



Title of report: Domestic Abuse Strategy for Herefordshire 2025 to 2028

Meeting:	Cabinet
Meeting date:	Thursday 17 July 2025
Cabinet member:	Cllr Gandy, adults, health and wellbeing
Report by:	Corporate Director Community Wellbeing
Report author:	Community Resilience Manager

Classification

Open

Decision type

Key

This is a key decision because it is likely to result in the council incurring expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant having regard to the council's budget for the service or function concerned. A threshold of £500,000 is regarded as significant.

This is a key decision because it is likely to be significant having regard to: the strategic nature of the decision; and / or whether the outcome will have an impact, for better or worse, on the amenity of the community or quality of service provided by the authority to a significant number of people living or working in the locality (two or more wards) affected.

Notice has been served in accordance with Part 3, Section 9 (Publicity in Connection with Key Decisions) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

To approve the Domestic Abuse Strategy for Herefordshire 2025 to 2028, in accordance with the requirements of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) **The Domestic Abuse Strategy for Herefordshire 2025 to 2028 be approved for implementation;**
- b) **Approval of progress updates and any refresh of the associated needs assessment required, be delegated to the Corporate Director for Community Wellbeing in consultation with cabinet members during the lifetime of the strategy.**

Alternative options

1. Not to approve the final draft Domestic Abuse Strategy for implementation. This option is not recommended, as it is a statutory duty under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, for local authorities to have a robust strategy in place for tackling domestic abuse. Local authorities are required to deliver an up to date strategy and report back to the Government annually.

Key considerations

2. Domestic abuse is a significant matter of public, has a huge impact on society and is one of the most pervasive of all social problems. It causes long term pain and suffering for those affected and their families, resulting in significant cost to public services and the local community. It is often a hidden crime that disproportionately affects women, with people experiencing domestic abuse often reluctant to report their situation.
3. This report and appendices refers to those who have experienced domestic abuse (DA) as “victims” as this is a widely understood term and is used in many publicly available reports. It is recognised that this terminology can be controversial, and different people may have preferences for other terms. The decision to use the term “victim” is purely for clarity and not an indication that other terms are not valid.
4. The Safe Lives prevalence tool uses data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales merged with local population and Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) data to capture a true understanding on the prevalence of domestic abuse in a local area. The latest available data (year ending 2020 due to a period of suspended data collection during COVID-19) estimates that:
 - a. There are 25,000 adult victims in Herefordshire who have experienced domestic abuse at some point in their lives since aged 16
 - b. Of the total estimated adult victims 19,000 (68%) are female
 - c. 8,000 victims have experienced domestic abuse in the last year, of these 68% were female
 - d. Only a third of female victims and a quarter of male victims in the past year were ‘visible’ (visible relates to the number of victims who told a support professional organisation).
 - e. 4,500 children were living in a household with domestic abuse present in the last year

- f. 4,500 people were using abusive behaviours in their intimate partner relationships in the past year, of these 20% were estimated to be serial perpetrators of domestic abuse.
5. People who have experienced or are experiencing domestic abuse may be affected in a number of ways, including significant and lasting impact on their 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 or being victim to domestic abuse.
6. The impact on individuals and families results in a variety of needs arising across a wide-range of public services, from police and health care through to education, housing support and criminal justice. The council recognise that a collaborative approach to developing and delivering services is fundamental to preventing and responding to domestic abuse.
7. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 placed new duties on local authorities. These duties include, but are not limited to the following;
 - a. Appoint a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board, which will be consulted during the implementation of the duties required by the Act.
 - b. Assess the need for accommodation-based domestic abuse support in their area for all victim or their children, including those who come from outside the area (local needs assessment). A full assessment should be conducted at a minimum of every 3 years but with an annual refresh as necessary.
 - c. Develop and publish a strategy for the provision of such support to cover the local authority locality, having regard to the needs assessment.
 - d. Give effect to the strategy (through commissioning or de-commissioning decisions) including the provision of safe accommodation.
 - e. Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy, reviewing it every three years.
 - f. Submit an annual report to the Secretary of State in relation to the council's duties under the Act.
8. The strategy has been developed in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders through the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board, using data obtained and analysed for the Needs Assessment and incorporating qualitative data gathered from practitioners and people with lived experience of domestic abuse in Herefordshire.
9. The strategy will be implemented and monitored via an action plan held by the Local Partnership Board. The Board includes representatives from the following organisations / groups in accordance with Section 58 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021:
 - a. Herefordshire Council including representatives from Community Wellbeing and Children and Young People
 - b. West Mercia Women's Aid
 - c. West Mercia Rape and Sexual Assault Centre
 - d. Local NHS organisations, including the Integrated Care System (ICS)
 - e. West Mercia Police
 - f. Registered Landlords of Social Housing
 - g. Lived experience advisory network
 - h. The perspective of people with "protected characteristics", who are often under represented among people seeking support.

10. The action plan includes specific tasks related to the promotion and publicity of the domestic abuse strategy alongside regular communications activity targeted at addressing stereotypes and biases and raising awareness of support services.
11. In addition to the action plan, the All Age Commissioning team are required to complete an annual monitoring report for MHLCG

Community impact

12. By adopting and working in partnership to deliver the Domestic Abuse Strategy, the work is directly contributing to the Council Plan 2024-2028 priority area 1; People – We will enable residents to realise their potential, to be healthy and to be part of great communities that support each other. We want all children to have the best start in life.
13. More generally, this strategy positively impacts on priorities within the Council Plan including enabling people to access the housing they need, supporting people to feel safe in their communities and supporting all children to have the best start in life. As well as complimenting the work of Talk Community in developing children and family community support.
14. The revised strategy is directly relevant to the council's corporate parenting responsibilities, as nationally, incidence of domestic abuse is reported to be highest amongst 16 to 25 year olds. In addition a significant proportion of care experienced children and young people are also victims of domestic abuse.
15. The requirement set out in the Act to undertake and regularly update the needs assessment will ensure that commissioning activity, policies and action plans reflect both current data and the feedback from stakeholders.

Environmental Impact

16. The council provides and purchases a wide range of services for the benefit of people living in Herefordshire. Together with partner organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors we share a strong commitment to improving our environmental sustainability, achieving carbon neutrality and to protect and enhance Herefordshire's outstanding natural environment.
17. Whilst this decision will have minimal environmental impacts, consideration has been made to minimise waste and resource use in line with the Council's Environmental Policy such as sustainable approach to the Local Partnership Board meetings etc.

Equality duty

18. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires the Council to consider how it can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that it is paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.
19. The mandatory equality impact screening checklist has been completed for this policy and it has been found to have high impact for equality.

20. Due to the scope of this policy and its potential impact on certain protected characteristics, an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is attached as an appendix to this report.
21. In summary, this project/decision/activity impacts on protected characteristics as follows:
 - a. *Age*. According to the needs assessment carried out in 2024, half of all victims of recorded domestic abuse offences were aged 25-44 years, with the median age of victims being 30. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 highlights the significant impact domestic abuse can have on children and young people, including their health, wellbeing, and development. The act also discusses the unique challenges faced by older victims of domestic abuse, such as dependency on the abuser for care and the potential for abuse to be overlooked or misinterpreted as age-related issues.
 - b. *Disability*. The needs assessment shows a significant number of domestic abuse victims are disabled. Also, that 68% of disabled people referred to West Mercia Women's Aid (WMWA) had mental health issues. Additionally, over 50% of victims supported by the Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) service in 2022/23 were recorded as disabled. Data suggests that disabled people may be more vulnerable to domestic abuse due to factors such as communication barriers, social isolation, and dependency on the abuser for care.
 - c. *Marriage and Civil Partnerships*. The domestic abuse act defines "personally connected" individuals as those who are married to each other, civil partners of each other, have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated), have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been terminated), are or have been in an intimate personal relationship with each other, have or have had a parental relationship in relation to the same child, or are relatives.
 - d. *Pregnancy and Maternity*. The needs assessment shows over three-quarters of the people accessing refuge were either pregnant (12%) or had children in the household (65%).
 - e. *Sex*. SafeLives, a leading domestic abuse charity, estimate that around 8,000 people a year in Herefordshire experience domestic abuse: 5,500 (68%) females and 2,500 (32%) males. The local needs assessment data confirms that the majority of domestic abuse victims are female.
 - f. *Others*. The local needs assessment shows a notable link between domestic abuse and deprivation, with over 40% of all domestic abuse offences and incidents recorded in the most deprived parts of Herefordshire. There are challenges in accessing support services, particularly for those in rural areas. Rural victims are half as likely to report their abuse, and face significant barriers in accessing support services.
 - g. *Health Inequalities*. The domestic abuse act addresses the impact of domestic abuse on children recognising that witnessing abuse can have long-term effects on their health and development. The Domestic Abuse Strategy also highlights the significant impact of domestic abuse on the health and well-being of victims. It emphasises the need for a comprehensive approach to address the physical, psychological, and emotional health consequences of domestic abuse.
22. The risks to equality impacts are mitigated through the Domestic Abuse Strategy. Decisions that inform the strategy are made by the Council based upon its consultation with the Local Partnership Board, the needs assessment and further consultee responses. The board takes a strategic and multi-agency approach to sharing knowledge and intelligence, identifying and, where possible, addressing gaps in support and prevention.

23. The council recognises the fact that domestic abuse has a huge impact on the lives of victims and are committed to listening and engaging with those with lived experience and supported by expert evidence base, to continuously learn and improve.
24. The council also acknowledges the gendered nature of domestic abuse but works to ensure our local response is accessible to all regardless of gender and other protected characteristics.

Resource implications

25. There are no direct financial implications for the council arising from the strategy. However, the Domestic Abuse Strategy requires the council to take action in collaboration with partner organisations including those actions which are mandatory under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. This has and will be achieved through the established services commissioned by the council and additional grant resources provided by the Government.
26. Domestic abuse provision in Herefordshire is also supported by funding from other public bodies, notably the office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). That funding supports Independent Domestic Violence Advisers and the perpetrator intervention programmes, Drive and Men and Masculinity. The PCC commissions these services directly.

Legal implications

27. The council is required to appoint a Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board under s58 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. This board must be consulted during the production of the Domestic Abuse Strategy required by s57. There is a requirement to submit an annual report to the Secretary of State confirming that a local partnership board has been appointed, a local needs assessment has been undertaken and the strategy is in place and operating effectively.

Risk management

28. The risks associated with the delivery of the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2025–2028 have been appropriately identified and will be monitored through the council's governance and partnership arrangements. The strategy will be supported by a clear action plan, and risks will be recorded and escalated through the relevant risk registers and partnership boards. The approach taken aligns with the council's Risk Management Strategy and provides assurance that delivery will be monitored and managed in a controlled and proportionate manner.

<p><u>Opportunity</u> Strategy priorities need to be embedded across all partner organisations and progress needs to be measurable.</p> <p><u>Opportunity</u> The strategy provides a clear statement of the councils intention to, and a mechanism for, working together with partners to protect people from domestic abuse and prevent it from happening in the first place.</p> <p><u>Risk</u> Lack of good quality data for needs assessment to inform strategy, action plan and subsequent commissioning of services remains a concern.</p> <p><u>Risk</u> Inconsistent commitment or resource allocation from partner organisations, although accountability is outlined through the partnership board there may be variability in capacity, funding or priorities across agencies.</p> <p><u>Risk</u> External funding pressures or shifts in national policy priorities Changes in government policy or reductions in grant funding could limit the council or partners' ability to deliver the full scope of the strategy.</p> <p><u>Risk</u> Lack of engagement with under-represented groups or hard-to-reach communities Some communities affected by domestic abuse may remain invisible to services if engagement methods are not inclusive.</p> <p><u>Risk</u> Reputational risk if strategic outcomes are not delivered. Failure to demonstrate impact could reduce public confidence and risk future funding bids or scrutiny.</p>	<p><u>Mitigation</u> A clear action plan has been developed to deliver the priorities of the strategy. Partner organisations will be accountable through the Local Partnership Board.</p> <p><u>Mitigation</u> A communication plan will be developed with the local partnership board to further enable a joint approach to prevention campaigns alongside a detailed action plan to develop the priorities within the strategy including enabling the right support at the right time for adults, children and young people experiencing domestic abuse.</p> <p><u>Mitigation</u> The local partnership board will continue to work together to address gaps in data and seek new and efficient ways to capture and share data pertinent to demongraphics, prevalence and prevention activities.</p> <p><u>Mitigation</u> Formalise partner responsibilities through the partnership board in the action plan and monitor delivery via agreed performance measures. Encourage continued senior-level engagement across all partners.</p> <p><u>Mitigation</u> Regular review of funding opportunities and strategic alignment with national policy. Contingency planning should be built into the strategy's delivery approach.</p> <p><u>Mitigation</u> Incorporate specific actions within the delivery plan to improve engagement and trust with marginalised or seldom-heard groups. Co-produce elements of service design where possible.</p> <p><u>Mitigation</u> Ensure that progress is measurable, with transparent reporting and clear outcome indicators embedded in the action plan.</p>
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Consultees

29. Stakeholder consultation was carried out during 2024. A detailed coproduction process has been completed with people with lived experience of domestic abuse which has directly informed the priorities and actions in the strategy. A public consultation was completed in February 2025.
30. Consultation took place with political groups on 19th June 2025. The strategy was supported by attendees. Discussion included the interconnectivity of domestic abuse with other issues such as drug and alcohol use and mental health, the ongoing need for appropriate housing for victims of domestic abuse and some suggestions for future invitations for the local partnership board to include we are farming minds and the NFU. Queries were raised in relation to the vision and the effective measurement of success, these were all resolved satisfactorily during the meeting.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Domestic Abuse Strategy for Herefordshire 2025-2028

Appendix 2 – Domestic Abuse in Herefordshire Final Needs Assessment 2024

Appendix 3 – Equality Impact Assessment

Background papers

None Identified

Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

Governance	John Coleman	Date 23/05/2025
Finance	Karen Morris	Date 13/05/2025
Legal	Sean O'Connor	Date 07/05/2025
Communications	Luenne Featherstone	Date 07/05/2025
Equality Duty	Harriet Yellin	Date 08/05/2025
Procurement	Nena Beric	Date 08/05/2025
Risk	Paige McInerney	Date 21/05/2025
Approved by	Hilary Hall	Date 23/06/2025

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.