

What is happening around you?

You might not believe it, but in 2019 violence, sexual offences and anti-social behaviour together made up over half Woking's nearly 10,000 reported crimes. Some of the increase is a result of better reporting and greater awareness from neighbours, but the number of these crimes is still a concern. Burglaries, meanwhile, comprised just 5% (although Surrey is experiencing a spike in burglaries at the moment).

The first category includes domestic violence, a problem that requires a better understanding.

The majority of Woking's citizens will not be involved in domestic violence, but it is happening around us and we need to recognise it. The official definition includes psychological, emotional and financial – as well as physical and sexual – abuse. Much of this takes place inside homes. Although away from public gaze it's often within earshot, and it is too easy for the rest of us to ignore it.

Most victims are going to be women, but don't assume they are never men. They do not need to have been beaten. Instead, they can be under severe mental and financial pressure by a family member, partner or ex-partner. The police generally get involved only when the problem escalates and the victim becomes in danger, or it overflows into the community.

There are many very effective organisations that can help:

- Woking's own domestic abuse organisation is Your Sanctuary, whose details can be found at yoursanctuary.org.uk
- National organisations such as Refuge (refuge.org.uk) and Women's Aid (womensaid.org.uk) provide excellent advice and services
- Men's Advice Line (mensadvice.org.uk) is self-explanatory!

Most of these organisations have 24/7 helplines with fully trained operators. Some have an on-line 'chat' service, as many victims prefer to write their problem anonymously rather than pick up the phone.

But these are support organisations. If you, the citizen, want to report a suspicion of domestic violence, call the police on 101 (or 999 if immediate action is needed). The police will respond accordingly and address the problem in a sympathetic manner, before the problem escalates. Don't forget, even if domestic abuse doesn't affect you, it may be at the root of other crimes that do directly affect our lives.