



**Herefordshire
Council**

Domestic Abuse Strategy for Herefordshire 2025 to 2028

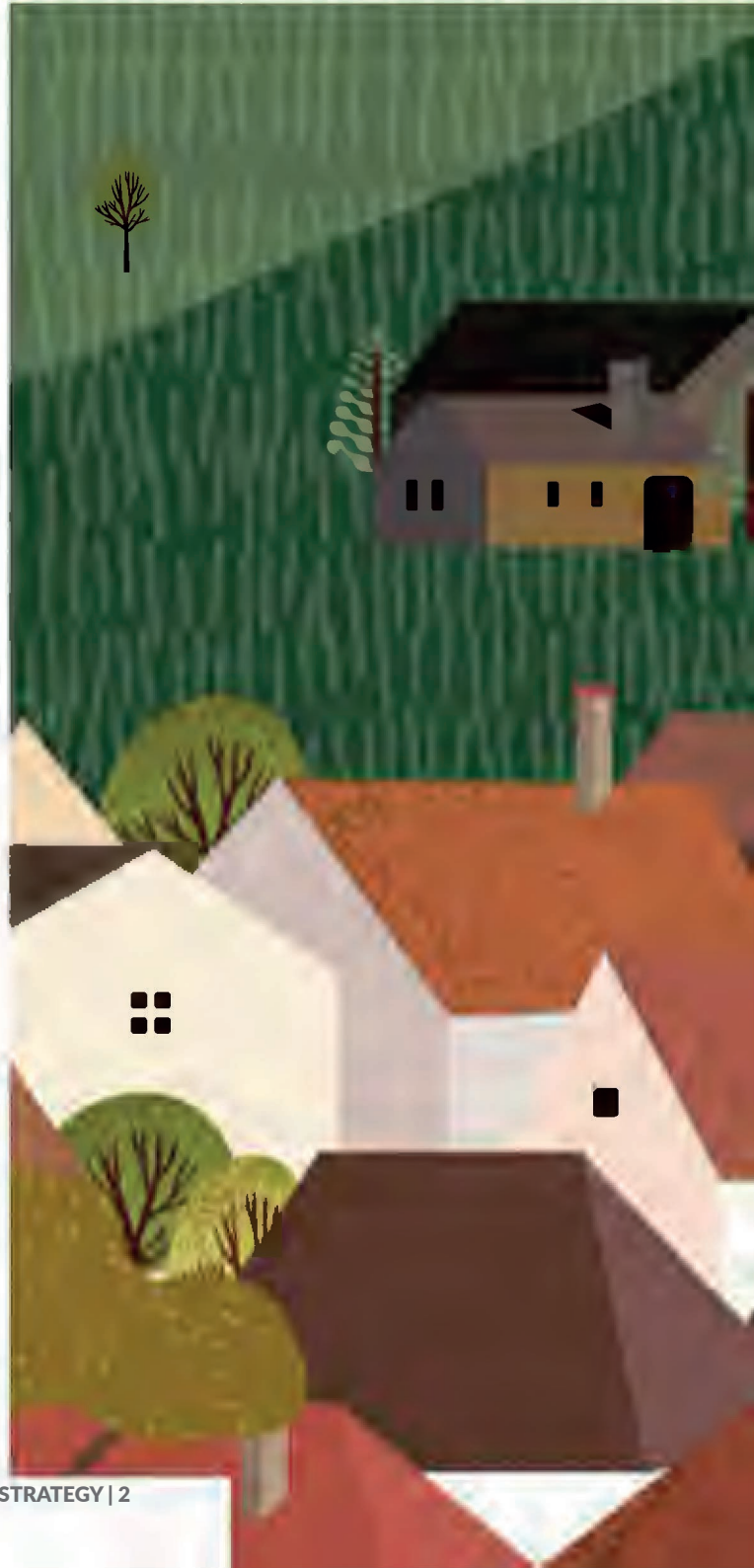
1. Introduction

This strategy has been developed by the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board in line with the requirements of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

The Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board is a group of organisations that are working together to improve outcomes for people experiencing domestic abuse. This is achieved through a strategic approach to sharing knowledge and intelligence, identifying and, where possible, addressing gaps in support and prevention. This strategy sets out the priorities and actions for the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board for the next 3 years.

The Board recognise the fact that domestic abuse has a huge impact on the lives of the people that experience it and are committed to listening and engaging with those with lived experience and supported by expert evidence base, to continuously learn and improve.

We also acknowledge the gendered nature of domestic abuse but work to ensure our local response to domestic abuse is accessible to all regardless of gender and other protected characteristics.





2. Herefordshire Vision for Domestic Abuse

For Herefordshire to be a county where domestic abuse is not tolerated and everybody can live free from abuse and harm, where people with lived experience of domestic abuse including children have access to the right support at the right time.



3. What is domestic Abuse?

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 provides the following definition:

Behaviour of a person (“A”) towards another person (“B”) is “domestic abuse” if A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and the behaviour is abusive.

‘Abusive behaviour’ is defined as any of the following:

- Physical or sexual abuse
- Violent or threatening behaviour
- Controlling or coercive behaviour
- Economic abuse
- Psychological, emotional or other abuse

‘Personally connected’ is defined in the act as parties who:

- are married to each other
- are 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 there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child
- are relatives

The national domestic abuse charity, Women's Aid provide an alternative definition of domestic abuse:

Domestic abuse as an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence, in the majority of cases by a partner or ex-partner, but also by a family member or carer. It is very common. In the vast majority of cases it is experienced by women and is perpetrated by men.

Domestic abuse can include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Coercive control (a pattern of intimidation, degradation, isolation and control with the use or threat of physical or sexual violence)
- Psychological and/or emotional abuse
- Physical or sexual abuse
- Financial or economic abuse
- Harassment and stalking
- Online or digital abuse

This definition recognises that domestic abuse is a pattern of behaviour, whereas the full legal definition indicates that domestic abuse can be a one-off incident.



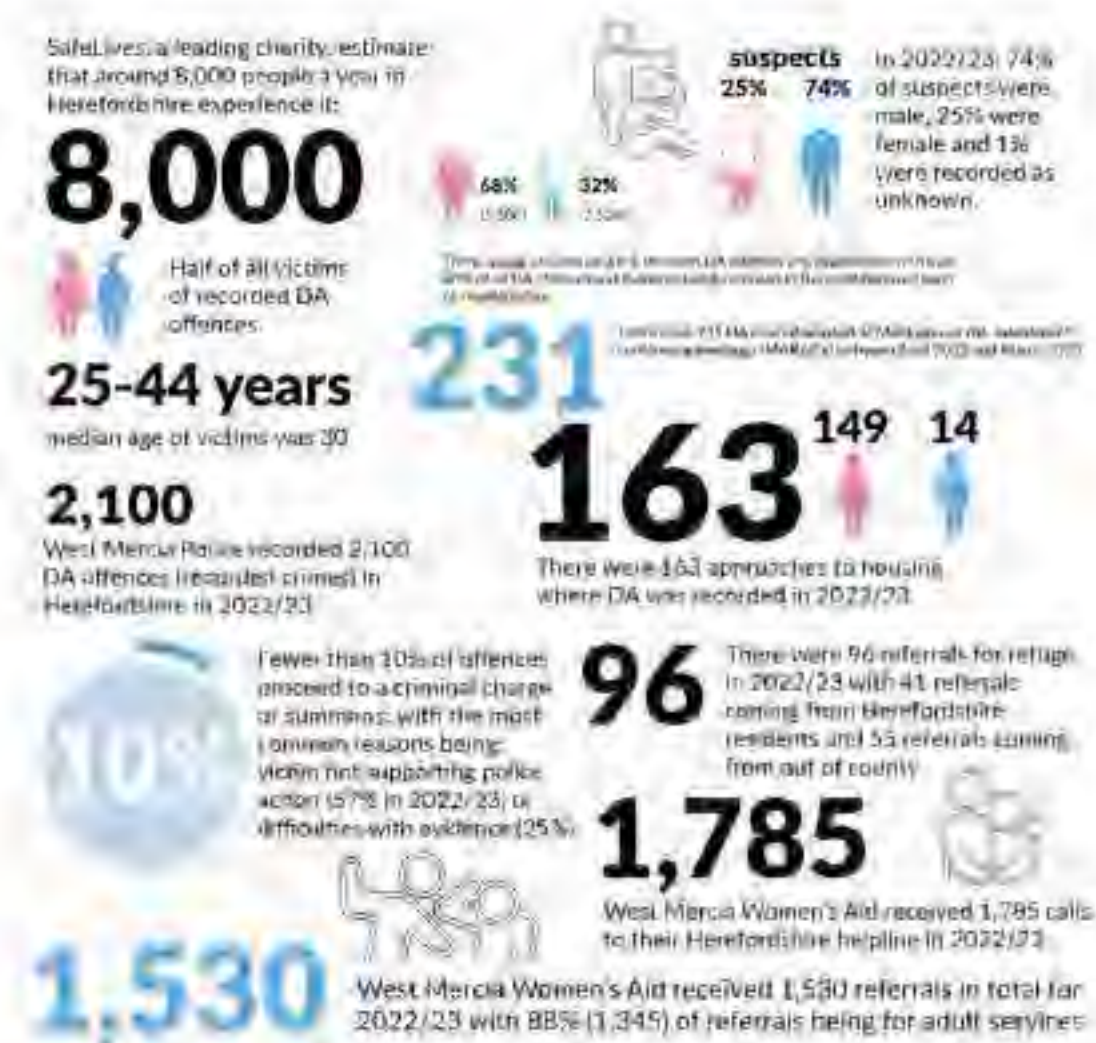
4. *Key Achievements over the last 3 years*

- Recommissioned domestic abuse services in Herefordshire, to extend their reach and increase the amount of safe accommodation available in the county.
- Commissioned the co-ordination of a lived experience advisory network to ensure that the voices of people with lived experience of domestic abuse are at the heart of what we do.
- Secured additional investment for the Sanctuary Scheme (installation of target hardening equipment) in Herefordshire, giving people experiencing domestic abuse the option to stay at home where it is deemed safe to do so.
- Co-located domestic abuse specialists in Early Help and Edge of Care/Home teams at Herefordshire Council to ensure a robust understanding and response to domestic abuse
- Reviewed, updated and secured funding for domestic abuse training for professionals and volunteers across Herefordshire.
- Secured funding to pilot the IRIS programme.
- Developed our relationship with the Police and Crime Commissioner and domestic abuse commissioners across West Mercia to share best practise and maximise service provision.
- Increased our understanding of domestic abuse in Herefordshire through needs assessments.



5. Understanding Domestic Abuse in Herefordshire

A needs assessment of domestic abuse in Herefordshire was carried out in 2024. Below are some of the key findings:



The full 2024 needs assessment is available on the Herefordshire Council website (link to be added).

6. Lived Experience Engagement

The lived experience advisory network was established in 2023 and since then people with lived experience of domestic abuse have been asked to give the Local Partnership Boards in Herefordshire and Worcestershire feedback about their experiences of the domestic abuse system via surveys, focus groups and working groups.

Five focus groups were held (four face to face and one virtual) specifically to inform the priorities and actions in this strategy. Three with women, one with young people and one with men, all of whom have lived experience of domestic abuse. Below is a summary of some of the feedback received through these sessions and through surveys that have been completed over the last 18 months

'(There is) Still so much stigma and shame attached to domestic abuse.'

'School is safer than home.'

'You worry that no one will believe you and then when you finally find the courage to talk it is used against you.'

'Having to repeat what happened over and over again was hard. I was like I've already told the Police this but I had to tell everyone again. It was exhausting.'

'It is hard to make someone see why you made certain choices when they don't understand what you were going through. They couldn't see that the choices I made were to protect myself and my children.'

'He played the system and manipulated professionals and made me feel more isolated and controlled even though I had left the relationship'

'He has used the TAF process to continue the abuse.'

'They just couldn't see what he was doing and made me feel like I was the problem for not wanting to cooperate with the person making our lives a living hell.'

'I thought it would get better once I left, but it didn't.'

'You are never free of your perpetrator if you have children.'

'The abused always seems to have to flee - there just isn't the available housing stock to house families in an emergency.'

'Coming out of refuge there is no help to move in. The kids had no furniture and we were told to make it fun and camp out on the floor. No help to decorate an empty shell when suffering PTSD, SEN kids, sorting finances, alone with zero support and family court and criminal proceedings.'

'(The) system lacks positive responses.'

'CPS / Social workers need more specialist training to educate them about domestic abuse.'

'Guidance isn't clear / system is not clear. So many pit falls. The end goal is just to be safe!'

'(Need) Better promotion of services and support available.'

'Onus is all on the women to protect themselves'

'Professionals need training to understand what coercive control is.'

'Professionals need to name the behaviours and acknowledge them. Onus is all on the woman.'

'Need to improve signposting and improved co-ordination.'

'When all the people involved on my case started working together that's when it got better.'

'Professionals need to work more closely with each other; I feel invisible.'

'(Need) Support with mental health, promote what people deserve e.g. the chance to rebuild your life.'

'Education and training and understanding (are needed).'

'A single person can save your life.'

7. *Priorities and Actions*

Priority One

Improve awareness and prevention

- Improve early identification and support for people affected by domestic abuse through the continuation of the IRIS programme which offers specialist training and support for GP practices.
- Cultivate a generation of young people better equipped to recognize and navigate healthy relationships, thereby preventing domestic abuse from an early age.
- Raise awareness through social media, educating the wider community about the signs of domestic abuse and the support available.
- Create a robust network of support, offering expert guidance and intervention through specialist domestic abuse roles.
- Integrate prevention in recommissioning activities to ensure that domestic abuse prevention remains a priority across all services.
- Increase public awareness and utilisation of protective measures such as Claire's Law and Sarah's Law, to save lives.

Priority Two

Improving understanding of domestic abuse and support services

- Build a comprehensive understanding of domestic abuse in Herefordshire, to aid targeted interventions and resource allocation.
- Review and invest in domestic abuse training ensuring that communities, volunteers, and professionals are equipped to recognise and address coercive control effectively.
- Ensure that domestic abuse training is mandatory for all Herefordshire Council social care and housing teams to enhance their ability to support victims and challenge victim-blaming attitudes, ensuring a more empathetic and effective response.
- Actively challenge victim-blaming across services to shift the focus from the victim to the abuser, promoting accountability and support for those experiencing abuse.
- Involve people with lived experience of domestic abuse to empower them and ensure that solutions are tailored to their needs, creating a more effective support system.
- Influencing domestic abuse training for wider professionals e.g. Police and Magistrates will create a more informed and cohesive response across agencies, improving the overall handling of domestic abuse cases.
- Understand the impact of domestic abuse on children to better tailor support to their needs and reduce the harm caused by domestic abuse.
- Gain insight into elder abuse prevalence to help address the specific needs of older victims, ensuring they receive appropriate support and protection.
- Share recommendations from domestic abuse homicide reports with the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board to incorporate valuable learning into future practices, enhancing the effectiveness of interventions.
- Investment in the Sanctuary Scheme will provide people with lived experience with safe housing options, allowing survivors to remain in their homes when safe to do so, thereby reducing homelessness and instability.

- Understanding the link between domestic abuse and increased risk of suicide will inform preventive measures, potentially saving lives by addressing the underlying causes and providing timely support to those in need. **Research on intimate partner violence, suicidality and self-harm** showed that past-year suicide attempts were 2 to 3 times more common in victims of intimate partner violence than non-victims.

Priority Three

Improve joint working and coordination across services

- Implementing the recommendations from the Safe Lives Review and actively participating in Family Courts working groups will foster a collaborative environment to address domestic abuse more effectively.
- Working with partners to address the perceived lack of support for low-medium risk clients and reducing waiting lists for commissioned services will ensure timely support for more victims.
- Ensuring consistent attendance and a clear focus on addressing the behaviours of those who harm within Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) will improve the response to high-risk cases.
- Foster professional relationships and enhance understanding of the domestic abuse system through the domestic abuse professionals' network.
- Explore systems that involve people experiencing domestic abuse from the start to empower them to be part of the solution, creating more effective outcomes.
- Improve access to safe accommodation with support and move-on options to ensure safety and aid recovery.
- Improve access to long term affordable housing solutions through the promotion and use of the 'special circumstances' clause in section 106 agreements.
- Ensure that families receive the specialist support they need by promote their services across social care teams to increase referrals.

Priority Four

Hold perpetrators to account for their behaviour

- Inform and influence the use and enforcement of protective orders ensuring victims gain increased trust in the legal measures designed to protect them, resulting in greater safety and stability.
- Reduce repeat offenses and increase deterrents against abuse through enhanced training opportunities for professionals to equip them with the skills needed to hold perpetrators to account.
- Collaboration with the Police, Crime Commissioner and people with lived experience of domestic abuse will ensure that perpetrator programmes are effective, offering long-term measurable reductions in risk.
- Increase justice to victims and reduce the prevalence of domestic abuse by working closely with police colleagues to support victim cooperation in legal actions.
- Provide a practical solution to maintaining victims' sense of security and stability by considering housing provision for perpetrators where it is safe to do so.

8. Accountability and Governance

This strategy is designed to be flexible to adapt to changing needs and national guidance.

The Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board is responsible for the implementation of this strategy. It will oversee its effectiveness, delivery plans and direct funding commitments, monitoring progress and deploy working groups as needed.

The strategy is underpinned by an action plan that will be championed by each partner within the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board. The actions set out above will be further developed and will be directly linked to agencies to ensure that they have effective mechanisms in place that contribute to its delivery.

Feedback from people with lived experience will continue to form a vital part of reviewing progress and commissioning of services. We will work to inform and continually improve our provision by listening to the voice of survivors, exploring the experiences of families affected by domestic abuse and evaluating the behaviours of perpetrators who have interacted with our services.

The Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board will provide quarterly briefings to Herefordshire Community Safety Partnership and provide regular update to the Safeguarding Boards so we can work in partnership to tackle domestic abuse in Herefordshire.

9. Measuring Progress

- A multi-agency domestic abuse dashboard will be further developed allowing tracking of numbers of people accessing services and trends.
- Feedback from the Lived Experience Advisory Network – to ensure we maintain an understanding of people’s perceptions, views, and experiences, and use them to inform future service design and delivery.
- Workforce data, for example progress on domestic abuse training.
- Grant and contract monitoring data, that ensures funding assigned to projects and initiatives (in-house or commissioned) is delivering against stated aims and objectives.
- Learning and insight from Domestic Homicide Reviews and other safeguarding reviews where domestic abuse was an aspect of the case.

10. References

<https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/>



www.herefordshire.gov.uk