

What is this?

Maidstone Borough Council is working with Involve to launch **Maidstone Together: A Community Discussion**.

This is your chance to be part of genuine discussion and real decision making about how to make our borough safer for everyone.

It's a space where residents come together, share experiences, hear from experts, and develop recommendations that will directly shape Maidstone Borough's strategy on violence against women and girls.

What is a Community Discussion?

A Community Discussion is a process where a group of residents comes together to learn about a complex topic, discuss it thoroughly, and then develop informed, joint recommendations. It goes deeper than a standard survey because participants carefully weigh evidence and explore different views to form a strong public judgment.

What happens at these discussions?

Across four sessions we'll talk together on topics like:

- Spotting harmful or controlling behaviours (including online harassment and threats)
- Standing up to disrespect
- How we can build safer communities for women and girls

You'll hear from a variety of people, experts and organisations, then discuss the issues openly with other residents.

To make sure everyone feels safe to speak, discussions will start in smaller groups of people who share similar experiences or identities. All groups welcome and include trans and non-binary people. This helps create trust and understanding before coming together as one group to shape final recommendations.

Your voice is important in this space. You'll reflect, discuss and help prioritise real solutions and ways forward for Maidstone Borough when it comes to addressing violence against women and girls.

Why me?

If you call Maidstone home, we need your voice in this space. The requirements are that you are over the age of 16 and be a resident or someone who studies in Maidstone.

Everyone has a role in tackling violence against women and girls. This is an opportunity to improve the safety and wellbeing of women and girls in Maidstone by having your voice as one of 36 residents' heard by the council. It is a chance to make a difference in your local community, on a really important issue: preventing and reducing violence against all women and girls.

In addition to creating change on a serious and ongoing issue that affects Maidstone's local community, you will have an opportunity to meet and get to know new people in your local area.

This is a facilitated discussion where your perspective matters. You won't just be listening: you'll be part of genuine discussion and decision making with other people who care about their community.

You will be paid as a thank you for your time and insights.

Who can apply?

We will have 36 residents taking part. These participants will be carefully selected from people who volunteer themselves, to ensure they represent the different groups across our local population. To create the safest environment for discussing sensitive topics, the process involves small groups based on age and gender (women, men, teenage girls, and teenage boys). All groups welcome and include trans and non-binary people.

If you are aged 16-18, we will also need you to share the contact details of a parent, guardian or carer to provide their consent for you to take part.

If you are from a local community organisation you can complete the sign up form on behalf of someone else if they have asked for support.

What will I receive for taking part?

We will cover the cost of reasonable travel to the venue and provide a £300 Gift of Thanks for taking part in all sessions. We will also provide food, drink and snacks on the day.

Do I need to attend all of the sessions to take part?

Yes, **you must be available to attend all sessions** to participate in the discussion. This makes sure you have the opportunity to hear all the information provided and be involved in all the discussions before making your recommendations.

What other support is available?

If you are selected to take part, we will arrange a phone call with you to discuss the type of support you may need. We will work with participants to ensure everyone is supported to take part.

What is expected of me? Will I need to do anything beforehand?

Involve will organise a short phone call with you to ask about any support needs you may have.

Otherwise, there is no preparation, knowledge or experience required for you to take part in the discussions. You just need to bring yourself and a willingness to listen and discuss with others.

What will the sessions be like ?

Some of the things you'll be doing during the sessions may include:

- Group activities and small table discussions, supported by independent facilitators
- Listening to presentations from invited speakers
- Talking with and asking questions to groups and people with expertise on the causes and solutions to VAWG
- Prioritising and agreeing to recommendations

On the day there will be a team of people that will lead the sessions and provide support to help everyone engage.

There will be scheduled breaks and food. You can wear what you feel comfortable in and bring any aids, such as for mobility or hearing.

Is this work only focused on women and girls?

While the project specifically focuses on preventing violence against women and girls because they face unique and disproportionate risks, ending all forms of violence is our shared goal. By involving all genders and ages, we aim to build understanding, empathy, and collective responsibility for a community free from violence.

Do I have to share my personal experiences within the discussion?

There is no requirement or expectation for you to share personal experiences to take part in this process.

If you've experienced violence or abuse, please know support is available. You can find more information on services at [Let's Talk Maidstone](#).

Why does this matter for Maidstone?

Communities built on respect and equality work better for everyone and this is what we want for where we call home.

Your participation means:

- Stronger, healthier relationships for all
- Safer public and online spaces for everyone
- Real support systems that work for our whole community
- Positive change for the next generation

Why is the Council using this approach for Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)?

VAWG is a sensitive and complex issue that needs solutions rooted in our community's values and experiences. A Community Discussion is especially useful because it:

- **Gathers Different Views:** It brings together residents who reflect the borough's different backgrounds.

- **Improves Decisions:** It helps us understand the deep needs and values behind people's opinions.
- **Builds Trust:** By focusing on citizens, the resulting recommendations will be more credible and will shape the Council's long-term VAWG plan.
- **Fosters Safe Conversations:** The process is built around safety but encourages open, respectful, and courageous discussions

Why now?

In December 2024, Maidstone Borough Council committed to taking stronger action to address violence against women and girls. The Council pledged to develop a borough-wide VAWG Strategy, promote safer night-time spaces, ensure women's safety is embedded in town planning, and work towards White Ribbon accreditation.

But lasting change doesn't come from policy alone: it comes from people.

That's why residents' voices are at the heart of this project. Your recommendations will directly influence how the Council and community take action.

What action will the Council take based on the recommendations?

The recommendations that come out of the Community Discussion will be the main guide for the Council and its partners. This means the Council will use these findings to decide what actions to take next and directly shape the development of their new, broader VAWG Strategy. The suggestions from the community will help make sure the final decisions accurately reflect what residents want and are concerned about.

What will happen next?

We will be in touch, via email, phone call or text, **by 3rd February** to confirm whether or not you will be involved in the community discussions.

If you are selected we will send you a confirmation email and text with further information on the project, and schedule a time to introduce ourselves, run through any logistical information and discuss any support needs.

Who is organising the citizens' discussion?

The project has been initiated by Maidstone Borough Council. The sessions will be organised by Involve, an independent charity who work to bring people's voices into decisions that affect them.