

Herefordshire Domestic Abuse Strategy 2019-22

Add organisations who are signed up to the strategy

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1. Foreword

Domestic abuse has a huge impact on society and is one of the most pervasive of all social problems. It causes pain and suffering for those affected and their family, and has a significant cost to public services and the local community. It is often a hidden crime, with people experiencing domestic abuse reluctant to report their situation and friends, neighbours or family hesitant to get involved.

People who have experienced or are experiencing domestic abuse may be affected in a number of ways, including significant and lasting impact on physical and mental health, homelessness, loss of income or work and isolation from families and friends. Children can experience both short and long term cognitive, behavioural and emotional effects as a result of witnessing domestic abuse. The definition of domestic abuse includes controlling and coercive behaviour, as well as physical and sexual abuse, and these negative impacts on adults and children may occur with any type of abuse. The breadth of the impact on individuals and families results in needs arising across a wide-range of public services, from police and health care through to education, housing support and criminal justice. We recognise that a collaborative approach to developing and delivering the priorities is fundamental to preventing and responding to domestic abuse in the most effective way.

This multi-agency strategy and accompanying live action plan builds on learning from the 2014-17 strategy. The documents have been developed through multi agency stakeholder workshops and engagement with those who have been affected by domestic abuse. Agencies need to work together to ensure a robust approach to tackling domestic abuse. This strategy aims to bring a strategic direction to the work to tackle domestic abuse and to make Herefordshire a place where domestic abuse is totally unacceptable. Successful delivery will require strong leadership, commitment and engagement from partner organisations.

Partner agencies who have adopted this strategy and will be instrumental to its delivery are:

- Herefordshire Council
- West Mercia Police
- Wye Valley NHS Trust
- 2gether Foundation NHS Trust
- NHS Herefordshire Clinical Commissioning Group
- Taurus Healthcare
- West Mercia Women's Aid
- West Mercia Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre
- National Probation Service
- West Mercia Community Rehabilitation Company
- West Mercia Youth Offending Service

Further partner agencies who support the strategy and will be instrumental to its delivery are:

- West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner

[DN: Work to gain official sign up from partner agencies is ongoing. Only those agencies who have confirmed adoption or support of the strategy will be listed at the time of

publication. The exact wording for the statement 'Further agencies who ... ' may be altered if requested by partner agencies ahead of publication].

2. The Shared Vision

The shared vision is that domestic abuse is unacceptable to people and communities in Herefordshire.

Domestic abuse and the harm it causes will be prevented as people and communities:

- Understand and have the skills to establish healthy relationships
- Recognise and reject all forms of domestic abuse
- Seek, are offered and receive effective help and support early

The long-term desirable outcome is a reduction in the incidence of domestic abuse. Such an outcome is however difficult to quantify and long term, likely beyond the duration of this strategy.

The objectives and outcomes within this strategy will ultimately contribute to the overall impact of reducing the number of domestic abuse incidences in Herefordshire.

Two nearer term outcomes of importance are:

- Increase in the number of domestic abuse cases that are identified
- Reduction in the harm caused by domestic abuse, through early intervention and access to support

3. The Priorities

There are four priorities under the shared vision:

- Priority 1 – Prevention
- Priority 2 – Provision of service
- Priority 3 – Partnership working
- Priority 4 – Pursuing perpetrators

3.1. Priority 1 – Prevention

The aim is that individuals and communities understand domestic abuse and the harm it causes and have the skills to build, and a culture that supports, healthy relationships. Preventing domestic abuse is key to delivery of our vision.

Objectives:

Partner agencies will:

- Use data effectively to create a shared understanding of domestic abuse in Herefordshire.
- Work collaboratively across organisations to support culture-change in the population to be one that recognises and rejects all forms of domestic abuse.
- Create an environment throughout universal services and others that supports early disclosure of domestic abuse by those affected and provides a high-quality and consistent initial response.
- Increase awareness amongst those who work with people with additional vulnerabilities to ensure domestic abuse is identified with an effective initial response.
- Support young people, children and families to recognise the signs of domestic abuse and understand that harm it causes as well as the positive impact of disclosing abuse.

Outcomes for Priority 1:

- Increased recognition by the population of all forms of domestic abuse and the harm it causes to children.
- Increased understanding by professionals of the signs, symptoms and appropriate response to domestic abuse.
- Decrease in the impact of domestic abuse on children, through reduction in the number of children affected, improved early identification and reduction in repeat incidents affecting children.

3.2. Priority 2 - Provision of Service

The aim is that when domestic abuse is disclosed, identified or reported, those affected by domestic abuse can access timely and effective information, advice and support. This support should meet the needs of the affected individual and any children, seeing them as a unit to be supported.

Objectives:

Partner agencies will:

- Ensure that those experiencing domestic abuse can easily and safely contact and access specialist domestic abuse services, including those with additional barriers
- Ensure that children exposed to domestic abuse are supported in the best possible way
- Ensure that housing advice, emergency and other appropriate housing solutions are available to those experiencing domestic abuse, and where appropriate support those affected by domestic abuse and their children to remain in their homes safely.

Outcomes for Priority 2:

- Those affected by domestic abuse and their families are supported to improve their resilience and to understand healthy relationships.
- Those affected by domestic abuse and their families are safe from harm.

3.3. Priority 3 - Partnership Working

Domestic abuse has impact across multiple agencies who therefore each play a key role. These include primary and secondary health care, police, early years, children's social services, adult's social services, schools, courts and probation. There is no single place that a person might disclose domestic abuse and no single agency that can provide a full response. Close partnership working is essential, with a shared vision, strong leadership and clear pathways. **The aim is to work together across organisations in an efficient and effective way to prevent, and protect those experiencing, domestic abuse, ensuring that organisational barriers do not have impact on those affected by domestic abuse.**

Objectives:

Partner agencies will:

- Ensure there is strong leadership across all organisations on domestic abuse.
- Work collaboratively across organisations to create clear pathways for supporting those experiencing domestic abuse.
- Ensure that front line staff (for example, staff who work in primary care, emergency department, children's centres, children's social care, adult social care, fire service)
 - i) have a good understanding of domestic abuse;
 - ii) see it as their role and responsibility to reduce the harm of domestic abuse; and
 - iii) understand the tools/resources available to them to do so.

Outcomes for Priority 3:

- Improved shared understanding of the whole system response to domestic abuse.
- Reduction in cross organisation barriers to an effective response to domestic abuse.

3.4. Priority 4 – Pursuing perpetrators

There are many tools available to the police and court system to prevent and deter perpetrators from domestic abuse. **The aim is that the tools available are used effectively and consistently and those experiencing domestic abuse see the police and criminal and civil legal systems as working to protect them and their children.**

Objectives:

Partner agencies will:

- Support those experiencing domestic abuse to use the various tools available to prevent further offending (e.g. Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme, Clare's Law), Domestic Violence Protection Notices and Domestic Violence Protection Orders).
- Use the criminal justice system to its full effect to deter offending and bring perpetrators to justice.

- Make available effective, evidence-based programmes to help change perpetrator behaviour, where perpetrators have the capacity to change.

Outcomes for Priority 4:

- Reduction in re-offending by perpetrators
- Victims of domestic abuse are aware of the range of prevention tools available and supported to access them

The vision, priorities and objectives have been developed through working with and gaining the views of professionals, stakeholders and groups from across Herefordshire, and those who have experienced domestic abuse.

Appendix 1 gives further detail on each of these objectives. These details capture the input from stakeholders in developing the strategy and will be used as the basis for action planning.

4. Delivering the Strategy

4.1. Strategic Leadership and Delivery

Domestic abuse is not an issue which can be meaningfully and sustainably tackled by any single organisation working alone. To most effectively prevent and respond to domestic abuse, strong leadership is required across the system and within organisations to prioritise this work. Organisations (including providers and commissioners, specialist and non-specialist services) must work in partnership, both at the strategic and operational level.

Key components of the strategic leadership and delivery of this strategy are:

- Community Safety Partnership (CSP) will be responsible for strategic leadership and the delivery of this strategy
- CSP will task the Herefordshire Domestic Abuse Delivery Group (previously called the Domestic Violence and Abuse Group) to develop and implement annual detailed action plans, building on the objectives to implement this strategy
- CSP will retain strategic oversight and provide leadership to the delivery group
- The DA Delivery Group will report to the CSP on a quarterly basis
- The DA Delivery Group will deliver and monitor the effectiveness of identified actions.

The CSP and Herefordshire Domestic Abuse Delivery Group are multi-agency groups.

4.2. Action Planning

The multi-agency Domestic Abuse Delivery Group will develop a live action plan for each year of the strategy, identifying the most important objectives and actions for that year. This action plan will build upon the objectives and further detail included in this strategy. These

objectives have been developed with the input of partners working across the system and from discussions with those affected by domestic abuse and key groups. The action plan will be agreed with the CSP. Action plans will need to take account of plans, opportunities and resources available within each partner organisation.

Successful delivery of the action plans will depend upon a continued commitment and engagement from partner organisations, including the allocation of professionals' time and a review of, and willingness to change, practices.

4.3. Measuring impact

The key outcomes are defined as:

- Increase in the number of domestic abuse cases that are identified
- Reduction in the harm caused by domestic abuse, through early intervention and access to support

These are outcomes which are difficult to accurately and truly quantify and are inter-related. For example, domestic abuse is under-reported; a successful awareness campaign would result in increased reporting, therefore an increase in numbers would be a positive indicator. However, other prevention measures may require a reduction in numbers to denote success.

It is important that caution is applied in interpreting the available data on domestic abuse; such data can only be used as a marker of the levels of support provided and action taken by the relevant organisations; it cannot be used to measure the true extent or patterns in domestic abuse.

The action plan will specify for each action the outputs and logic by which these outputs are expected to impact on one or more of the above outcomes.

5. Definition of domestic abuse

The cross-government definition of domestic abuse is given in Box 1. This strategy adopts this definition, which recognises that abuse takes many forms including coercive and controlling behaviour and that abuse can occur not just between partners and ex-partners but includes other family relationships. This definition includes so called 'honour' based violence (HBV), female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, and is clear that domestic abuse is not confined to one gender or ethnic group.

Herefordshire's response to HBV, FGM and forced marriage is co-ordinated under the domestic abuse agenda by the Community Safety Partnership.

Box 1. UK Cross Government Definition of Domestic Abuse, revised 2012:

Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- economic
- emotional

Controlling behaviour can involve a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.

6. Domestic Abuse in Herefordshire

6.1. Domestic abuse incidence and prevalence

Domestic abuse is often a hidden crime and many incidents go unreported. Using data from different sources enables a fuller picture to be understood, including reported crime, self-reported histories and service use data.

In the year ending March 2017, West Mercia police recorded 3,071 victims in Herefordshire: 2,024 (66%) females and 1,047 (34%) males (these counts are not unique victims, but rather include multiple counts of repeat victims). Many incidents are known to not be reported to the police.

A more accurate prevalence can be estimated by applying national, self-reported prevalence rates to Herefordshire population. Through this method, it was estimated that in 2016/17 there were 5,900 victims aged 16-59 in the county; nearly double the number of victims recorded by the police.¹

¹ DRAFT Domestic Violence and Abuse: Evaluation of the local response in Herefordshire, 2017, Herefordshire Council

Key facts from the Crime Survey for England & Wales, year ending March 2018²:

- 7.9 per cent of females aged 16-59 and 4.2 per cent of males aged 16-59 experienced domestic abuse during the last year in England and Wales.
- Since the age of 16 year, 28.9% of women and 13.2% of men experienced domestic abuse at some point.
- Partner abuse is most common form of domestic abuse.

In Herefordshire, over a six year period (2011/12-2016/17) there were five domestic homicides. In England and Wales, over the last three years of available data there have been a total of 400 domestic homicides (average 133 per year), representing 25% of homicides of over 16 year olds.³ The majority of victims were female (73%, 293). 82% of female victims of domestic homicides were killed by a partner or ex-partner and 18% by a family member, whilst for males 42% were killed by a partner or ex-partner and 58% by a family member. Although domestic homicide reviews can be conducted for deaths by suicide where there are circumstances that raise concern, these deaths are not captured in the above data. It has been estimated that there are approximately 200 deaths by suicide for women a year in the UK.⁴

The number of children exposed to domestic abuse in Herefordshire has been estimated to be 300-400 children per month (some of these will be repeat exposures for the same children). Around 850-900 children are known to be in the households of those accessing domestic abuse support services each year, including around 250-300 children in households of high risk cases discussed at the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference each year.⁵

Local data suggests that the number of reported incidents is increasing over time, as also seen nationally. This is likely to reflect an increase in reporting rather than incidents, and indeed national survey data suggests a very slightly decreasing trend in incidence.

Evidence suggests that anyone is vulnerable to domestic abuse. There are however certain circumstances known to increase the risk of domestic abuse. These include pregnancy, mental health conditions, alcohol and substance misuse, low income, separation.⁶

² Domestic abuse: findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales: year ending March 2018. Office for National Statistics

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabusefindingsfromthecrimesurveyforenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2018>

³ Domestic abuse in England and Wales: year ending March 2018. Office for National Statistics.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2018>

⁴ Walby S. The cost of domestic abuse. 2004.

http://eprints.lancs.ac.uk/55255/1/cost_of_dv_report_sept04.pdf

⁵ DRAFT Domestic Violence and Abuse: Evaluation of the local response in Herefordshire, 2017, Herefordshire Council

⁶ SafeLives. Who are the victims of domestic abuse? <http://safelives.org.uk/policy-evidence/about-domestic-abuse/who-are-victims-domestic-abuse>

Of all age groups, the Crime Survey of England and Wales found that in 2016/17, 16 to 19 year olds were the most likely to say they had experienced domestic abuse in the last year (11% women, 7% men). Herefordshire has an older age structure than England and Wales as a whole, meaning that Herefordshire is expected to also have an older age profile of potential domestic abuse victims compared with nationally. Older people experiencing abuse are considered a hidden group. Barriers faced by older people include carer relationships, abuse being hidden behind other physical and mental health conditions, services typically being set up with younger clients in mind, older people being less likely to call 999, cultural or generational attitudes towards marriage and family life, and a lack of awareness among some professionals.⁷

Herefordshire is a rural county which brings additional barriers for those experiencing domestic abuse, including recognising abuse, asking for help, accessing support and fleeing the abusive relationship.⁸ Domestic abuse in rural communities is no less prevalent but can be less visible. Women living in rural areas have been found to particularly value the importance of health practitioners, especially GPs, in providing confidential and safe services for women compared to women living in urban areas. Such women have been found to express concern about the confidential nature of services they received in their community, not echoed by women living in urban areas.⁹

These data suggest that key issues for Herefordshire include:

- Recognition that domestic abuse is under-reported and this might be even more so in certain population groups and due to rurality which is likely to have a big impact in Herefordshire
- Whilst young people are most likely to experience domestic abuse, the demographics of Herefordshire mean there will be a high number of older people affected by domestic abuse
- Many children experience domestic abuse (see impact section)
- There are key vulnerable populations in Herefordshire who might find it harder to recognise or escape abuse, including, traveller communities, rural communities older adults (e.g. dementia)

⁷ SafeLives. Guidance for multi-agency forums: older people.

http://www.safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/NSP%20Guidance%20Older%20People%20FINAL_0.pdf

⁸ SafeLives Herefordshire MARAC review, 2018

⁹ McCarry M and Williamson E. Violence against women in rural and urban areas.

https://www.thewi.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/49874/vawruralandurbanareas.pdf

Groups with Additional Vulnerabilities in Herefordshire

All people affected by domestic abuse are vulnerable in some way. However, there are certain groups of people who are harder to reach due to additional vulnerabilities or cultural challenges:

- There are fewer known cases of men reporting domestic abuse than women. 1.7% of high risk cases discussed by MARAC were male, whilst the expected proportion is 4-10%. There are very few men accessing the local domestic abuse support service provided by West Mercia Women's Aid.
- Older people are less likely to make disclosures of domestic abuse, further exacerbated by health conditions such as dementia or physical disability. People in such circumstances are more likely to be isolated and reliant upon their partner or family for their care, while the demands upon their carer can cause additional pressures and a shift in the dynamic of their relationship.
- Similarly, people with physical or mental health illness or learning disabilities can be additionally vulnerable to domestic abuse due to isolation or a reliance upon their family or partner as their carer.
- People from the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual or transgender (LGBT) community are less likely to report domestic abuse. Local data provided by West Mercia Women's Aid shows low numbers of people in lesbian, gay or bi-sexual relationships accessing the service and similarly lower than expected numbers of LGBT cases are considered in MARAC (<1% of all high risk cases) than would be expected (≥5%). The West Mercia and Warwickshire Police Draft Domestic Abuse Threat Assessment 2017 reports for couples in a same sex relationship, females accounted for 7% of reported offences and males for 8%. This would indicate that proportionately, those in same sex relationships are not accessing domestic abuse support services.
- People from ethnic minority groups may be reluctant to report abuse due to fear of isolation or repercussions, or due to a lack of understanding about domestic abuse, UK law and the support available. Key communities to consider in Herefordshire include the Eastern European and Traveller populations. People affected by domestic abuse in both these communities might face additional challenges which make it harder to identify abuse for both the person affected and agencies, and more difficult to leave. For example, lack of trust in police and other professionals, being ostracised from their own community if women leave a marriage, traditional established roles for men and women, lack of culturally-appropriate refuge accommodation
- People living in rural communities may face additional challenges to accessing services, or have concerns about their information being shared with others in their community should they make a disclosure.

A new approach is required across organisations to ensure people with additional vulnerabilities and those who are harder to reach are given special consideration. They must be enabled and encouraged to access services, and the system must be prepared to respond to their individual needs and vulnerabilities.

6.2. Impact of domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is devastating to those affected and their families.

For the person directly affected the impact can be physical and mental.¹⁰ Physically there can be short term injuries and long-term physical health problems for example, asthma, bladder and kidney infections, cardiovascular disease and reproductive health problems have all been associated with domestic abuse. Mental health issues are extremely common (40% of high risk people affected by domestic abuse reported mental health issues and 16% reported having considered or attempted suicide). Psychological problems include anxiety, depression, suicidal behaviour, low self-esteem, lack of ability to trust others, flashbacks, sleep disturbances, and emotional detachment.

Children exposed to violence in the home may suffer a range of severe and lasting effects. Evidence ¹¹ suggests that:

- Children who grow up in a violent home are more likely to be victims of child abuse. Even where a child does not suffer direct abuse, the impact of violence in the home can be devastating and long-term.
- The stress caused by being exposed to violence in the home can harm the development of the brain and impair cognitive and sensory growth.
- Children who are exposed to violence in the home may have difficulty learning and limited social skills, exhibit violent, risky or delinquent behaviour, suffer from depression or severe anxiety, excessive irritability, sleep problems, emotional distress, fear of being alone, immature behaviour, and problems with toilet training and language development.
- Children in the earliest years of life are particularly vulnerable: studies show that domestic violence is more prevalent in homes with younger children than those with older children.
- Several studies also reveal that children who witness domestic violence are more likely to be affected by violence as adults – either as victims or perpetrators.
- There is also evidence that children try to prevent the violence, get outside help or protect the victim.

In addition to the impact on those experiencing domestic abuse and their families, domestic abuse also has a large impact on services. Data from children's services suggests that domestic abuse is a factor in approximately 50% of vulnerable children cases in

¹⁰ SafeLives. How widespread is domestic abuse and what is the impact? <http://safelives.org.uk/policy-evidence/about-domestic-abuse/how-widespread-domestic-abuse-and-what-impact#physical> impact

¹¹ UNICEF. Behind Closed Doors: the impact of domestic violence on children, 2006
<https://www.unicef.org/media/files/BehindClosedDoors.pdf>

Herefordshire.¹² Furthermore when there are children in the household, the majority witness the violence that is occurring and in about half of all domestic violence situations, the children are also being directly abused themselves. Police data shows that domestic violence accounts for between 16% and 25% of recorded violent crime and 10% of emergency calls.

It is also known that those experiencing and perpetrating domestic abuse often experience multiple issues e.g. alcohol and/or substance misuse, mental health issues. In Herefordshire, 31% of domestic violence crimes had alcohol identified as an issue and 5% had drugs identified as an issue (February 2014).

The importance of identifying, and effectively supporting those affected by, domestic abuse at the earliest possible opportunity is highlighted by the severity of its impact. Universal services, such as GPs, schools, health visitors, midwives, domiciliary care, residential care, carer support, have a key role to play in this.

6.3. Preventing domestic abuse

Primary prevention of domestic abuse is key. This means preventing abuse before it happens. There are several broad categories of interventions that work at primary prevention level. These include¹³:

- Early childhood and family-based approaches: not only, as described above, does witnessing abuse have a direct impact on child development, but it is in early childhood that children learn a range of skills and attitudes. Skills such as problem-solving, emotional management, and social skills, alongside attitudes to gender roles, relationships and acceptability of aggression and violence, form the basis of future relationships. Children learn much of this from the behaviour of people around them. Positive parenting and safe and supportive home environments are therefore crucial to pro-social behaviour and healthy relationships.
- School-based approaches: school based programmes to prevent abuse should be part of broader community based prevention strategies. Evidence suggests that most effective programmes are those that aim to change attitudes and norms, rather than provide information, and should address both boys and girls.
- Interventions to reduce alcohol and substance misuse: alcohol and drug use are a situational factor that contribute to the severity of abuse, or a coping mechanism for ongoing abuse, rather than being the primary cause. Alcohol harm reduction strategies, although not addressing the underlying cause, can still lead to improvements in preventing abuse.

¹² Herefordshire Council and Herefordshire Community Safety Partnership. Domestic violence and abuse needs assessment. 2013

¹³ World Health Organization. Primary prevention of intimate-partner violence and sexual violence: Background paper for WHO expert meeting May 2–3, 2007
https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/publications/violence/IPV-SV.pdf

- Public information and awareness campaigns: such campaigns are a common approach to preventing domestic abuse, to try to break the silence and influence attitudes and social norms. Communications strategies based on a social marketing framework are more likely to be effective in changing individuals' knowledge, attitudes, and social norms.
- Community-based approaches: such approaches include interventions targeted at subgroups of the population (such as group education for people at risk) and comprehensive community-wide mobilisation interventions. Comprehensive programmes are designed to effect social change by creating an enabling environment for changing individual attitudes and behaviour. This approach requires multiple components, often including participatory education or training, public awareness campaigns, and social marketing techniques. These approaches can be particularly challenging as they rely on long-term, participatory engagement with high-quality facilitation and are most effective where there is community ownership.
- Structural and policy approaches: working towards strengthening gender equality can have fundamental impact on domestic abuse whilst improving criminal justice system responses is a key part of a comprehensive approach.

This overview, based on international research, outlines the range of activities required across the system to effectively prevent domestic abuse and the importance of the wider work of organisations, such as Herefordshire Council. This strategy and the identified priorities include primary prevention strategies, alongside early identification and harm-reduction after domestic abuse incidents have taken place.

6.4. Understanding the needs and views of those experiencing domestic abuse

As part of developing this strategy, we sought the views of those who have experienced, or continue to experience, domestic abuse to provide valuable insight into their journey. We also sought the views of parents with young children, various professional working closely with those who have experienced domestic abuse.

The key themes that have emerged from our conversations include:

- Recognition of abuse: People understand that domestic abuse is not just violence, however people affected by domestic abuse found it difficult to identify whether things they were experiencing or witnessing constituted abuse or were just typical relationship issues.
“When should alarm bells ring and who do you talk to, to check it out?”
- Fear of losing children: There was a deep fear of children's social services or intervention into family matters. This was driven by the concern that children will be taken away or custody issues. Perpetrators often use children as leverage to exert power and control and persuade someone to stay in the abusive relationship.
- Crisis point: The majority of those affected waited until things reached crisis point and the police or social services became involved before they sought help.

- Cycle of domestic abuse: many (but not all) of those affected by domestic abuse reported coming from abusive families, and had experienced multiple abusive relationships.
- Feeling that no-one is on their side: those affected reported that as a parent, once you have been identified as a victim, you are continually seen as the bad guy by the authorities who are checking up on your parenting skills; by the police who don't believe you unless there's hard evidence (and perpetrators are usually very good persuaders); by their families who think you should keep the family together; and by the criminal justice system which fails victims with perpetrators who receive a conviction getting more lenient sentences for physically assaulting a member of their family than they would receive if they had attacked a stranger.
- Housing concerns: Property rights and tenancies are used as another manipulation tool.
- Impact on children: The impact of domestic abuse on children, whilst the parent affected by domestic abuse was with them, was not recognised – with the parent feeling they could protect the child(ren) from harm. People affected by domestic abuse reported concern about the impact on their children who remained living with their abuser.
- Organisations could work better together: reports of organisations continuing to work in a fragmented way, leading to confusion and conflicting information.

6.5. Challenges in addressing domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is often a hidden experience, with those affected fearful of repercussions such as reprisals from their partner, loss of their children and loss of home being deterrents from reporting the abuse (as highlighted above). This is further exacerbated by low self-esteem and lack of control which results from domestic abuse. The abuse itself therefore directly affects the ability of the person affected to identify and address the situation.

For the system, challenges arise from cross organisational barriers and different risks and focus of the agencies involved. For example, and simplistically, children's services focusing on the risk to children, police and probation focusing on the risk from the perpetrator, specialist support services focussing on the risk to the person affected by domestic abuse. Whilst each is a valid angle with which to view the situation, it takes all angles to form a comprehensive picture from a family-centred view.

Men affected by domestic abuse, whilst fewer in number, are arguably less well supported by the system. There are not for example, designated local refuge facilities and local support programmes.

As outlined above (see Box "Groups with additional vulnerabilities in Herefordshire"), certain groups, such as people with dementia or learning disabilities, can be disproportionately affected by domestic abuse and face additional barriers to access support and services.

Technology offers both a means to help those affected by domestic abuse seek information and support, but also provides perpetrators with more ways to control, coerce and threaten. Research undertaken by SafeLives found half of those affected by domestic abuse were monitored online or with technology, through trackers, apps or internet blockers. This included controlling social media interactions, monitoring locations and for those who tried to leave, tracking them through technology. Many had been traced, either through social apps such as Facebook, through dedicated tracking apps, or through online bank statements and phone bills. In extreme cases, tracking devices were placed in cars and cameras were placed around the house. The research found that despite the risks, victims often remained online and technology offers a key source of information and advice, when this can be found safely and quickly. Practitioners have reported that the power of technology can be harnessed to enable those affected by domestic abuse locate support services, share tips on staying safe, recognise abuse, communicate more easily with services, improve their own safety and to seek peer support.¹⁴ It will be important that local initiatives that use technology, whether that be campaigns, universal or specialist services, understand and take steps to ensure their offer meets the needs of those affected and helps them stay safe.¹⁵

7. Context

This strategy builds on the work of the previous Herefordshire Multi Agency Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy (2014-2017), evidence and data from the Domestic Violence and Abuse Needs Assessment, July 2013 and the Draft Domestic Violence and Abuse: Evaluation of the local response in Herefordshire, 2017, as well as national policy.

7.1. 2014-2017 Herefordshire Multi Agency Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy

The outcomes within the 2014-2017 domestic violence and abuse strategy were informed by both national policy and the result of a local needs assessment completed in 2013. Significant progress was made to achieving the outcomes within the 2014-2017 strategy, including:

- A new refuge building for Herefordshire with increased capacity and individual flats which better support women affected by domestic abuse and their children, including by being able to accommodate older male children.
- Helping Hands (4-11 year olds) and CRUSH (13-19 year olds) programmes delivered to children who are or had experienced, witnessed or were at risk of domestic abuse.
- Recognition that clearer and more consistent data were required. Data recording was improved across agencies. Funding was provided by the Community Safety Partnership to create a central Intelligence Team covering the West Mercia policing

¹⁴ SafeLives Tech Vs Abuse: Research Findings.

<http://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Tech%20vs%20abuse%20report.pdf>

¹⁵ SafeLives Tech Vs Abuse Design Challenges <https://www.techvsabuse.info/design-challenges>

area footprint to improve consistency. A domestic abuse triage worker was included in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub to support the flow of information

- Improved understanding of Early Help and the Troubled Families programme, increasing pathways and referrals from across agencies.
- Amendments to the Housing Allocations Policy to ensure domestic abuse victims have higher priority
- A specific worker within the Housing Solutions Team with specialist knowledge, training and experience around domestic abuse
- Agreement by the Community Safety Partnership to commence the 'Inspiring Families' pilot project, funded by the Police and Crime Commissioner due to commence in January 2019. The programme is aimed at female victims and male perpetrators who have children and wish to remain in a couple. The project adopts a 'whole family' approach; working with children to reduce the impact of being exposed to domestic abuse, the victim to build resilience and safety and the perpetrator to address attitude and behaviour.
- Implementation of 'Operation Encompass' – a secure established flow of information about domestic abuse incidents involving children from the police to the relevant school/s
- The roll out of Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) training to professionals.
- Two conferences on 'Silent Victims', looking at additional barriers for people with additional vulnerabilities, including those from black and minority ethnic communities.

Some of the actions identified within the 2013 domestic abuse needs assessment (updated in 2017) have been addressed to some extent but remain outstanding and will be considered by the Domestic Abuse Delivery Group to inform the action plan. These include:

- A specific domestic abuse service for males (support and signposting is currently available)
- Awareness raising, culture change and education in communities, including black and minority ethnic communities.
- Robust education for professionals around the identification of and provision of initial advice to those experiencing domestic abuse
- Clarity between organisations which undertake assessments to create a mutual understanding of thresholds and how assessments should be interpreted.
- Better information sharing arrangements between key agencies (substance misuse services, sexual health services, general health services, social care, schools etc.) where safeguarding does not apply, including compliance with the General Data Protection Regulations.

Many of these actions have been brought forward to this strategy, but some remain a particular challenge, specifically domestic abuse services for males and culture change.

7.2. Other local policy context

The priorities within this strategy align with key organisations' plans and strategies.

This strategy aligns with Herefordshire Council's corporate plan and plans for adult and wellbeing and children and young people:

- Herefordshire Council's Corporate plan priorities:
 - Enable residents to live safe, healthy and independent lives
 - Keep children and young people safe and give them a great start in life
 - Support growth of our economy
 - Secure better services, quality of life and value for money.
- Herefordshire Council's Adults and Wellbeing Plan 2017-2020:
 - *All adults in Herefordshire live healthy, happy and independent lives within their local communities, for as long as possible with support when they need it.*
- Herefordshire Council's Children and Young People's Plan 2015-18:
 - *We want all children and young people in Herefordshire to have the best start in life and grow up healthy, happy and safe within supportive family environments. We want them to have the best possible health, education and opportunities to enable them to reach their full potential.*

It also aligns with West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner's Safer West Mercia Plan 2016-21 vision:

- Putting victims and survivors first
- Building a more secure West Mercia
- Reforming West Mercia
- Reassuring West Mercia's communities

[Drafting note: sign up to be confirmed] A number of agencies are committed to delivering the vision and priorities within this strategy. These include:

- Herefordshire Council
- West Mercia Police
- Wye Valley Trust
- 2gether Mental Health Trust
- The Clinical Commissioning Group
- Taurus Healthcare GP Federation
- West Mercia Women's Aid
- West Mercia Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre
- National Probation Service
- West Mercia Community Rehabilitation Company
- West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner

- West Mercia Youth Offending Service

7.3. National policy

7.4. National context

In 2016 the government released the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2016-20. Although it is recognised that domestic abuse can affect any person, the strategy recognises that violence in general is disproportionately skewed towards women and girls. The strategy provides an overview of the wide range of actions the government is taking to tackle violence against women and girls between 2016 and 2020 and includes forced marriage, sexual exploitation, honour based violence and female genital mutilation. The priorities within the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2016, taken with the local context, evidence and research, have informed the priorities for this strategy.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) produced guidance for Domestic Violence and Abuse: Multi-Agency Working in 2014. This provided 17 recommendations, including local strategic multi-agency partnerships, integrated care pathways, joint-commissioning of services, creating an environment and culture for domestic abuse to be disclosed, better information sharing, training for frontline staff in recognising and responding to domestic abuse and providing specialist domestic abuse services to adults and children. All of the recommendations have been considered in drafting the strategy and action plan.

8. References and further information

[Herefordshire DVA Needs Assessment 2013](#)

[Understanding Herefordshire 2013](#)

[Women's Aid Website](#)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/strategy-to-end-violence-against-women-and-girls-2016-to-2020>

<https://www.nice.org.uk/Guidance/PH50>

https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/1500/corporate_plan_2016-20.pdf

https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/10458/adults_and_wellbeing_plan_2017_to_2020.pdf

https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/5211/children_and_young_people_s_plan_2015-2018.pdf

9. Appendix 1

The table below gives further detail of each objective, capturing the full discussions of stakeholders. It is proposed that the action plan will be built upon these details.

	Objectives Partners will:	Further detail
Prevention	Use data effectively to create a shared understanding of domestic abuse in Herefordshire.	Share, analyse and use sub-county (e.g. locality) level data on DA
		Share appropriate data on individual cases to ensure all agencies have necessary information and take appropriate action (e.g. Operation Encompass), with any necessary agreements in place
	Work collaboratively across organisations to support culture-change in the population to be one that recognises and rejects all forms of domestic abuse.	Co-ordinate our approach to public awareness on DA, with sign-up from wide range of partners
		Work to ensure the system supports the prosecution of cases, which itself will help support a culture of non-acceptance (link to perpetrators)
	Create an environment throughout universal services and others that supports early disclosure of domestic abuse by those affected and provides high-quality and consistent initial response.	Work across wide range of universal services likely to encounter DA to equip professionals to encourage disclosure and respond appropriately (link to professional enquiry). Such services include police, schools, GPs, dentists, social landlords, sexual health services, benefits officers, vets, hairdressers
	Increase awareness amongst those who work with people with additional vulnerabilities to ensure domestic abuse is identified with an effective initial response	Work with partners and colleagues to increase DA awareness amongst those who work/support those with additional vulnerabilities (e.g. dementia, LD);

	<p>Support young people, children and families to recognise the signs of domestic abuse and understand that harm it causes as well as the positive impact of disclosing abuse.</p>	<p>Work across the system to increase awareness about healthy relationships in children and young people and to not accept DA</p> <p>Work to support early intervention with children who have experienced or are beginning to perpetrate DA, both by DA specialist and wider services</p>
	<p>Objectives Partners will:</p>	<p>Further details</p>
<p>Provision of services</p>	<p>Ensure that those experiencing domestic abuse can easily and safely contact and access specialist domestic abuse services, including those with additional barriers</p>	<p>Support access to specialist and refuge services with a particular focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - easy access to specialist and refuge services especially those who face additional barriers - supporting access to relevant health and wellbeing services and for those affected by DA - supporting those affected, and other services, of the financial provision and availability of services particularly for those with no recourse to public funds - increasing provision of and access to solicitors who support women through legal aid and have specialist knowledge of DA <p>Identify children exposed to domestic abuse at the earliest possible opportunity</p> <p>Work to understand where inconsistencies lie in the response to domestic abuse across both the criminal justice and civil legal systems and work to address these</p> <p>Work as a partnership to respond to funding initiatives/calls to bring additional money into Herefordshire to address DA and support those affected.</p>

	Ensure that children exposed to domestic abuse are supported in the best possible way	Work across the system to increase awareness of the negative impact of domestic abuse on children
		Work to adopt a family-centred approach, supporting the non-abusive parent to protect and support their child(ren)
		Work with specialist services to ensure the additional needs of children and young people accessing services are met
	Ensure that housing advice, emergency and other appropriate housing solutions are available to those experiencing domestic abuse, and where appropriate support those affected by domestic abuse and their children to remain in their homes safely.	Work to support those affected by domestic abuse to be safe in their own homes
		Ensure that those who are forced to leave their homes due to domestic abuse are a housing priority, have access to timely advice and have access to a housing solution.
		Work with housing and ensure civil/criminal orders/tenancy agreements are used to maximum effect to ensure that perpetrators are made to leave their homes as opposed to the victim and children.
	Objectives Partners will:	Further details
Partnership working	Ensure there is strong leadership across all organisations on domestic abuse.	Ensure that the governance and delivery arrangements are fit for purpose and that organisations make a high level commitment to seeing through the implementation of the DA strategy both across Herefordshire and within their organisation.
		Ensure there is a whole-system understanding of each agency's key offer, through, for example developing a domestic abuse glossary and system overview
		Ensure there is effective strategic oversight of systems and processes with support from multi agencies
	Work collaboratively across organisations to create clear pathways for supporting those experiencing domestic abuse.	Ensure systems and processes are in place to facilitate multi-agency cooperation at all appropriate levels.

		Ensure there are clear, cross-organisational pathways for victims which include robust systems to ensure victims don't fall between the gaps (especially where these are between agencies)
	Ensure that front line staff i) have a good understanding of domestic abuse, ii) see it as their role and responsibility to reduce the harm of domestic abuse and iii) understand the tools/resources available to them to do so.	Work to ensure all organisations are clear about their role and offer around domestic abuse and that of partners.
		Ensure universal services have appropriate training and tools available to identify and respond to domestic abuse. This will include understanding the resources available to different professions and any gaps.
		Ensure that systems are established within organisations to support staff delivering front line services to enquire as part of their normal work
	Objectives Partners will:	Further details
Pursuing perpetrators	Support those experiencing domestic abuse to use the various tools available to prevent further offending (e.g. Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (Clare's Law), Domestic Violence Protection Notices and Domestic Violence Protection Orders).	<p>The police, supported by other organisations, will use the full range of powers available to them to reduce incidence of DA</p> <p>Probation services, supported by other organisations, will work to ensure the safety of victims of DA</p>
	Use the criminal justice system to its full effect to deter offending and bring perpetrators to justice.	Work with the courts to identify any areas for improvement in training or elsewhere to support court proceedings result in sentences for perpetrators that reflect the impact of DA and act as a deterrent.
	Where perpetrators have the capacity to change, partners will make available effective, evidence-based programmes to help change perpetrator behaviour.	Develop a good understanding of perpetrator behaviour and drivers of behaviour, and the evidence-base and effectiveness of behaviour change programmes

		<p>Work to deliver effective behaviour change support for perpetrators of domestic abuse who have and have not been convicted, and for the range of relationships (not just intimate partners). This will require a focus both on the effectiveness of programmes and identification of potential funding sources.</p>
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