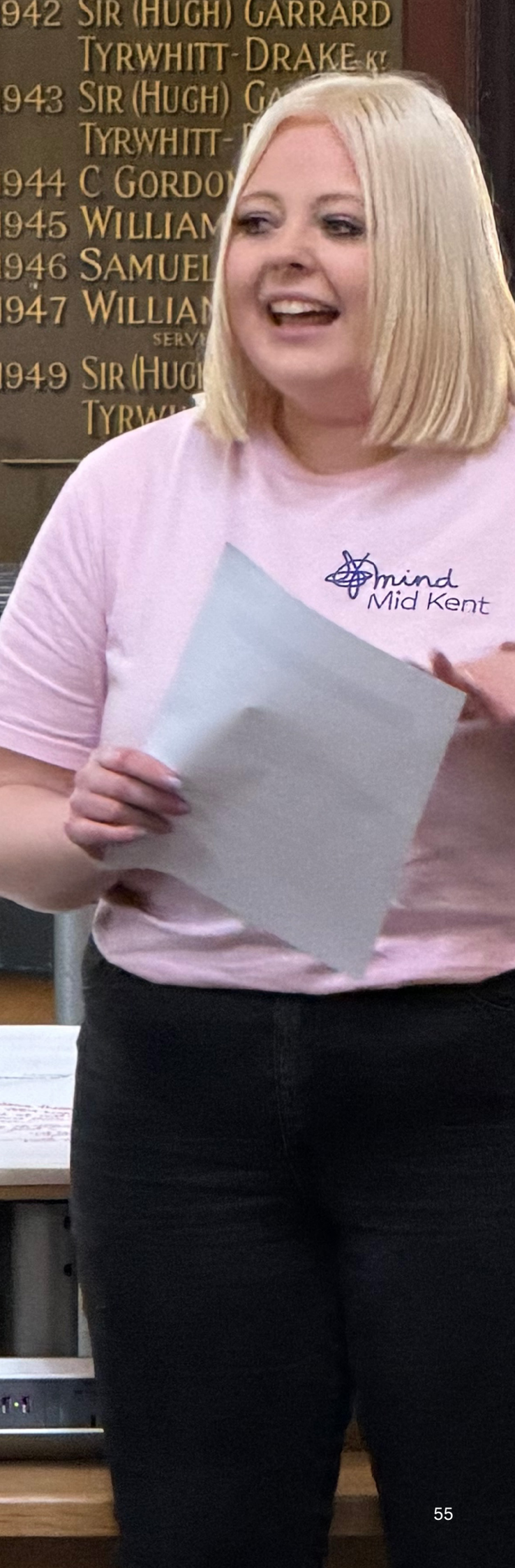
Kent Autistic Trust
Kent Fire and Rescue Service
Kenward Trust
Kerala Cultural Association
Ladies only Football, Larkfield
Linton Road Free Church
MADM
Maidstone and Weald Samaritans
Maidstone Baptist Church
Maidstone Community Support Centre
Maidstone Mediation Scheme
Maidstone MMH Safe haven
OCD Group Maidstone
Rubicon Cares
SeeAbility
Seniors Helping Seniors
Space 2 Be Me
SSAFA Kent
St Andrews, Barming Heath
St Faiths Church
St Luke’s Church
St Margaret’s, Barming
St Martin’s Church
St Nicholas, Allington Baptist
St Philips Church
The Blackthorn Trust
Street Pastors

The Princess Project
The Salvation Army
The Vine Church
Therapy Partners
Tommy’s Rainbow Trust
U3A Maidstone
YMCA Maidstone
Young Lives Foundation
Switch Youth Cafe
Probation Service
Maidstone United/The Stones Trust
Probation Service Andy Marriott Senior Probation Officer, Mid Kent PDU
Parish Councils
MidKent College
Andy’s Men’s Club

Sign-up demographics at a glance

Age	Total number of sign ups	%
16 - 18 years	24	22.02%
19 years old	1	0.92%
20 -24 years	3	2.75%
25 - 34 years	13	11.93%
35 - 49 years	21	19.27%
50 - 64 years	32	29.36%
65 - 74 years	12	11.01%
75 - 84 years	3	2.75%
Total	109	100%

Gender	Total number of sign ups	%
Male	33	30.28%
Female	73	66.97%
Non-binary	2	1.83%
Trans woman	1	0.92%
Total	109	100%



Ethnicity	Total number of sign ups	%
Asian or Asian British- Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese or Other Asian	5	4.59%
Black, Black British, Caribbean, African or Other Black	3	2.75%
Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Groups- White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White and Asian or Other Mixed	1	0.92%
Other Ethnic Group	1	0.92%
White - English, Welsh, Scottish, etc.	93	85.32%
White- Other White	6	5.50%
Total	109	100%

Social and economic background (priority wards)	Total number of sign ups	%
Park Wood & Mangravet	2	1.83%
Senacre	1	0.92%
Ringlestone	3	2.75%
High Street	6	5.50%
Tovil	5	4.59%
Total	17	15.60%

Urban and rural areas	Total number of sign ups	%
Rural	42	38.53%
Urban	62	56.88%
I study in Maidstone but live outside of Maidstone	4	3.67%
Does not live or study in Maidstone	1	0.92%
Total	109	100%

Speakers

The following speakers gave their time to present at the community discussion.

This was through a mix of in-person and virtual presentations.

Anna Collier, Head of Policy, Transformation and Insight, MBC

Elisa Page, Domestic Abuse and Safeguarding Coordinator, MBC

Professor Nicole Westmarland, Director of the Durham Centre for Research into Violence and Abuse, Durham University

Martyn Jeynes, Safer Stronger Communities Manager, MBC

Chief Inspector Lizzie Jones, Director of Kent and Medway Violence Reduction Unit

Professor Fiona Vera Gray, Professor of Sexual Violence and Co-Director of the Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit, London Metropolitan University

Jess Phillips MP, Minister for Safeguarding and Violence Against Women and Girls

Tim Woodhouse, Suicide Prevention Programme Manager, KCC

Sue Dunn, Co-CEO, Protection Against Stalking

Dr Anna Barker, Associate Professor in Criminal Justice & Criminology, University of Leeds

Susannah Walker, Co-Founder of Make Space for Girls + Consultant at In Her Place

Leyla Buran, Research Fellow, Centre for Protecting Women Online (formerly White Ribbon UK)

Dr Alishya Dhir, Research Fellow in Law and a co-lead of the Law and Policy stream at the Centre for Protecting Women Online

Dr Stephen Burrell, Lecturer, Co-chair Melbourne Research Alliance to End Violence against Women and their Children

Full vote on ideas

This table shows the full vote on all 14 ideas that were deliberated on in Session 4.

Participants had two rounds of voting. The first round asked them to select their 6 priority recommendations to inform MBC’s VAWG strategy and form the final recommendations. The second round asked them to select their 2 priority areas for further public engagement.

Idea cluster	Priority votes for final recommendations	Votes for further engagement
Small everyday actions make change	11	5
Women’s representation in positions of decision making	21 (final recommendation)	3
Government action	23 (final recommendation)	9 (for further engagement)
Interventions	11	4
Poverty reduction and cycles of abuse	16 (final recommendation)	3
Men’s mental health and loneliness	8	4
Gender norms	12	1

Idea cluster	Priority votes for final recommendations	Votes for further engagement
Social media	11	4
Lifelong learning	25 (final recommendation)	12 (for further engagement)
Difficult / uncomfortable conversations about VAWG	14 (final recommendation)	8 (for further engagement)
Shared social spaces for young men and women	13 (final recommendation)	4
Public spaces	16 (final recommendation)	6
Support to increase disclosures and provide long term support for survivors	19 (final recommendation)	7
Prosecution rates	10	2

Maidstone Together: A Community Discussion



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