

# Agenda

## Cabinet

Date: **Thursday 17 July 2025**

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Time: **2.30 pm**

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Place: **Conference Room 1 - Herefordshire Council, Plough Lane Offices, Hereford, HR4 0LE**

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Notes: Please note the time, date and venue of the meeting.

For any further information please contact:

**Samantha Gregory, Democratic Services Officer**

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If you would like help to understand this document, or would like it in another format, please call Samantha Gregory, Democratic Services Officer on (01432) 260176 or e-mail [samantha.gregory@herefordshire.gov.uk](mailto:samantha.gregory@herefordshire.gov.uk) in advance of the meeting.

# **Agenda for the meeting of Cabinet**

## **Membership**

<b>Chairperson</b>	<b>Councillor Jonathan Lester, Leader of the Council</b>
<b>Vice-Chairperson</b>	<b>Councillor Elissa Swinglehurst, Deputy Leader of the Council</b>
	<b>Councillor Graham Biggs</b>
	<b>Councillor Harry Bramer</b>
	<b>Councillor Barry Durkin</b>
	<b>Councillor Carole Gandy</b>
	<b>Councillor Dan Hurcomb</b>
	<b>Councillor Ivan Powell</b>
	<b>Councillor Philip Price</b>
	<b>Councillor Pete Stoddart</b>

## Agenda

### Pages

#### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

To receive any apologies for absence.

#### 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

To receive declarations of interests in respect of Table A, Table B or Other Interests from members of the committee in respect of items on the agenda.

#### 3. MINUTES

To approve and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 5 June 2025.

Minutes are to follow.

#### HOW TO SUBMIT QUESTIONS

*The deadline for submission of questions for this meeting is:*

*5pm on Friday 11<sup>th</sup> July 2025.*

Questions must be submitted to [councillorservices@herefordshire.gov.uk](mailto:councillorservices@herefordshire.gov.uk) Questions sent to any other address may not be accepted.

Accepted questions and the response to them will be published as a supplement to the agenda papers prior to the meeting. Further information and guidance is available at <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/getinvolved>

#### 4. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

To receive questions from members of the public.

#### 5. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

To receive questions from councillors.

#### 6. REPORTS FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

To receive reports from the Council's scrutiny committees on any recommendations to the Cabinet arising from recent scrutiny committee meetings.

There are no scrutiny reports.

#### 7. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PERSONS' IMPROVEMENT PLAN - PHASE 3

The purpose of this report is to present cabinet with the Phase 3 Children's Services Improvement Plan for endorsement.

11 - 66

#### 8. DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY FOR HEREFORDSHIRE 2025 TO 2028

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

67 - 188

In the opinion of the Proper Officer, parts of the following item will not be, or is likely not to be, open to the public and press at the time it is considered given the exempt information contained in the appendices.

**RECOMMENDATION:** that under section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business, in respect of the appendices, on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Schedule 12(A) of the Act, as indicated below and it is considered that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

**3** *Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person*

**9. PROCUREMENT STRATEGY FOR THE HEREFORD WESTERN BYPASS -PHASE 1**

189 - 226

Seeking approval of the procurement strategy and authority to procure and award a contract, to a contractor through a two-stage procurement process. The report also seeks to inform members of the land acquisition strategy for the land required to construct Hereford Western Bypass Phase 1.



## The Public's Rights to Information and Attendance at Meetings

Please take time to read the latest guidance on the council website by following the link at [www.herefordshire.gov.uk/meetings](http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/meetings) and support us in promoting a safe environment for everyone. If you have any queries please contact the Governance Support Team on 01432 261699 or at [governancesupportteam@herefordshire.gov.uk](mailto:governancesupportteam@herefordshire.gov.uk)

### You have a right to:

- Attend all Council, Cabinet, Committee and Sub-Committee meetings unless the business to be transacted would disclose 'confidential' or 'exempt' information.
- Inspect agenda and public reports at least five clear days before the date of the meeting. Agenda and reports (relating to items to be considered in public) are available at [www.herefordshire.gov.uk/meetings](http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/meetings)
- Inspect minutes of the Council and all committees and sub-committees and written statements of decisions taken by the Cabinet or individual Cabinet Members for up to six years following a meeting.
- Inspect background papers used in the preparation of public reports for a period of up to four years from the date of the meeting. (A list of the background papers to a report is given at the end of each report). A background paper is a document on which the officer has relied in writing the report and which otherwise is not available to the public.
- Access to a public register stating the names, addresses and wards of all Councillors with details of the membership of Cabinet and of all Committees and Sub-Committees. Information about councillors is available at [www.herefordshire.gov.uk/councillors](http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/councillors)
- Have access to a list specifying those powers on which the Council have delegated decision making to their officers identifying the officers concerned by title. Information about councillors is available at [www.herefordshire.gov.uk/councillors](http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/councillors)
- Copy any of the documents mentioned above to which you have a right of access, subject to a reasonable charge (20p per sheet subject to a maximum of £5.00 per agenda plus a nominal fee of £1.50 for postage).
- Access to this summary of your rights as members of the public to attend meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Committees and Sub-Committees and to inspect and copy documents.

## **Recording of meetings**

Please note that filming, photography and recording of this meeting is permitted provided that it does not disrupt the business of the meeting.

Members of the public are advised that if you do not wish to be filmed or photographed you should let the governance services team know before the meeting starts so that anyone who intends filming or photographing the meeting can be made aware.

The reporting of meetings is subject to the law and it is the responsibility of those doing the reporting to ensure that they comply.

The council may make a recording of this public meeting or stream it live to the council's website. Such recordings form part of the record of the meeting and are made available for members of the public via the council's web-site.

## **Public transport links**

The Herefordshire Council office at Plough Lane is located off Whitecross Road in Hereford, approximately 1 kilometre from the City Bus Station.

The location of the office and details of city bus services can be viewed at:

<http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/1597/hereford-city-bus-map-local-services->

## Guide to Cabinet

The Executive or Cabinet of the Herefordshire Council consists of a Leader and Deputy Leader and eight other Cabinet Members each with their own individual programme area responsibilities. The current Cabinet membership is:

Cllr Jonathan Lester (Leader)	Corporate Strategy and Budget
Cllr Elissa Swinglehurst (Deputy Leader)	Environment
Cllr Ivan Powell	Children and Young People
Cllr Harry Bramer	Community Services and Assets
Cllr Pete Stoddart	Finance and Corporate Services
Cllr Carole Gandy	Adults, Health and Wellbeing
Cllr Graham Biggs	Economy and Growth
Cllr Barry Durkin	Roads and Regulatory Services
Cllr Philip Price	Transport and Infrastructure
Cllr Dan Hurcomb	Local Engagement and Community Resilience

The Cabinet's roles are:

- To consider the overall management and direction of the Council. Directed by the Leader of the Council, it will work with senior managers to ensure the policies of Herefordshire are clear and carried through effectively;
- To propose to Council a strategic policy framework and individual strategic policies;
- To identify priorities and recommend them to Council;
- To propose to Council the Council's budget and levels of Council Tax;
- To give guidance in relation to: policy co-ordination; implementation of policy; management of the Council; senior employees in relation to day to day implementation issues;
- To receive reports from Cabinet Members on significant matters requiring consideration and proposals for new or amended policies and initiatives;
- To consider and determine policy issues within the policy framework covering more than one programme area and issues relating to the implementation of the outcomes of monitoring reviews.

### Who attends cabinet meetings?

- Members of the cabinet, including the leader of the council and deputy leader – these are the decision makers, only members of the cabinet can vote on recommendations put to the meeting.
- Officers of the council – attend to present reports and give technical advice to cabinet members
- Chairpersons of scrutiny committees – attend to present the views of their committee if it has considered the item under discussion

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- Political group leaders attend to present the views of their political group on the item under discussion. Other councillors may also attend as observers but are not entitled to take part in the discussion.

## **The Seven Principles of Public Life (Nolan Principles)**

### **1. Selflessness**

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

### **2. Integrity**

Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

### **3. Objectivity**

Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

### **4. Accountability**

Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

### **5. Openness**

Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

### **6. Honesty**

Holders of public office should be truthful.

### **7. Leadership**

Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour and treat others with respect. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.





## Title of report:

# Children's Improvement Plan Phase 3

**Meeting:** Cabinet

**Meeting date:** Thursday 17 July 2025

**Cabinet member:** Cllr Powell, Children and Young People

**Report by:** Corporate Director Children and Young people

**Report author:** Corporate Director Children and Young people

### Classification

Open

### Decision type

Non-key

### Wards affected

(All Wards);

### Purpose

The purpose of this report is to present cabinet with the Phase 3 Children's Services Improvement Plan for endorsement. The plan agreed by the multi-agency improvement board May 25. Amends have been made following that board meeting.

### Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) Cabinet endorse the Phase 3 Improvement Plan outlined in Appendix A
- b) Cabinet authorises the Corporate Director for Children and Young People in consultation with the council's Corporate Leadership Team to lead this improvement plan on behalf of the Council and to send it to Ofsted as part of the ongoing children's services monitoring.

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Further information on the subject of this report is available from Tina Russell, email: [tina.russell@herefordshire.gov.uk](mailto:tina.russell@herefordshire.gov.uk), Tel: 01432 260039

## Alternative options

1. To not endorse the plan and to send to Ofsted – this is not an option as it would put the council at significant risk by not having a plan to deliver the necessary improvements following the Ofsted judgement of inadequate in all areas of Children's Services.

## Key considerations

### Background

2. Children's Services was inspected by Ofsted in July 2022 under the Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework.
3. The inspection report was published on 21 September 2022 and is available [here](#).
4. The Secretary of State issued a [Statutory Direction](#) to Herefordshire Council on 21 September 2022, and appointed a Commissioner for Children's Services.
5. The overall judgement was that Herefordshire Children's Service is 'inadequate'. The judgements contributing to this outcome are as follows:

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Inadequate
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Inadequate
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness	Inadequate

6. Six Ofsted monitoring visits have taken place to date, this will be seven by the time this report goes to Cabinet 17<sup>th</sup> July. The last two monitoring visits November 24 and February 25 found that the Phase 2 plan was having impact and services were improving as evidenced in the areas of inspection; Extra Familial Abuse/ Exploitation and Social Work Assessments. (see background papers)
7. An interim DCS remain in post having extend their fixed term contract to 31.12.25. The advert for the new and permanent DCS post went live May 25 with a target date for appointment July 25.
8. Once in post the plan is for the new DCS to be supported by the outgoing interim DCS to the end of the year covering the ILACS and post ILACS planning as Herefordshire respond to the outcome of that inspection.
9. Herefordshire are expecting their full Inspection of Children's Services (ILACS) by the end of 2025.

## Current Situation

### Development of the plan

10. This Phase 3 Improvement Plan (Appendix A), hereinafter referred to as the Plan, has been developed to bring continuity and continued focus, pace and measures to the improvement journey.



11. Phase 2 has seen much progress, as plan was received well for its clarity of approach and measure and has achieved positive results. See Appendix B
12. The Phase 3 plan continues the approach and has re-set actions for improvement and development against each of the Ofsted recommendations.
13. Phase 3 also sets out our National engagement with the Families First Program. The Families First has a separate detailed quarterly implementation plan that will reports to the Children and Young People Strategic Partnership.
14. The plan confirms Herefordshire engagement in the regional work and the improvement alliance which ensure Herefordshire's voice, needs and our opportunity for learning are embedded within our work.
15. The Quality Assurance framework of measures to enable us to monitor progress are re-set under the range of Key Performance Indicators', Service User feedback and Audit. These are set out within the Phase 3 document.
16. The Children's Improvement Board is independently chaired by the Department of Education Commissioner Deborah McMillan and meetings are held on a six-weekly basis.

### **Community impact**

17. The Ofsted inspection judgement of 'Inadequate' has a direct and indirect effect on the lives of both current and future children and families in Herefordshire.
18. Ensuring co-ordination and golden thread the County Plan and delivery plan 2025/26 includes the Children Services improvement plan as one element of the Children Services contributions to the ambition to '*to do everything we do, well*', as the council aims to:
  - a) Ensure all children are healthy, safe, and inspired to achieve.
  - b) Ensure that children in care, and moving on from care, are well supported and make good life choices.

### **Environmental Impact**

19. There are no specific environmental impacts arising from this report.
20. The transformation activity will be undertaken with consideration to minimise waste and resource in line with the Council's Environmental Policy.

### **Equality duty**

21. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act.
- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

22. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the ‘general duty’ on public authorities is set out as follows:

In particular, the council must have due regard to the public sector equality duty when taking any decisions on service changes.

23. Children and young people who are assessed to be ‘in need’ of support, protection and care are additionally vulnerable, often as a result of abuse, neglect, exploitation and a range of personal and family circumstances.
24. As individual improvement projects and service delivery progresses, and changes are designed, equality impact assessments will be undertaken, as necessary and appropriate.

### **Resource implications**

25. There are no resourcing implications to this decision report. Performance against the agreed revenue budget for the Children & Young People Directorate is reported quarterly to Cabinet.
26. The resource implications of the transformation programme have been outlined in separate reports to Cabinet.

### **Legal implications**

27. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

### **Risk management**

28. The following risks have been considered.

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
Partnership buy in to the plan – recognising a joint responsibility to deliver an improved childrens services	Extensive partnership engagement activity and involvement, focus groups with children and young people and key stakeholders. Quartely partnership summits
Plan is not adopted or endorsed	Continuous engagement throughout the development of the plan and the governance process. Engagement with CLT, DLT, Improvement Board, the commissioner and the DFE.

## Appendices

Appendix A – Phase 3 Improvement Plan Report

Appendix B – Phase 2 Outcomes Report

Appendix C – Improvement Board Terms of Reference and Membership

## Background papers

A -Ofsted's Publication - [Ofsted Inspection Report July 22](#)

[June 2023 Monitoring Visit](#)

[September 2023 Monitoring Visit](#)

[February 2024 Monitoring Visit](#)

[October 2024 Monitoring Visit](#) (Phase 2)

[February 2025 Monitoring Visit](#) (Phase 2)

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



# Herefordshire Children's Services and Partnership Improvement Plan

## Phase 3

“ We hope this plan assures our children, young people and our families that Herefordshire Council, its Children's Services and the associated partnership remain fully committed to making the improvements required to ensure our children, young people and family get the help, support and protection they need.

I want to thank them for their past and future engagement with us, our staff and our services.”

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## Welcome to Herefordshire's Children's Services and Partnership Improvement Plan.

This plan is in response to the inadequate judgment arising from the Ofsted *Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services* (ILACS)

framework in July 2022. It builds on the developments and progress of the Children's Services Improvement Plan Phase 2 July 24 – April 25.

### Our Shared Vision

We believe that children and young people thrive best in their **family care**, within **highly effective schools** and in **flourishing communities**. Our plans have focused on putting into place the conditions for good practice to thrive. This Phase 3 plan reflects our collective drive and commitment to continue the pace of improvement seen during 24/25 with a focus on delivery against our Quality Assurance Programme to ensure;

- **we know ourselves well**, our strengths and our areas for improvement so we can take timely action to improve
- **we understand the experience and impact our services make to the children and their families**, so we can be sure we are “making a difference” and are supporting them at the earliest opportunity
- **we understand how it feels to be part of the children workforce, so we are an employer of choice** giving our children and young people stability and consistency in good quality help, support and protection

We understand the pressures of parenting and life that many of our families face as they strive to care for their children well. Through our restorative approach we will recognise their strengths and support them in the challenges they face. We hope this plan assures them of our united commitment to deliver timely and high quality Children's Services.

We want to help children, young people and their families achieve the best in life.

Our Improvement plan recognises the importance of Partnership Working required to deliver good quality help, support and protection. Each of our partner agencies will have their own priorities, strengths, changes and challenges. We will recognise, support and coordinate these as we work together to achieve good services for children and their families across Herefordshire. We thank our partners for their continued prioritisation and commitment to this plan.

## Herefordshire a National Context

Our plan also recognises that “good quality” services are those that reflect the latest legalisation, statutory guidance and policy as defined by DfE. During 24/25 we have completed the work to comply with Working Together 2023 and we have taken the developing work from the Children’s Services Care Review and the government published ‘Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive’ policy into consideration.

**As a result, we are in a strong place to develop and implement the Families First programme designed to achieve the following Outcomes:**

- **Outcome 1:** children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need
- **Outcome 2:** children and young people are supported by their family network
- **Outcome 3:** children and young people are safe in and outside of their home
- **Outcome 4:** children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes

**We have a lead officer for this implementation programme, supported by a multi agency steering group, who will ensure Herefordshire have the following “enablers” in place which will provide foundations required for the Families First programme to be effective :**

- Multi-agency working is prioritised and effective
- Leaders drive conditions for effective practice
- The workforce is equipped and effective

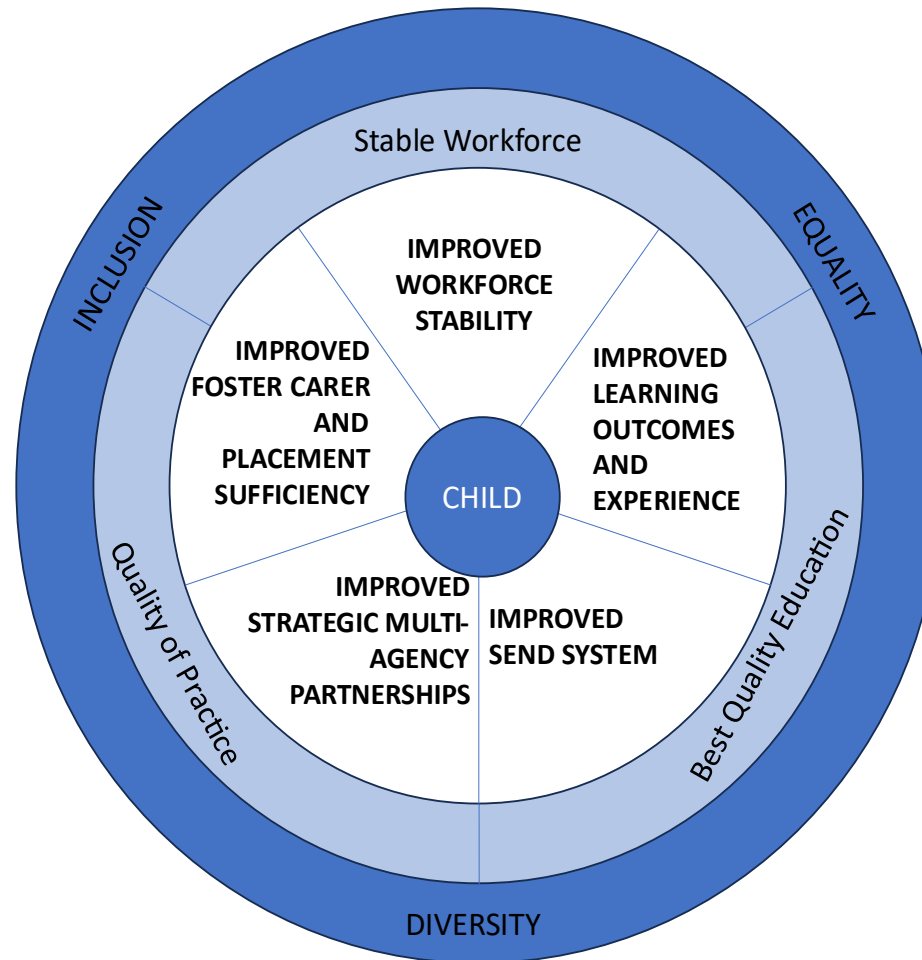
## Herefordshire a Regional Context

As a member of the West Midlands Regional Local Authority group, we also work in partnership with the other West Midlands Local Authorities and Trusts and as part of the national programme of Regional Improvement Investment Alliance (RIIA).

The 25/26 regional priorities have been agreed as below. **We have strong representation and engagement in the delivery against those priorities to ensure Herefordshire voice is heard and taken into account and that we maximise on all regional learning and investment opportunities.** These include the regional Frameworks for commissioning Residential Care placements and Fostering placements, Leadership and Management training, Agency workforce management and Peer Reviews.

To develop a sustainable strategy that delivers  
**IMPROVED FOSTER CARER AND PLACEMENT SUFFICIENCY**,  
 and ensures children are placed in settings that meet all of their needs.  
 Which provides sector leading support for the regions in-house carers and that delivers best value for the region's taxpayers.

To use the collective strength of the region's DCS Network to ensure  
**IMPROVED STRATEGIC MULTI-AGENCY PARTNERSHIPS**,  
 including health, police and probation to deliver the best outcomes for children and young people.



**IMPROVED WORKFORCE STABILITY**  
 across disciplines of the sector and that continues to promote the West Midlands as the “go to” region for children’s services professionals.

**IMPROVED LEARNING OUTCOMES AND EXPERIENCE**  
 for all children and young people across an inclusive and high-performing schools system, promoted through positive partnerships with all schools and sector partners

To collectively influence the national conversation regarding an  
**IMPROVED SEND SYSTEM**,  
 so as to be able develop effective services that meet the realistic needs of children, young people and their families.



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Key documents



The Herefordshire Council Plan  
2024-2028



hfdscouncil

[herefordshire.gov.uk](https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk)



Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022 - 2024



hfdscouncil

[herefordshire.gov.uk](https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk)

## Ofsted Recommendations – ILACS July 2022

- Corporate responsibility for the help and protection of children and those in care and care leavers, so this is prioritised and embedded across the council and partnerships.
- The sufficiency and stability of staff across the workforce, including sufficient numbers of Foster Carers, so children receive a timely response to having their needs identified and met across the service.
- The timely and robust identification and multi-agency response to children and young people who are at risk of harm, including, but not limited to, the response to pre-birth children and babies, 16- and 17-year-olds who present as homeless, children living in private fostering arrangements and children who go missing from home and care.
- The quality of practice including assessments, plans, planning and purposeful visits that are responsive to risk and need.

- Timely and effective multi-agency arrangements to ensure children are protected and enter care when required.
- Monitoring and tracking to prevent drift and delay. This includes the monitoring and tracking of children in the Public law Outline (PLO), permanence planning, children subject to deprivation of liberty orders and those placed in unregistered children's homes.
- The availability of support and services to meet children and young people's needs, including timely access to therapeutic interventions, access to dentistry, life-story work, emotional and mental health support, help for young people to support transitions into independence and sufficient suitable accommodation.
- Management oversight and grip across the service to include clear structures and service pathways, and regular and effective supervision.
- Performance and quality assurance arrangements to support and test service improvements.



*Staff at Fun Day for care-experienced children and young people*

Herefordshire Council



*Social care staff celebrating world social work week*

May 2025

## Governance and monitoring of the Improvement plan

<b>Improvement Board</b> The Improvement board is the key partnership body with ownership of the improvement plan and responsibility for oversight of its delivery	<b>The Partnerships</b> The improvement plan has identified key partnership forums to carry out and oversee aspects of the plan relevant to their forums. These forums are set out below:	<b>The Monitoring</b> Partnership forums that will oversee, monitor and support progress reflecting Children's Services as a priority.
<p>The Improvement Board is made up of strategic representation from partner agencies, working together to agreed terms of reference.</p> <p>The Improvement Board is chaired by the DfE appointed Children's Commissioner.</p> <p>Progress against the Improvement plan will be reported to the improvement board on a six weekly basis.</p> <p>Reporting will include reports on the three dimension of our quality assurance programme that tell us, what we are doing, how well we are doing it and what difference it is making.</p> <p>Reports will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A performance DASH board of key indicators linked to the Improvement Plan.</li> <li>• Audit activity reports including multi-agency audits. Service User feedback reports</li> </ul>	<p>Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSCP) Co-ordinates safeguarding across the partnership through the statutory partners as set out in Working Together 2023.</p> <p>Partnership Executive Group Created with Senior Leaders membership of the three safeguarding partners, LA, Police and Health for the purpose of ensuring any barriers identified in partnership work are removed to ensure delivery of the improvement plan at pace.</p> <p>Corporate Parenting Board Statutory responsibility to ensure looked after children and young people grow up having the same opportunities as their peers and to support children leaving care to live successful independent lives.</p> <p>Children &amp; Young people Strategic Partnership (CYPP) This multi-agency strategic partnership will oversee the delivery of the Herefordshire CYPP supporting, challenging and resolving partnership barriers to delivering good quality services.</p> <p>SEND Partnership – working specifically to ensure children with additional needs are recognised and engaged in service improvement and development.</p>	<p>Herefordshire Council Directorate and Political Leadership Teams undertakes shared ownership for the coordination and delivery of the council's plan. The Children's Improvement Plan is a HCC priority.</p> <p>Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee Undertakes the scrutiny of all Children and Young People services in Herefordshire including monitoring and challenging the progress and implementation of the improvement Plan.</p> <p>Health and Well Being Board and Children and Young People Partnership provides leadership across the partnership to people, communities, cultures and organisations that are delivering Herefordshire's vision of <i>keeping children and young people safe and giving them a great start in life</i>.</p> <p>Children's Corporate Leadership Board will review the progress against the plan quarterly alongside wider children's performance and finance monitoring.</p>





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.

### Children and Young Person's Version Improvement Plan Phase 3: May 2025

#### Quality Assurance - Hearing the Voice of the Children Young People and Parent/ Carers Understanding the impact of what we do

The Head of Service for Quality Assurance and the Participation Worker met with 2 groups of Care Leavers in August 2024 to share the new Improvement Plan and to get feedback on what they thought needed doing to improve Herefordshire Children's Services. Their priorities are reflected in our improvement plan. We will report back on progress against their priorities through their groups

#### Our Children and Young People Priorities

1. Staff stability and consistency of approach.
2. Children and Young People should contribute to their Plans.
3. Improved management and supervision of workers.
4. Better housing options for care leavers.
5. Workers need better training to be trauma informed.

#### How it feels

Biggest issue is the changes in worker  
Having to tell my story over and over  
Handover between workers is poor  
Seems like a tick box exercise, you don't really care  
Never seen my Pathway Plan

#### What we need

Listen to us  
Follow through with what you say you will do  
Show us respect  
Tell us the truth

#### Direct quote #1

'Get to know me? Read my file, don't make me repeat my story over and over.'

#### Progress is built on partnerships: partnership activities will be delivered through:

Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership: Herefordshire Council Corporate Parenting Board: SEND Partnership

Oversight and coordination of this plan is through the Improvement Board Evidencing our progress and outcomes will be shared through regular Ofsted monitoring visits

Quality Assurance - Audit Activity  
Understanding quality of practice

Quality Assurance - KPIs  
Timelines of workload and workflow Carers Understanding the impact of what we do

## Phase 2 Outcomes Achieved

### Ofsted Recommendation

Corporate responsibility for the help and protection of children and those in care and care leavers, so this is prioritised and embedded across the council and partnerships

- Ofsted found that there was a “***stronger understanding and commitment across the council to children who need the support of children's social care and that this was reflected in its corporate plans, priorities and the commitment to developing “Child Friendly Herefordshire”*** and the workforce reported feeling well supported by line managers, colleagues and leaders
- **Your Voice Matters: We Say They Do”** group re-launched for children in care and care experienced young people. YP undertook a ‘take over’ of the Corporate Parenting Board April.25.
- **Complaints have reduced from 102 (23/24) down to 75 (24/25) and we have received 126 external compliments (now recorded)**
- **Assessment locality teams received 51 families feedback** to evaluate service standards. Feedback indicates that children and families appreciate the support received and understand the reasons for our involvement. As a service we are benefitting from ongoing encouragement the social workers are receiving in this process.
- **Safeguarding locality received 20 families** feedback - All the families said their plan was right one for them, child in need or child protection
- **Support, Benefits and Opportunities for our Foster Carers** - Herefordshire foster carers receive a wide range of support, benefits, include a financial incentive for successful referrals of new foster carers, council tax relief, and new funded Specialist Foster Carer programme launched

## Ofsted Recommendation

The sufficiency and stability of staff across the workforce, including sufficient numbers of Foster Carers, so children receive a timely response to having their needs identified and met across the service

- **Permanency for Social Work Managers** Managers 85% (from 70%) **Social Workers** 42% from 29%
- **Associated reduction in the number of agency staff** 81 (January 2024) down to 41 (February 2025)
- **Allocation stability for children in care** 43% from 31% through 24/25
- **Allocation stability index Child Protection** 36% from 29% through 24/25
- **8 new approved mainstream carers.** 12 in assessment. This growth is in contrast to national trends.
- **478 fostering training courses completed through our new provider in three months** compared to 229 in the prior eight months. Feedback new provider course more accessible
- **Children in FC placements 73.2% above SN**
- **Recommissioned Short Breaks.** Evaluation Panel, including young people, considered 24 applications received (for over £250k worth of funds). 7 successful applications awarded funds.
- **In 2024-25, 121 fostering enquiries** compared to 50 enquiries the year before. We have improved advertising and better use of digital platforms radio, cinema, social media, Google, YouTube, and electronic billboards.
- **9 young people gave feedback regarding placement moves** and to gain their views on their experiences. Themes that emerged were that they shared 6/9 felt safe in their placement, with 3 expressing they felt unsure at the time of the feedback. All shared they felt supported in their moves and that professionals were working well together

## Ofsted Recommendation

**The timely and robust identification and multi-agency response to children and young people who are at risk of harm, including, but not limited to, the response to pre-birth children and babies, 16- and 17-year-olds who present as homeless, children living in private fostering arrangements and children who go missing from home and care.**

- Timeliness in management of Contacts 97%, Referrals 95% Strategy Discussions 91% – sustained through 24/25
- Ofsted found that “a range of professionals and agencies are involved and make an important contribution to assessments as well as provide the support which families need” and Child protection “strategy meetings are well attended by multi agency partners”.
- We have increased the number of children we see for welfare return interviews after missing episodes from home to 196 from 139 the previous year and missing from Care to 176 from 130. Timeliness in completing these also improved to 80% (home) and 74% (care)
- Repeat referrals have reduced from 23.5% (EoY 23/24) to 22.4% (EoY 24/25)
- Strategy discussion and timeliness has been sustained above 93% year average an improvement on 90% year average in 23/24
- There are stronger working relationships at Pre-Birth Panel which involves timely sharing of information and strengthening support plans for unborn children to care experienced parents
- Repeat Child Protection has reduced in year from 27% down to 21%
- Child Protection Conferences Feedback: 22x parents said they knew what to expect; had received and understood the Social Worker report; spoken to the Chair; felt listened to and were treated with respect. Participants had a good understanding of the Child Protection Plan and how the Plan could end.

## Ofsted Recommendation

The quality of practice including assessments, plans, planning and purposeful visits that are responsive to risk and need.

- In year audit evidences improvement in case audit judgements: Good rising to 43% from 27%, Requires Improvement dropping from 65% to 45% and Inadequate dropping from 9% to 6%
- Ofsted found that “*many social workers developed relationships with parents and children in a skilled way*”
- Ofsted found good quality and timeliness in our social work assessments. *Feb 25*
- Timeliness of visits to children subject of Child protection sustained above 95% through 24/25
- Timeliness of ICPC a concern mid year and improved under new management Q3/4.
- Timeliness of RCPC sustained average through year at 94%
- 99.5% children on Child Protection with an up to date plan in place through 24/2



## Ofsted Recommendation

**Timely and effective multi-agency arrangements to ensure children are protected and enter care when required.**

- Feb 25 Ofsted found: “*Children received into care appropriately to protect from further harm*”
- Timeliness of visits to Children in Care sustained 80%
- Timeliness of Child in Care Reviews at 98.9%
- 100% of children in care with an up to date care plan
- C&YP participated in some way within their Child Looked After Review meeting 100% time.
- Repeat social work Assessments have reduced from 28% to 23% which evidences the quality of support is improving and children and families are receiving the right plan of support upon closure.
- Child Looked After Review meetings, C&YP Feedback 14x children and young people said they knew what to expect; had spoken to the IRO and knew how to contact their IRO. Shared that they were able to share their views; felt respected, listened to and understood their care plan. All respondents shared positive comments about having choice about their review meeting with regard to venue, time, attendees
- Tracking of multi-agency escalations shows that the multi-agency professional differences policy is being followed, and more escalations are being resolved at earlier stages, and within expected timescales.
- Of 99 families asked 44.5 % said professionals worked “very well” together and 37.5% said “fairly well” Only 18% said not well

## Ofsted Recommendation

**Monitoring and tracking to prevent drift and delay. This includes the monitoring and tracking of children in the Public law Outline (PLO), permanence planning, children subject to deprivation of liberty orders and those placed in unregistered children's homes**

- Care Proceedings timeliness is in top quartile - Improved timeliness of Care proceedings in 26 weeks : Herefordshire averages 24 weeks against national average of 36 weeks
- Restorative Practice has reduced our PLO/ Care Proceedings: 21 new cases issued 24/25 compared to 41 the previous year.
- Six young people placed during the year in an unregistered setting through 24/25 – all short term

**Ofsted  
Recommendation  
The availability of  
support and  
services to meet  
children and young  
people's needs,  
including timely  
access to  
therapeutic  
interventions,  
access to dentistry,  
life-story work,  
emotional and  
mental health  
support, help for  
young people to  
support transitions  
into independence  
and sufficient  
suitable  
accommodation.**

- SEND inspectors found 'children and young people with SEND known to early help services access swift support from education, health and social care teams where appropriate'.
- SEND inspectors described effective and appropriate support for disabled young people who are leaving care. 'Appropriate support to develop their independence skills for when they reach adulthood, and they are involved in preparing their pathway plan. and 'Disabled children and young people who receive a service from social care are well supported into adulthood.'
- For kinship carers, most placement losses were due to Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) being granted. While this reduces the number of fostering households, it represents a positive outcome for our children and young people, offering greater permanency within their family networks.
- Our overall number of children placed in a family-based setting is 73% above national average 71%.
- The percentage of dental checks has remained stable at 56% on review we have gathered child/young person feedback and understand many as having a reluctance or phobia which prevents them accessing checks. Support to address this is being provided via a joined-up approach by carers, looked nurses and social workers.

## Ofsted Recommendation

**Management oversight and grip across the service to include clear structures and service pathways, and regular and effective supervision.**

- Staff told Ofsted they benefitted from regular and reflective supervision that provides helpful reflection and direction
- KPI timeliness of supervision up from 52% - 82% across the Safeguarding services
- Service Manager Leadership and Management programme delivered to all our Service Managers
- The partnership has established a new multi-agency dataset and auditing schedule with findings regularly reviewed with a focus on action and impact// local and national lens.
- The National Panel has agreed with the recommendations from all Herefordshire Rapid Reviews completed in 2024/25.

## Ofsted Recommendation

### Performance and quality assurance arrangements to support and test service improvements.

- Feb 25 Ofsted found: A wider breadth of quality assurance activity gives leaders a stronger line of sight on the quality of practice. This includes a broader range of targeted audits on areas of service or cohorts of children who are more vulnerable. Feedback from children and parents is much more embedded into audits, which provides more meaningful insight into the experience and impact of practice for those who receive support from children's services. Audits identify issues to improve the service as well as more practice improvement
- 109 families have given us direct feedback since we introduced service user feedback Sept 24. Overall this is consistently positive feedback with 87% reporting able to share their views, 80% understanding why they had a social worker and 80% feeling the intervention met all or most of their needs and 80% reporting professionals worked well or "really well" together
- We have revised our audit processes and tools: Grade descriptors, moderation and case audit forms.
- We have developed our overarching QA Framework and embedded into practice an overarching programme and our Service Area QA programmes.
- We can see that we have increased the number of cases overall graded as in Good Q1- Q3 and for the first time this year seen Outstanding practice in Q4.
- Review of our complaint management completed with now all stage 1 complaints being investigated by a QA officer who is independent of the case and each investigation starts with a mtg with the complainant.
- In Early Help we collect regular SU feedback to understand impact; In 2024/25 174 evaluations from parents and 234 evaluations from children. The average increase in score comparing the beginning and end scores was 2.3.

### Quality Assurance – Hearing the Voice of the Children Young People and Parent / Carers

#### Understanding the impact of what we do

<b>Quality Assurance – Audit Activity</b> <i>Understanding quality of practice</i>	<p>Corporate responsibility for the help and protection of children and those in care / care leavers, so this is prioritised and embedded across the council and partnerships</p>	<p>Monitoring and tracking to prevent drift and delay. This includes the monitoring and tracking of children in the Public law Outline (PLO), permanence planning, children subject to deprivation of liberty orders and those placed in unregistered children's homes</p>	<p>The timely and robust identification of a multi-agency response to children &amp; young people at risk of harm, including, but not limited to, the response to pre-birth children and babies, 16- and 17-year-olds who present as homeless, children living in private fostering arrangements and children who go missing from home and care</p>	<p>The availability of support and services to meet children and young people's needs, including timely access to therapeutic interventions, access to dentistry, life-story work, emotional and mental health support, help for young people to support transitions into independence and sufficient suitable accommodation</p>	<p>The sufficiency and stability of staff across the workforce, sufficient numbers of Foster Carers, so children receive a timely response to having the service</p>
	<p>Our corporate responsibility to children will be evident in our council priorities, policies and development plans</p>	<p>Our care proceedings will be completed in 26 weeks or we will know why not achieved</p> <p>We will visit children in care in timescales to meet need and see how they live. They will tell us they feel happy and safe with carers</p>	<p>Our contacts, referrals, strategy and assessments will be completed in timescales with full partnership contributions</p>	<p>Our children in care will have up-to-date Health Assessments and Dental Checks</p>	<p>Our workforce data will show an improving picture on permanency and stability in agency staff</p>
	<p>Children and Families will tell us that they believe Herefordshire is a good place to live</p>	<p>We will have timely and robust managerial oversight and clear best interest decision making for children subject to DoLS and those in unregistered placements.</p> <p>Children subject to SGO will have good support to promote long term permanence</p>	<p>Visits and assessments to 16/17yr will be completed within timelines and they have made informed decisions about their welfare &amp; accommodation</p>	<p>They will tell us they have support with their emotional well being</p> <p>Audit will show we have good quality life story work and letters in place</p> <p>CYP will tell us they know why they are in care and that they have contributed and understand their plans</p>	<p>Children will have fewer changes in social workers</p> <p>More children will be in family care and their placements stable</p> <p>Children will tell us they feel happy and safe in care and that they know how to raise their worries and make complaints</p>
	<p>Management oversight and grip across the service to include clear structures and service pathways, and regular and effective supervision</p>	<p>Timely and effective multi-agency arrangements ensuring children are protected receive care if required</p>	<p>The partnership will ensure early sharing of information on unborns in need/at risk and assessments and appropriate plans will be in place by birth. Those in care proceedings will have timely progression to permanency, including foster to adopt placements</p>	<p>The quality of practice including assessments, plans, planning and purposeful visits that are responsive to risk and need</p>	<p>Performance and quality assurance arrangements to support and test service improvements.</p>
	<p>Audits will show an improving picture on the quality and timeliness of managerial decisions</p> <p>Staff will tell us they benefit from regular and reflective supervision</p> <p>Practice standards will be in place to guide best practice within and across the services</p>	<p>Repeat Social Work Assessments, children on requiring repeat CP plans will be lower than national</p> <p>Our protection and care planning meetings and reviews will show timeliness and good multi-agency attendance</p> <p>Partnership concerns will be addressed through a timely escalation process to resolution</p>	<p>CYP will have told us why they went missing and we will address this in their plans</p>	<p>Visits &amp; Assessments will be timely and our QA audits will show an increasing positive trend on the quality of visits and plans and evidence appropriate step up and down as plans progress</p> <p>CYP and parents will tell us they can access their workers, have contributed to and understand the plans in place for them or their children</p>	<p>QA activity embedded across all services areas</p> <p>A range of opportunities for Children &amp; Young People and Parents to tell us how they have experienced and benefited from our services will be in place</p> <p>Learning from both shared and developed practices identified</p>

**Quality Assurance – KPIs**  
*Timeliness of workload and workflow*

**Progress is built on partnerships: partnership activities will be delivered through:**

Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership: Herefordshire Council Corporate Parenting Board: SEND Partnership

## Quality Assurance Measure of Success

The above plan on a page is designed as a visual to remind us of what Ofsted recommendations were and how we will know when we have achieved against them.

Our Quality Assurance Framework is made up of three complementary components:

- **Case Audit** – including regular case audits and targeted audits giving us evidence on the quality of work and compliance with our practice standards
- **Feedback from children and families** to understand how they are receiving our services and the impact they make
- **Analysis of key performance indicators** that enable us to monitor workload, workflow, demand and timeliness

Our Quality Assurance Programme enables us to

- **know ourselves well**, our strengths and our areas for improvement so we can take timely action to improve
- **understand the experience and impact our services make to the children and families** so we can be sure we are “**making a difference**”
- understand how it feels to be part of the children workforce, so we are an **employer of choice** giving our children and young people stability and consistency in good quality help, support and protection

There is an overarching Quality Assurance programme for Children’s Social Care and each service area has a focused QA programme that reports quarterly into the senior managers forum.

In addition, there are Children’s Service Performance Indicators reporting to Chief Executive and the council plan and a set of Key Performance Indicators to the Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliance (RIIA), so we have some comparator data within regional, national and statistical neighbours.

**For our Phase 3 plan we have further developed the range of QA measures for each Ofsted recommendation incorporating a range of; Key Performance Indicators, Audit activity and Service User feedback**

Ofsted Recommendations	Key Performance Indicators	Audit/ Documentation	Service User Feedback
<b>Recommendation 1</b>  Corporate responsibility for the help and protection of children and those in care/care leavers, so this is embedded across the council and partnerships	Permanency in the overall Children's Services workforce  Learning and Development data on multi agency training	Corporate Delivery plan  Corporate Parent Strategy and delivery plan  Participation plan 25/26  Co-production documents and CYP engagement activities	Workforce will tell us they feel valued as employees of Herefordshire  Children and Young People will tell us they know where to access safe spaces and support within Herefordshire  The partnership will tell us they understand and apply a Restorative Practice approach
<b>Recommendation 2</b>  Monitoring and tracking to prevent drift and delay. This includes monitoring and tracking of children in the Public Law Outline (PLO), permanence planning, children subject to deprivation of liberty orders and those place in unregistered children's homes	Care Proceedings completed with 26 weeks  Timeliness of statutory visits to children in care  Children u16yrs in unregistered settings  Timeliness of children achieving permanency in 12-	LFJB sub group review of cases not meeting 26 weeks  DCS/SD decision making on placements in Unregistered and timely visit to children  Managerial Oversight on care proceedings cases meet practice standards  Legal proceedings training for social work	Children subject to DOLS will tell us they feel safe and supported in their care placements  Children in unregistered setting will tell us they feel safe and supported in their care placement



Ofsted Recommendations	Key Performance Indicators	Audit/ Documentation	Service User Feedback
	24 months after reception into care	staff Public and Private proceedings	
<b>Recommendation 3</b>  The timely and robust identification of a multiagency response to children and young people at risk of harm, including but not limited to, the response to pre-birth children and babies, 16 and 17 year olds who present as homeless, children living in private fostering arrangements and children who go missing from home and care	Contacts managed in 24hrs Referral managed in 24hrs Strategy Discussion in 24hrs  Social Work Assessment in 45 days with proportionate mix  Timeliness in care proceedings for babies under 3months  Take up of Welfare Return interview for children missing from Home and Care  Timeliness of welfare Return interviews for CYP missing	Contact / Referral and Strategy decisions will reflect consistency in HCSP thresholds  Assessment of CYP presenting as homeless will be timely and evidence the offer of care and choice decision making of the young person  Missing from Home and Care analysis reports will identify the push / pull factors affecting our Children and Young People  Looked After Reviews will address "missing" push /pull factors identified	Welfare Return Interviews will capture the voice of the child/young person informing our understanding of county risks and informing individual care planning  Children and young people will tell us they have contributed their views to their assessments and understand the purpose of their Child Protection plans  16/17yrs olds presenting as homeless will tell us they have contributed to their assessment, understand the offer of care and are happy with their accommodation
<b>Recommendation 4</b>  The availability of support and services to meet children and young people's needs including	Children in Care Health Checks meet timeliness standards	Children in care will have life letters and life story work in place  Children leaving care and transitioning to	Care experienced children and young people will tell us their carers support them with their Emotional Wellbeing and they have a Trusted Adult to talk to.

Ofsted Recommendations	Key Performance Indicators	Audit/ Documentation	Service User Feedback
timely access to therapeutic interventions, access to dentistry, life story work, emotional and mental health support, help for young people to support transitions into independence and sufficient suitable accommodation	Children in Care Dental Checks meet timeliness standards  The majority of Care Leavers will be in "suitable accommodation"	independent accommodation will have the financial assistance to set up home and an up to date Pathway Plan Training for staff on life story work completed	Care experienced children and young people living in supported and independent living will tell us they feel safe and supported.
<b>Recommendation 5</b>  The sufficiency and stability of staff across the workforce, sufficient number of Foster Carers, so children receive a timely response to having the service.	Permanency of qualified Social Workers in children's workforce  Permanency of Children's wider Social Care workforce  Stability of SW for children open to Children's Social Care for 12 months  Children in care placed in a family based placement - in line or better than Eng/SN averages  Children subject to Child Protection and Care plans will have	Foster Care assessment and Approvals will be completed in a timely way meeting best practice standards  Our Foster Carers will have an allocated fostering worker and monthly supervision from approval  Our Foster carers will have timely annual reviews  Fostering ADM decision making will be timely to ensure no child is left in an unregistered foster care arrangement	Children and Young people will tell us they feel safe and supported in their care placements  Foster Carer annual reviews will seek feedback from children previously placed within the year

Ofsted Recommendations	Key Performance Indicators	Audit/ Documentation	Service User Feedback
	an allocated qualified social worker at all times		
<b>Recommendation 6</b>  Management oversight and grip across the service to include clear structures and service pathways, and regular and effective supervision	Monthly supervision for case holding social workers and social care staff	Case file audits will evidence that the majority of cases have timely and good quality managerial oversight  Specific Training programme for first and second line managers will have been delivered	Our workforce surveys will tell us staff feel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Valued at work</li> <li>• Understand the Vision and Improvement plans</li> <li>• Have manageable case loads</li> <li>• Good access to front line managerial advise and support</li> <li>• Regular and reflective supervision</li> <li>• Good working environments</li> <li>• Understand and apply Restorative Practice</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation 7</b>  Timely and effective multi-agency arrangements ensuring children are protected and receive care if required	Repeat Social Work assessment within 12 months  Repeat Child Protection Plans  Repeat reception into care following a care exit.  Timeliness of Child Protection Case	Audit and data on use and outcome of the Safeguarding partnership escalation process  Audit on children in care decision making will evidence all new receptions into care considered by a Service Director	Families will tell us the right agencies were invited to contribute to their child protection assessment and plans  At the end of a Child Protection intervention families will tell us their strengths were recognised through our Restorative Practice approach

Ofsted Recommendations	Key Performance Indicators	Audit/ Documentation	Service User Feedback
	<p>Conferences ICPC/RCPC</p> <p>Participation in Child Protection case conferences – including attendance for those over 12years</p>	<p>Children and Young People will tell us they contributed their views and feelings to the children protection S47 assessments</p>	
<p><b>Recommendation 8</b></p> <p>The quality and practice including assessments, plans, planning and purposeful visits that are responsive to risk and need</p>	<p>Improvement Board Phase 3 dashboard</p> <p>Regional RIIA dashboard</p> <p>National CHAT dashboard</p>	<p>Our monthly Case file auditing programme will evidence links to our Learning and Development work and impact on improvement in practice in the following seven domains.</p> <p>Our Learning and Development programmes will reach the workforce providing regular learning and development</p>	<p>Through our case file audit we seek feedback from parents/carers and young people so we will understand their experience</p> <p>Staff will tell us they have up to date accessible practice standards to guide them in front line practice</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 9</b></p> <p>Performance and Quality Assurance arrangements to support and test service improvements</p>		<p>Through our Quality Assurance Programs we will undertake a regular and targeted programme of audit including service user feedback and KPI's data to inform the programme</p>	<p>During our case file audits and at the end of Assessments and Interventions we will seek feedback from the services users on how they have experienced our intervention – From Family Help to Care .</p>

Ofsted Recommendations	Key Performance Indicators	Audit/ Documentation	Service User Feedback
		We will develop our council wide co-production and child participation programme	

## Delivery - Actions and Measures of Progress and Success

### Ofsted Recommendation 1

Corporate responsibility for the help and protection of children and those in care and care leavers, so this is prioritised and embedded across the council and partnerships.

Actions we will take	Person/Forums	Timescale – progress reporting quarterly
Develop Child Friendly Herefordshire – learning from the Leeds initiative develop Herefordshire council plan priorities: People/Place/Growth/Transformation for children and young people.	Council Leader & Lead Member for Children's / CEO / DCS - Leeds Partner	25/26
Confirm appropriate funding to support children services improvement against a four year plan	Herefordshire Council	25 - 27
Complete the apprenticeship programme for Care Leavers within Herefordshire Council – starting within children's services and extending apprenticeships opportunities in all areas and major contracts. Target 12 apprenticeship	Tori Lynch Children's Directorate Leadership Team	25/26
Capture the voices of Children and Young people across Herefordshire and use this to inform partnership priorities and strategic development.	Safeguarding Partnership Scrutiny Officer	
Implement and report on the council wide Voice of the Child Engagement and Participation programme	Rosie Thomas-Easton	25/26
Secure new funding and appoint a Service Manager with responsibility for Children and Young People participation to lead and develop our participation strategy	DCS / HoS QA	April/May 25
Complete the Herefordshire Children and Young People Plan	CYPSP – Cllr Powell	25/26
Support local providers including foster carers to meet the cultural, religious and social needs of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) • Review placement of UASC by type and location	Stacie Edwards Zoe Richards	25/26

Actions we will take	Person/Forums	Timescale – progress reporting quarterly
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and implement a communication and engagement plan with UASC in relation to commissioned services.</li> <li>• Develop options to improve the offer of Herefordshire support and inclusivity to UASC locally</li> </ul>	Participation Manager	
Develop child and parent friendly information on complaints, child protection and care proceeding processes accessible via media links	Suzie Simms	Q2/3

**Ofsted Recommendation 2**

**The sufficiency and stability of staff across the workforce, including sufficient numbers of Foster Carers, so children receive a timely response to having their needs identified and met across the service**

Actions we will take	Person/Forums	Timescale
Undertake a voice of the Children's workforce survey – measure progress against 2024/25 council workforce and SW Health check feedback	Dylan Harrison (PSW)	June/July 25
Launch a new Welcome and Retention offer for qualified social workers	Rachel Gillott	April 25
Further develop performance reporting from Mosaic / PBi to provide both self-service and provided performance reports to individual and managers to enable effective workload management	Claire Peet	2025/56 Reporting qrtly
Engage with the regional bid for Regional Fostering Hub	Tori Lynch	Q1/2
Implement a targeted recruitment programme for foster carers and promotion of the specialist foster carer scheme	Natasha Newton	25/26
Ensure sufficiency of local care placements • Mobilise 4 new Residential Children Home (RCH) beds • Undertake market engagement events locally/regionally with Independent Fostering Agencies to promote working relationships and their acceptance of our referrals	Tori Lynch Lisa Dufield Zoe Richards	25/26

<b>Actions we will take</b>	<b>Person/Forums</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
Develop a continuous programme for Restorative Practice multi agency briefings and regular workshop for CSC to bring for case reflection lead by RP champions	Dylan Harrison and Leeds	25/26
Complete refurbishment of locality work spaces	Anthony Oliver (E&E)	Q1/2
Complete SGO support and finance offer review and business case to increase number of SGO carers and children receiving permanency via this route	Natasha Newton	Q1
Undertake annual programme of Fostering recruitment and pay review	Natasha Newton / Finance	Q2
Complete and Launch Fostering Hand book and Website	Natasha Newton	Q1
Develop a training, development and career pathway programme for Family Support workers	Katy Straughan	Q1/3

### **Ofsted Recommendation 3**

**The timely and robust identification and multi-agency response to children and young people who are at risk of harm, including, but not limited to, the response to pre-birth children and babies, 16- and 17-year-olds who present as homeless, children living in private fostering arrangements and children who go missing from home and care.**

<b>Actions we will take</b>	<b>Person/Forums</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
Develop a joint Herefordshire / Worcestershire levels of need bring consistency of language to our shared partners	HSCP / WSCP	Sept 25
Develop an annual programme for Private Fostering awareness raising across the partnership and compliance audit programme	Natasha Newton	June 25
Complete a further audit to review impact on practice and compliance against 16/17yrs homelessness standards	Christine Wellington	Q1 25/26
Produce a quarterly report on "Push/Pull" factors, patterns, and trends identified from Welfare Return Interviews for children and young people missing from home and care.	Christine Wellington / Ruby Card	Q1/2/3/4
Develop the Missing from Home and Care Welfare Return Interviews reporting mechanisms and information / data sharing within services to ensure SW and IRO /CP chairs understand	Christine Wellington	Q1



Actions we will take	Person/Forums	Timescale
and can take into account within a child plan and ensure as a partnership we understand the push pull factors		
Undertake an annual community launch of Get Safe across Herefordshire to raise awareness amongst children, young people and the community of signs of concern and support services available	Holly Powell CSE Partnership	Annual – 2025
Provide a consultation, support and training package to the voluntary and community sector to enable them to build skills and confidence in managing presenting needs and risks. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop training materials and programmes tailored to the needs of the VCSE sector.</li> <li>• Deliver the training across VSCE and universal Early Help workforce.</li> <li>• Evaluate the impact of the training and identify next steps for ongoing support.</li> </ul>	Dawn Knight Talk Community	Q1/2/3
Embed partnership working within the Joint Commissioning HCC and ICB to jointly address health and care needs of children and young people with an initial focus on children and young people with Special Educational Needs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and refresh S75 arrangements for joint funding across Health, Education and Social Care</li> <li>• Review arrangements for commissioned services across therapy and promote commissioned solutions for enhanced capacity, quality and value where possible</li> </ul>	Rachel Gillott Tori Lynch Jade Brooks ICB Zoe Richards	25/26

#### Ofsted Recommendation 4

The quality of practice including assessments, plans, planning and purposeful visits that are responsive to risk and need.

Actions we will take	Person/Forums	Timescale
Deliver against the Leeds sector led improvement programme – embedding relational practice	Dylan Harrison / Leeds	2025/26
Implement the service specific QA programme on a quarterly basis – incorporating Audit, KPI review and Service User feedback to inform each quarterly programme	Service Managers	25/26
Develop a range of opportunities to hear the voice of the child in our work using Surveys, Audit, feedback/learning through compliments and complaints and create a regular Voice of the Child report as a measure of success against the improvement plan	Service Manager QA and Participation	25/26

Actions we will take	Person/Forums	Timescale
Implement Families First Programme – Family Help	Lead Dawn Knight	25/26 Q1/2/3
Merge the strengths of targeted early help and section 17 (Child in Need) work, to enable families to experience <b>one assessment</b> and to have flexibility on who leads the work to support relationship building.	Steering Group Ruby Card - MASH	
Utilize multi-disciplinary teams, delivering support out of local community-based settings so children and families can more easily access support	Dylan Harrison PSW Andrea Busk - CP	
Establish the Family Help Lead Practitioner role across the partnership giving families some choice as to who leads their plan of intervention	Nicola Stroud - Talk C Angela Wilson HSCP	
Through our Think Family approach create new Family Help plans to identify what and who is impacting on good parenting – who can help and who needs help?	Leanne Lowe WMP Wye Valley HC Trust Lyndsey McCurdy PH	
Develop our work with the wider family network of children to maximise the support and safety planning wider family can offer as we support parents to care for their own children.		

#### Ofsted Recommendation 5

**Timely and effective multi-agency arrangements to ensure children are protected and enter care when required.**

Actions we will take	Person/Forums	Timescale
Auditing decision making on contact and referrals to identify patterns and trends that lead to repeat referral/assessment/plans for children and sharing targeted learning to effect change	Ruby Card	Q1
Develop further the Multi Agency audit activity across the partnership and within children social care to ensure we have maximum opportunity to understand the multi agency delivery ultimately and impact and to coordinate and share learning as a partnership	Ruth Coles Christine Wellington	April – Dec 25

Actions we will take	Person/Forums	Timescale
Develop reporting mechanism on Multi Agency contributions to child protection processes and children Strategy discussions through to Child Protection conferences	Claire Peet Amanda Sherrard	Q2/3
Monitor use of the new multi-agency Professional Differences Escalation processes for effective and timely outcomes for children	Safeguarding Partnership	25/26
Implement the Families First Programme with development and piloting of the specialist social worker role to ensure our experienced social workers are providing consistent advice and direction to our child protection interventions	Dawn Knight Dylan Harrison	Q4
Implement the quality of practice sector lead improvement plan with Leeds Relational Practice in Practice' Develop: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• local champions group as facilitators and trainers</li> <li>• Joint workshop programme in summer</li> <li>• Incorporating formulation approach in key decision-making points, e.g. core groups, care planning meetings and professionals meetings</li> </ul>	Dylan Harrison John Maynard	Q1-3

#### Ofsted Recommendation 6

**Monitoring and tracking to prevent drift and delay. This includes the monitoring and tracking of children in the Public Law Outline (PLO), permanence planning, children subject to deprivation of liberty orders and those placed in unregistered children's homes.**

Actions we will take	Person/Forums	Timescale
Identify and audit cases where PLO timeliness is at risk or not achieved to identify actions to retrieve timeliness or identify patterns and trends for learning and practice improvement. Reporting to LFJB and CSC Exec	LFJB sub Tess Burgess / Rachel Gillott	Quarterly
Confirm the Special Guardianship offer to promote permanency through SGO in a timely way with an offer that provides a strong practical, emotional and financial support in permanency	Natasha Newton	Q1/2

Actions we will take	Person/Forums	Timescale
<p>A quarterly court data report using the Legal Tracker will provide us with outcome and timeliness date for PLO and Care proceedings. This will enable us to identify patterns and trends of concern in practice and or teams</p> <p>Develop ways to engage great young persons aged 12+ in participation in children protection conferences to ensure they understand the purpose of them and feel safer as a result</p>	<p>Tess Burgess / Rachel Gillott</p> <p>Andrea Busk IRO and CP chairs</p>	Q1/2/3/4
<p>Deliver training programme to staff on Private and Public Law proceedings including statement and giving evidence over three modules – Public Law, Court Skills and Private Law</p>	<p>Tess Burgess / Cahomie Richards</p>	Q1/2/3 – by Dec 25

### Ofsted Recommendation 7

**The availability of support and services to meet children and young people's needs, including timely access to therapeutic interventions, access to dentistry, life-story work, emotional and mental health support, help for young people to support transitions into independence and sufficient suitable accommodation**

Actions we will take	Person/Forums responsible	Timescales
<p>Deliver and evaluate the 25/26 Community Safety funded projects that deliver Early Help and Support to identify those for future long term funding - informing 25/26 commissioning</p>	<p>Rachel Gillott Zoe Richardson Anthony Price PCC</p>	25/26
<p>Provide training in Life Story work and be skilled to deliver this for children in care.</p>	<p>Dorine Rai Katy Straughan</p>	Q1/2
<p>Audit the quality of "Later life letters" to inform practice development Undertake a practice workshop and develop tools for practice</p>	<p>Dorine Rai</p>	Q1 Q2
<p>We will confirm data on our children registered with dental practice and Dental checks and raise findings with ICB and in service to ensure all children have these in place and up to date.</p>	<p>Tori Lynch CSC Jade Brooks ICB</p>	
<p>Engage in the regional Care Leavers forums to ensure HCC Care Leavers have best practice in suitable accommodation, access to education/employment, finances and wellbeing support to independence</p>	<p>Tori Lynch &amp; Corporate Parenting Board</p>	25/26

Actions we will take	Person/Forums responsible	Timescales
Undertake an emotional well being / trusted adult survey with care experienced children and young people	Stacie Edwards Dorine Rai	Q1
Further develop short break sufficiency with increased capacity and choice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a communication strategy with Parent Carer Voice (PCV) and the Children with Disability (CWD) team to ensure wider take up of the existing short break offer</li> <li>• Develop options to deliver a commissioned framework for daytime community based short breaks in the County</li> <li>• Undertake feasibility scoping of potential to deliver in County residential overnight short breaks alongside Strategic Housing</li> <li>• Review the targeted allowance scheme for short breaks to inform future planning</li> </ul>	Jess Davies Zoe Richards	

**Ofsted Recommendation 8**

**Management oversight and grip across the service to include clear structures and service pathways, and regular and effective supervision.**

Actions we will take	Person/Forums responsible	Timescales
Complete development of our practice standards for managers on recording decisions in the interests of children with rationale and reference to threshold and outcomes so these decisions are auditable, provide guidance to staff and accountability for practice decisions.	Tori Lynch Christine Wellington	24/25
Complete an evaluation of the new Complaints policy, process and culture to ensure we are getting the best learning from complaints, have processes that provide assurance on quality and timeliness and in which our service users have confidence and assurance	Tilly Page Suzie Simms	Q2
Provide a consultation, support and training package to the voluntary and community sector to enable them to build skills and confidence in managing presenting needs and risks. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop training materials and programmes tailored to the needs of the VCSE sector.</li> <li>• Deliver the training across VSCE and universal Early Help workforce.</li> </ul>	Dawn Knight Emily Lowe Talk Community Children's	Q1/2/3

Actions we will take	Person/Forums responsible	Timescales
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluate the impact of the training and identify next steps for ongoing support.</li> </ul>		
Deliver a bespoke Management and Leadership programme to Team Managers supported by our own Service Managers	Dylan Harrison / Leeds SLIP	Q1/Q2
Increase student social workers in training “grow our own” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attend regional skills show and recruitment events</li> <li>Create links and a programme of sessions with Sixth Form and FE colleges to promote career options with children social care, early years and SEND</li> <li>Collaborate with local University providers to promote Herefordshire student and AYSE offer</li> </ul>	Learning & Development	25/26
Access the regional training, development and career pathway programme for Personal Advisors	Stacie Edwards Regional Network	Q2/3

### Ofsted Recommendation 9

**Performance and quality assurance arrangements to support and test service improvements.**

Actions we will take	Person/Forums responsible	Timescale
Continue the review and development of the use of Mosaic and Power Bi to ensure permanence data is both self-service and pushed out to managers to enable them to have timely performance information on which to manage workflow and timeliness of practice – providing a headline for deep dive	Clare Peet  Rachel Gillott / Tori Lynch	Summer 24
Embed the implementation of the quality assurance programme in each service area ensuring there is a mix of KPI, Audit and Children and Young People Service user feedback informing our understanding of quality, timeliness and impact of work	Susie Simms And Service Managers	Q1/2/3/4
Practice standards will be in place to promote consistency and good practice across the services	Dylan Harrison Rachel Gillott Tori Lynch	25/26

Actions we will take	Person/Forums responsible	Timescale
Undertake Regional Peer Review Challenge	Rachel Gillott / Tori Lynch	Q3

Signed

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**Paul Walker - Herefordshire Council Chief Executive  
(Interim)**

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**Simon Trickett – Chief Executive ICB**

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**Tina Russell – Director of Children’s Services**

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.....

**Rachel Jones – Deputy Chief Constable –  
West Mercia Constabulary**



## **Phase 2 Outcome Measure of impact**



## Quality Assurance – Hearing the Voice of the Children Young People and Parent / Carers

*Understanding the impact of what we do*

Quality Assurance – Audit Activity  
*Understanding quality of practice*

Corporate responsibility for the help and protection of children and those in care / care leavers, so this is prioritised and embedded across the council and partnerships.

Our corporate responsibility to children will be evident in our council priorities, policies and development plans

Children and Families will tell us that they believe Herefordshire is a good place to live

Management oversight and grip across the service to include clear structures and service pathways, and regular and effective supervision.

Audits will show an improving picture on the quality and timeliness of managerial decisions

Staff will tell us they benefit from regular and reflective supervision

Practice standards will be in place to guide best practice within and across the services

Monitoring and tracking to prevent drift and delay. This includes the monitoring and tracking of children in the Public Law Outline (PLO), permanence planning, children subject to deprivation of liberty orders and those placed in unregistered children's homes

Our care proceedings will be completed in 26 weeks or we will know why not achieved

We will visit children in care in timescales to meet need and see how they live. They will tell us they feel happy and safe with carers

We will have timely and robust managerial oversight and clear best interest decision making for children subject to DoLS and those in unregistered placements.

Children subject to SGO will have good support to promote long term permanence

Timely and effective multi-agency arrangements ensuring children are protected receive care if required.

Repeat Social Work Assessments, children on requiring repeat CP plans will be lower than national

Our protection and care planning meetings and reviews will show timeliness and good multi-agency attendance

Partnership concerns will be addressed through a timely escalation process to resolution

The timely and robust identification of a multi-agency response to children & young people at risk of harm, including, but not limited to, the response to pre-birth children and babies, 16- and 17-year-olds who present as homeless, children living in private fostering arrangements and children who go missing from home and care.

Our contacts, referrals, strategy and assessments will be completed in timescales with full partnership contributions

Visits and assessments to 16/17yr will be completed within timelines and they have made informed decisions about their welfare & accommodation

The partnership will ensure early sharing of information on ~~unborns~~ in need/at risk and assessments and appropriate plans will be in place by birth. Those in care proceedings will have timely progression to permanency, including foster to adopt placements

CYP will have told us why they went missing and we will address this in their plans

The availability of support and services to meet children and young people's needs, including timely access to therapeutic interventions, access to dentistry, life-story work, emotional and mental health support, help for young people to support transitions into

Our children in care will have up-to-date Health Assessments and Dental Checks

They will tell us they have support with their emotional well being

Audit will show we have good quality life story work and letters in place

CYP will tell us they know why they are in care and that they have contributed and understand their plans

The quality of practice including assessments, plans, planning and purposeful visits that are responsive to risk and need

Visits & Assessments will be timely and our QA audits will show an increasing positive trend on the quality of visits and plans and evidence appropriate step up and down as plans progress

CYP and parents will tell us they can access their workers, have contributed to and understand the plans in place

The sufficiency and stability of staff across the workforce, sufficient numbers of Foster Carers, so children receive a timely response to having the service.

Our workforce data will show an improving picture on permanency and stability in agency staff

Children will have fewer changes in social workers

More children will be in family care and their placements stable

Children will tell us they feel happy and safe in care and that they know how to raise their worries and make complaints

Performance and quality assurance arrangements to support and test service improvements.

QA activity embedded across all services areas

A range of opportunities for Children & Young People and Parents to tell us how they have experienced and benefited from our services will be in place

Learning from both shared and developed practices identified

Quality Assurance – KPIs  
*Timeliness of workload and workflow*

**Progress is built on partnerships: partnership activities will be delivered through:**

Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership: Herefordshire Council Corporate Parenting Board: SEND Partnership: Health and Wellbeing Board: Children's Partnership

Oversight and coordination of this plan is through the Improvement Board  
Evidencing our progress and outcomes will be shared through regular Ofsted monitoring visits

## Ofsted Recommendation

Corporate responsibility for the help and protection of children and those in care and care leavers, so this is prioritised and embedded across the council and partnerships

- Ofsted found that there was a “***stronger understanding and commitment across the council to children who need the support of children's social care and that this was reflected in its corporate plans, priorities and the commitment to developing “Child Friendly Herefordshire”*** and the workforce reported feeling well supported by line managers, colleagues and leaders
- **Your Voice Matters: We Say They Do” group** re-launched for children in care and care experienced young people. YP undertook a ‘take over’ of the Corporate Parenting Board April.25. .
- **Complaints have reduced from 102 (23/24) down to 75 (24/25) and we have received 126 external compliments (now recorded)**
- **Assessment locality teams received 51 families feedback** to evaluate service standards. Feedback indicates that children and families appreciate the support received and understand the reasons for our involvement. As a service we are benefitting from ongoing encouragement the social workers are receiving in this process.
- **Safeguarding locality received 20 families** feedback - All the families said their plan was right one for them, child in need or child protection
- **Support, Benefits and Opportunities for our Foster Carers** - Herefordshire foster carers receive a wide range of support, benefits, include a financial incentive for successful referrals of new foster carers, council tax relief, and new funded Specialist Foster Carer programme launched

## Ofsted Recommendation

The sufficiency and stability of staff across the workforce, including sufficient numbers of Foster Carers, so children receive a timely response to having their needs identified and met across the service

- **Permanency for Social Work Managers** managers 85% (from 70%) **Social Workers** 42% from 29%
- **Associated reduction in the number of agency staff** 81 (January 2024) down to 41 (February 2025)
- **Allocation stability for children in care** 43% from 31% through 24/25
- **Allocation stability index Child Protection** 36% from 29% through 24/25
- **8 new approved mainstream carers.** 12 in assessment. This growth is in contrast to national trends.
- **478 fostering training courses completed through our new provider in three months** compared to 229 in the prior eight months. Feedback new provider course more accessible
- **Children in FC placements 73.2% above SN**
- **Recommissioned Short Breaks.** Evaluation Panel, **including young people**, considered 24 applications received (for over £250k worth of funds). 7 successful applications awarded funds.
- **In 2024-25, 121 fostering enquiries** compared to 50 enquiries the year before. We have improved advertising and better use of digital platforms radio, cinema, social media, Google, YouTube, and electronic billboards.
- **9 young people gave feedback regarding placement moves** and to gain their views on their experiences. Themes that emerged were that they shared 6/9 felt safe in their placement, with 3 expressing they felt unsure at the time of the feedback. All shared they felt supported in their moves and that professionals were working well together

## Ofsted Recommendation

The timely and robust identification and multi-agency response to children and young people who are at risk of harm, including, but not limited to, the response to pre-birth children and babies, 16- and 17-year-olds who present as homeless, children living in private fostering arrangements and children who go missing from home and care.

- **Timeliness** in management of Contacts 97%, Referrals 95% Strategy Discussions 91% – **sustained through 24/25**
- Ofsted found that “***a range of professionals and agencies are involved and make an important contribution to assessments as well as provide the support which families need***” and Child protection “***strategy meetings are well attended by multi agency partners***”.
- **We have increased the number of children we see for welfare return interviews after missing episodes** from home to 196 from 139 the previous year and missing from Care to 176 from 130. Timeliness in completing these also improved to 80% (home) and 74% (care)
- **Repeat referrals have reduced** from 23.5% (EoY 23/24) to 22.4% (EoY 24/25)
- **Strategy discussion and timeliness has been sustained** above 93% year average an improvement on 90% year average in 23/24
- There are stronger working relationships at Pre-Birth Panel which involves timely sharing of information and strengthening support plans for unborn children to care experienced parents
- **Repeat Child Protection has reduced** in year from 27% down to 21%
- **Child Protection Conferences Feedback: 22x parents** said they knew what to expect; had received and understood the Social Worker report; spoken to the Chair; felt listened to and were treated with respect. Participants had a good understanding of the Child Protection Plan and how the Plan could end.

## Ofsted Recommendation

The quality of practice including assessments, plans, planning and purposeful visits that are responsive to risk and need.

- **In year audit evidences improvement in case audit judgements:** Good rising to 43% from 27%, Requires Improvement dropping from 65% to 45% and Inadequate dropping from 9% to 6%
- Ofsted found that “***many social workers developed relationships with parents and children in a skilled way***”
- Ofsted found good quality and timeliness in our social work assessments. *Feb 25*
- **Timeliness of visits to children subject of Child protection** sustained above 95% through 24/25
- **Timeliness of ICPC** a concern mid year and improved under new management Q3/4.
- **Timeliness of RCPC sustained** average through year at 94%
- 99.5% children on Child Protection with an up to date plan in place through 24/25



## Ofsted Recommendation

Timely and effective multi-agency arrangements to ensure children are protected and enter care when required.

- Feb 25 Ofsted found: “**Children received into care appropriately to protect from further harm**”
- **Timeliness of visits to Children in Care sustained 80%**
- Timeliness of Child in Care Reviews at 98.9%
- 100% of children in care with an up to date care plan
- C&YP participated in some way within their Child Looked After Review meeting 100% time.
- **Repeat social work Assessments have reduced from 28% to 23%** which evidences the quality of support is improving and children and families are receiving the right plan of support upon closure.
- **Child Looked After Review meetings, C&YP Feedback** 14x children and young people said they knew what to expect; had spoken to the IRO and knew how to contact their IRO. Shared that they were able to share their views; felt respected, listened to and understood their care plan. All respondents shared positive comments about having choice about their review meeting with regard to venue, time, attendees
- Tracking of multi-agency escalations shows that the multi-agency professional differences policy is being followed, and more escalations are being resolved at earlier stages, and within expected timescales.
- Of 99 families asked 44.5 % said professionals worked “very well” together and 37.5% said “fairly well” Only 18% said not well

## Ofsted Recommendation

Monitoring and tracking to prevent drift and delay. This includes the monitoring and tracking of children in the Public law Outline (PLO), permanence planning, children subject to deprivation of liberty orders and those placed in unregistered children's homes

- Care Proceedings timeliness is in top quartile - **Improved timeliness of Care proceedings in 26 weeks** : Herefordshire averages 24 weeks against national average of 36 weeks
- Restorative Practice has reduced our PLO/ Care Proceedings: 21 new cases issued 24/25 compared to 41 the previous year.
- Six young people placed during the year in an unregistered setting through 24/25 – all short term



## Ofsted Recommendation

The availability of support and services to meet children and young people's needs, including timely access to therapeutic interventions, access to dentistry, life-story work, emotional and mental health support, help for young people to support transitions into independence and sufficient suitable accommodation.

- SEND inspectors found '*children and young people with SEND known to early help services access swift support from education, health and social care teams where appropriate*'.
- SEND inspectors described effective and appropriate support for disabled young people who are leaving care. '*Appropriate support to develop their independence skills for when they reach adulthood, and they are involved in preparing their pathway plan. and 'Disabled children and young people who receive a service from social care are well supported into adulthood.'*
- For kinship carers, most placement losses were due to Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) being granted. While this reduces the number of fostering households, it represents a positive outcome for our children and young people, offering greater permanency within their family networks.
- **Our overall number of children placed in a family-based setting is 73% above national average 71%.**
- The percentage of dental checks has remained stable at 56% on review we have gathered child/young person feedback and understand many as having a reluctance or phobia which prevents them accessing checks. Support to address this is being provided via a joined-up approach by carers, looked nurses and social workers.

## Ofsted Recommendation

**Management oversight and grip across the service to include clear structures and service pathways, and regular and effective supervision.**

- Staff told Ofsted they benefitted from regular and reflective supervision that provides helpful reflection and direction
- KPI timeliness of supervision up from 52% - 82% across the Safeguarding services
- Service Manager Leadership and Management programme delivered to all our Service Managers
- The partnership has established a new multi-agency dataset and auditing schedule with findings regularly reviewed with a focus on action and impact// local and national lens.
- The National Panel has agreed with the recommendations from all Herefordshire Rapid Reviews completed in 2024/25.

## Ofsted Recommendation

Performance and quality assurance arrangements to support and test service improvements.

- *Feb 25 Ofsted found: A wider breadth of quality assurance activity gives leaders a stronger line of sight on the quality of practice. This includes a broader range of targeted audits on areas of service or cohorts of children who are more vulnerable. Feedback from children and parents is much more embedded into audits, which provides more meaningful insight into the experience and impact of practice for those who receive support from children's services. Audits identify issues to improve the service as well as more practice improvement*
- **109 families have given us direct feedback since we introduced service user feedback Sept 24.** Overall this is consistently positive feedback with 87% reporting able to share their views, 80% understanding why they had a social worker and 80% feeling the intervention met all or most of their needs and 80% reporting professionals worked well or "really well" together
- **We have revised our audit processes and tools:** Grade descriptors, moderation and case audit forms.
- **We have developed our overarching QA Framework** and embedded into practice an overarching programme and our Service Area QA programmes.
- **We can see that we have increased the number of cases overall graded as in Good Q1- Q3 and for the first time this year seen Outstanding practice in Q4.**
- Review of our complaint management completed with now all stage 1 complaints being investigated by a QA officer who is independent of the case and each investigation starts with a mtg with the complainant.
- In Early Help we collect regular SU feedback to understand impact; In 2024/25 174 evaluations from parents and 234 evaluations from children. The average increase in score comparing the beginning and end scores was **2.3**.



## Herefordshire Children's Improvement Board

### Refreshed Terms of Reference (August 2022)

**[all meetings will be held in person, with option of MS Teams]**

<b>Board Purpose</b>	Herefordshire Children's Services Improvement Board will oversee and drive the ongoing improvement of services for children and families, ensuring that the Ofsted recommendations from 2022 continue to be addressed and improvements are consolidated and progress made in areas that still require improvement. The Improvement Board will monitor delivery of the refreshed Improvement Plan to ensure that these objectives are met.
<b>Board Responsibilities</b>	<p>The board will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Oversee, monitor and challenge progress on the implementation of the refreshed Improvement Plan, identifying issues that arise which may have an impact on progress and ensuring that robust plans are in place to tackle these.</li> <li>2. Scrutinise the performance and quality of services, providing a direct line of sight into operational risks and ensuring there are robust plans in place to mitigate these where necessary.</li> <li>3. Review Ofsted Monitoring Visits outcome letters and consider the need to take any immediate action to address feedback</li> <li>4. Escalate any issue to the Partnership Executive Group (PEG) that cannot be resolved within the senior operational partnership and associated processes</li> <li>5. Engage and challenge senior officers from across the council and from partners to co-ordinate support and resources to ensure that all are working together to sustain the improvement in children's services.</li> <li>6. Operate with an open culture of listening and respectful challenge, to ensure the council and its partners contribute to creating the conditions for good social work to flourish and so secure the best possible outcomes for children and families.</li> <li>7. Receive assurance that front-line practitioners, children and families and partners are being appropriately engaged in progressing the priorities identified in the Improvement Plan.</li> <li>8. Support the development of strong partnership-based leadership for the system of children's services in Herefordshire as an essential step to sustaining the improvement made in the quality of services and outcomes for children, and building upon it</li> </ol>

<b>Board Members</b>	<p>Children's Commissioner and chair of the Board - Eleanor Brazil</p> <p>Department for Education (DfE) Advisor – Deborah McMillan</p> <p>Chief Executive - Paul Walker</p> <p>Leader to the Council - Cllr Jonathan Lester</p> <p>Interim Corporate Director of Children Services – Tina Russell</p> <p>Cabinet Member for Children's Services - Cllr Ivan Powell</p> <p>Local Government Association - Claire Burgess</p> <p>Independent Scrutineer - Kevin Crompton</p> <p>West Mercia Police – Helen Wain</p> <p>Integrated Care Board Director of Delivery and Operations – Jade Brooks</p> <p>Regional Advisor, DfE - John Bostock</p> <p>Primary School representative - Emma Shearer</p> <p>Secondary School representative – Alison Banner</p> <p>Designated Safeguarding Lead- Jan McColl</p> <p>Leeds Relational Practice Director – Sal Tariq</p> <p>Chairperson, Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee – Cllr Toni Fagan</p> <p>Service Director, Safeguarding and Family Support - Rachel Gillott</p> <p>Service Director, Education, Development and Skills - Liz Farr</p> <p>HoS Quality Assurance and Principal social worker– Dylan Harrison</p>
<b>Other attendees will be invited to meetings when required for specific agenda items.</b>	
<b>Accountabilities and Governance</b>	The Chair of the Board will report to the Minister for children and families on the implementation of the Plan highlighting areas of risk. The Cabinet, Full Council and Corporate Leadership Team will receive regular updates.
<b>Frequency of Meetings</b>	Monthly
<b>Standard Agenda Items</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvement plan progress report</li> <li>• Improvement plan QA report (KPI/SU feedback and Audit activity)</li> <li>• Quarterly LA Children Services KPI report and analysis</li> <li>• Ofsted Monitoring Visits feedback letters</li> <li>• Risk log (quarterly)</li> <li>• AOB</li> </ul> <p>Each Board there will be an in depth focus on an agreed theme that staff from across the partnership will be invited to attend for this item ensuring board to hear direct from front line staff and managers</p>
<b>Administration</b>	<p>Papers will be circulated at least 3 working days in advance of meeting.</p> <p>Herefordshire Council will be responsible for the project management, administration, clerking and hosting of the board meetings and will ensure the minutes are taken and distributed to Board Members. The Chair and Director will agree the minutes before circulation. Board papers will be shared as agreed by the Board depending on the documents at each meeting.</p>
<b>Type of meeting</b>	In person meeting with the option of virtual.
<b>Access to information</b>	<p>TBC</p> <p>[webpage for improvement board]</p>



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

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

## **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 19<sup>th</sup> 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.**







Herefordshire  
Council

# Domestic Abuse Strategy for Herefordshire 2025 to 2028

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## 1. Introduction

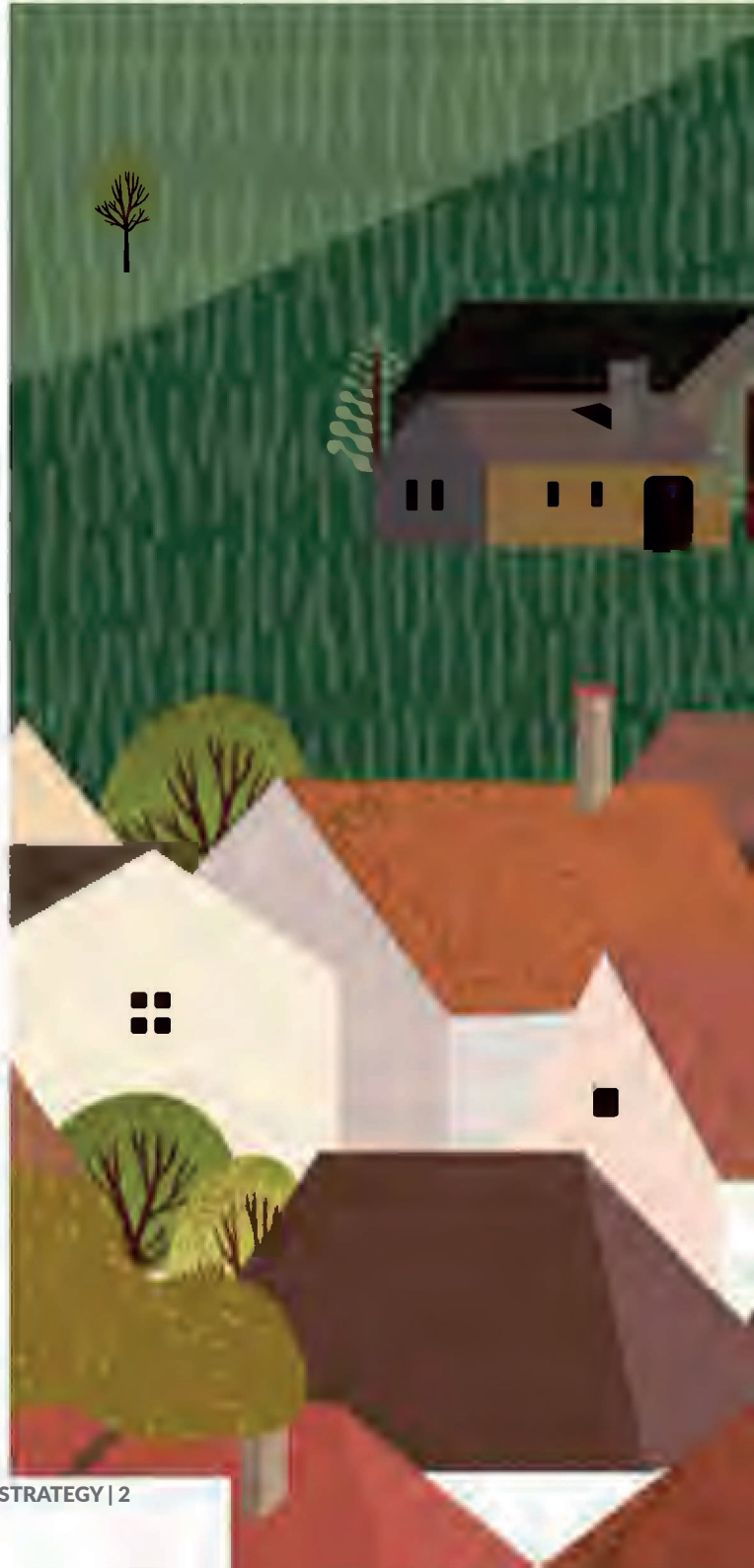
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This strategy has been developed by the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board in line with the requirements of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

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.







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## **2. Herefordshire Vision for Domestic Abuse**

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*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.

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

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

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

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- 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.



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## 4. *Key Achievements over the last 3 years*

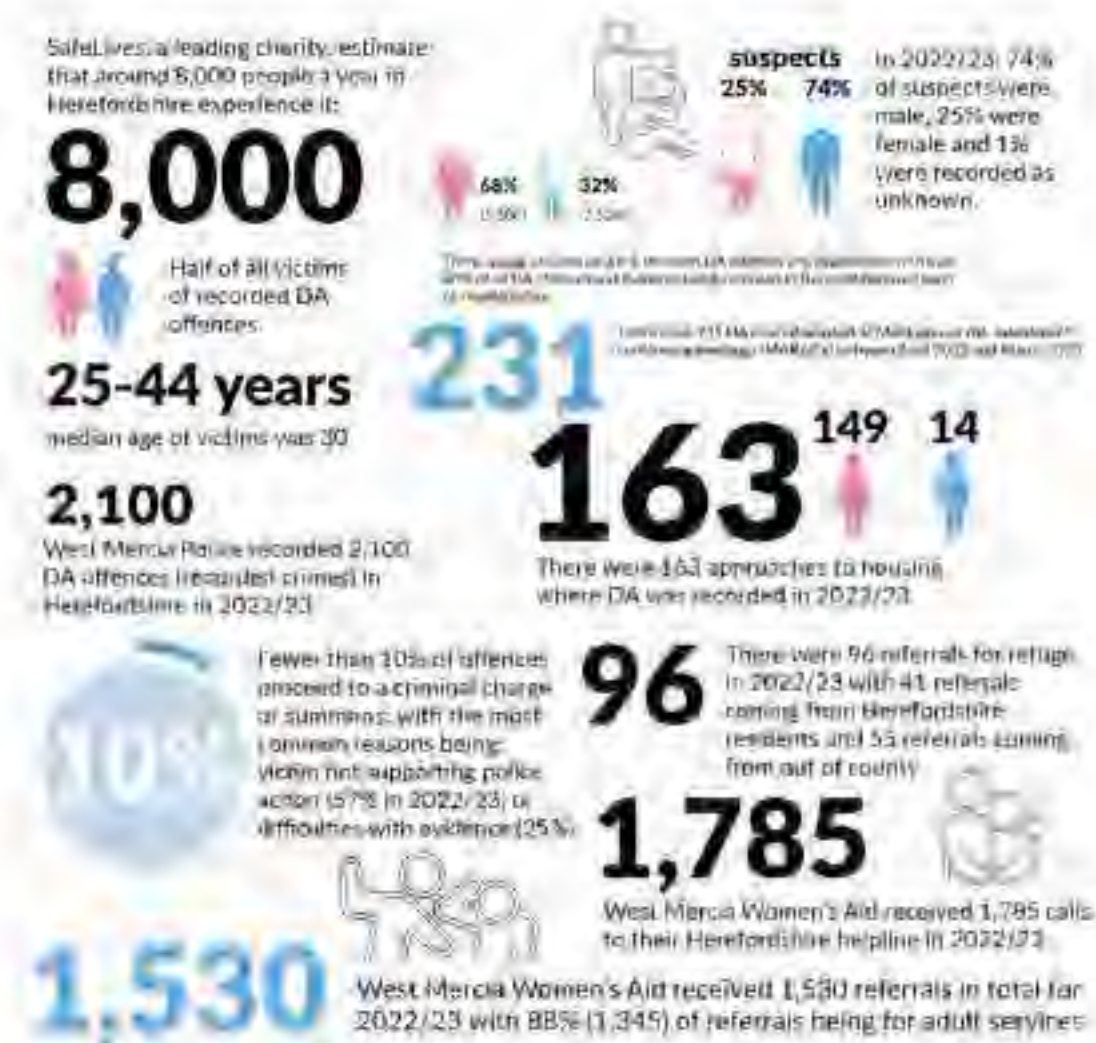
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- Recommissioned domestic abuse services in Herefordshire, to extend their reach and increase the amount of safe accommodation available in the county.
- Commissioned the co-ordination of a lived experience advisory network to ensure that the voices 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).



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## 6. Lived Experience Engagement

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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

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

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*'School is safer than home.'*

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

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*'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.'*

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*'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.'*

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

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

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*'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.'*

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*'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.

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## **8. Accountability and Governance**

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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.



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## **9. Measuring Progress**

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- 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.

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## **10. References**

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



[www.herefordshire.gov.uk](http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk)

# DOMESTIC ABUSE IN HEREFORDSHIRE 2024

Final Version

April 2025

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If you need help to understand this document, or would like it in another format or language, please contact us on 01432 261944 or e-mail [researchteam@herefordshire.gov.uk](mailto:researchteam@herefordshire.gov.uk)

# Introduction

This report presents a summary of the findings of a needs assessment completed by Herefordshire Council using data from a range of sources.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 introduced the requirement for all Local Authority areas to produce a domestic abuse needs assessment and states that the document is refreshed annually. The legislation also requires that Local Authorities have a Domestic Abuse strategy in place. Combined with ongoing engagement with, and feedback from, people with lived experience of domestic abuse in Herefordshire, these documents bring together data to inform decision making, service planning and strategy development.

While prompted by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 requirements, this needs assessment is not restricted to safe accommodation support. We sought to build a comprehensive picture of domestic abuse in Herefordshire including need, demand for services, service provision, and feedback from survivors and professionals.

The prevention of domestic abuse and the protection of all victims lies at the heart of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. The measures within the Act seek to:

- Promote awareness by introducing a statutory definition of domestic abuse and recognising children as victims in their own right.
- Protect and support victims by establishing in law the office of Domestic Abuse Commissioner, introducing new domestic abuse protection notices and domestic abuse protection orders and placing a new duty of local authorities to provide support to victims in refuges and other forms of safe accommodation.
- Hold perpetrators to account by extending the definition of some existing offences and creating a new offence of non-fatal strangulation.
- Transform the justice response by helping victims to give their best evidence in the criminal court through the use of video evidence, screen etc and ensuring that victims of abuse do not suffer further trauma in family court proceedings by being cross-examined by the perpetrator.
- Improve performance – driving consistency and better performance in the response to domestic abuse.

Promoting Safety - Herefordshire's strategy for addressing domestic abuse 2021-24 was published in May 2022. The strategy is supported by an action plan that is driven forward by Herefordshire's Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board, a multi-agency board established to ensure that a joined-up approach is taken to tackling domestic abuse. A new strategy will be developed using the data from this needs assessment

This report refers to those who have experienced domestic abuse (DA) as “victims” as this is a widely understood term and is used in many of data sources. 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. Data from the different sources do not necessarily relate to the same victims, although there will be some overlap.

## Definition of 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

Women’s Aid provide an alternative definition of domestic abuse:

“Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, 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.”

## Estimated prevalence of domestic abuse in Herefordshire

The SafeLives prevalence tool uses data from the Crime Survey England and Wales (CSEW) merged with local population and Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) data to capture a true understanding of the prevalence of domestic abuse in a local area. The information provided details the estimated number of victims who have experienced DA, not the number of victims who have accessed services.

*Please note that the SafeLives data comes with the following caveats: The CSEW dataset used is for the year ending in March 2020. This is due to a period of suspended data collection during the Covid 19 pandemic, resulting in the March 2022 dataset which had much lower response rates and highly suppressed figures affecting the quality of estimates. CSEW data is to be updated with the July 2023 dataset when available. Older (75+) victim prevalence rates are based on a proxy rate from the CSEW for abuse in the past year only for those aged 60-74. This is because there is no CSEW prevalence rate data for the year ending in March 2020 for those aged 75+. It should also be noted that CSEW surveys are completed face to face and within the home on a voluntary basis, which may impact on reporting of domestic abuse. The national sample for CSEW is 28,000.*

### Prevalence of adult victims – since the age of 16

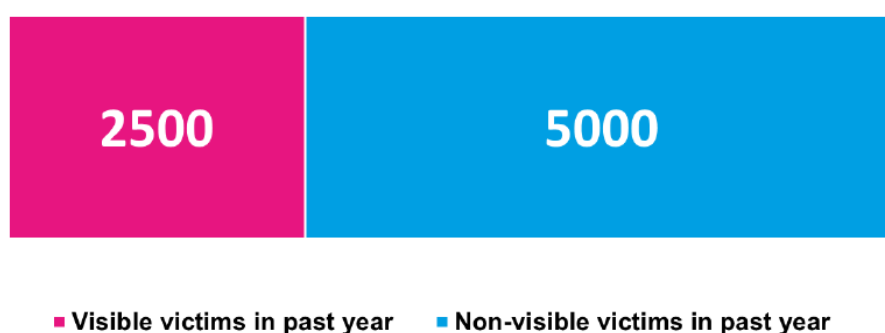


- SafeLives estimate there are 25,000 adult victims in Herefordshire who have experienced domestic abuse at some point in their lives since the age of 16.
- An estimated 15% of these adult victims will have experienced both partner and family abuse.
- Of the total estimated adult victims 19,000 (68%) are estimated to be female.
- Of the total estimated adult victims 9,000 (32%) are estimated to be male.

#### Prevalence of adult victims – in the past year

- SafeLives estimate there are 8,000 adult victims in Herefordshire who have experienced domestic abuse at some point in the last year.
- They estimate that around 8% of those adult victims will have experienced both partner and family abuse.
- Of the total estimated adult victims in the past year, 5,500 (68%) are estimated to be female.
- Of the total estimated adult victims in the past year, 2,500 (32%) are estimated to be male.

#### Prevalence of adult victims – in the past year – visible victims



- This infographic shows the estimated number of **visible** adult victims in the local area in the past year. SafeLives estimate that a **third (34%) of female victims** and a **quarter (24%) of male victims** in the past year were visible. This calculation uses a combination of MARAC data to show visible high-risk victims and data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) for visible non-high risk victims as they reported in the CSEW that they had “told other support professional or organisation.”

Visible victims = the estimated number of adult victims in the local area who have experienced domestic abuse in the past year and who could be considered as wishing to access services. This is as they reported in the CSEW that they had “told other support professional or organisation”. This calculation uses a combination of MARAC data to show visible high-risk victims and CSEW data for visible non-high risk victims.

Non-visible victims = the estimated number of adult victims in the local area who have experienced domestic abuse in the past year and who could be considered as not wishing to access service / not visible to services.

Caveat: MARAC data recording can vary amongst local areas depending on their MARAC processes, for instance some have triaging systems where not all the initial referrals are recorded. These differences will impact on the prevalence estimations for visible high-risk victims.

#### Prevalence – in the past year – partner abuse (IPV)

- SafeLives estimate that there were 5,500 adult victims in the local area who have experienced partner abuse in the past year.

- SafeLives estimate that there were 4,500 children living in a household with partner abuse in the past year.
- SafeLives estimate that there were 4,500 people using abusive behaviours in their intimate partner relationships in the past year in the local area.
- Of those 20% are estimated to be serial perpetrators of domestic abuse.

Caveat.

Uses estimations of 41% of households with partner abuse having children in with an average of 1.85 children per household – this data comes from the ONS, with details in SafeLives 'A safe fund' report.

## Methodology of the Needs Assessment

This report applies the latest intelligence on domestic abuse (DA) in Herefordshire gathered from:

- West Mercia Police
- West Mercia Women's Aid (WMWA)
- Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)
- Housing Solutions
- Adult Social Care
- Children's Social Care
- Cranstoun
- Health Partners
- West Mercia Probation

All of the above services/departments were asked to provide data on the overall numbers of domestic abuse (for example, requests for support or DA flags recorded). They were also asked to provide demographic and socioeconomic data. Many of the services/departments were unable to provide the level of detail requested and this is discussed in more depth later in this report.

The majority of data utilised within this needs assessment is based upon data collected from April 2022 to March 2023. This is to build upon the data collected in the previous needs assessment which covered April 2021 to March 2022. In order to provide services/departments with sufficient time to collate the data required, we were unable to obtain data in time for this financial year (April 2023 – March 2024). We recognise this is a limitation and intend to address this in the next full needs assessment (due to be completed in 2026/27) which will include the most current and up to date information.

In addition to the quantitative data collected above, this needs assessment includes qualitative data which was gathered from practitioners and people with lived experience of domestic abuse in Herefordshire. This data is incorporated throughout the needs assessment with recommendations provided at the end of each section. Qualitative data was provided via the Lived Experience Advisory Group at WMWA, the SafeLives Review of the DA System in Herefordshire produced in 2023 and through opportunities to feedback via email in relation to this needs assessment.

We would like to express our sincere thanks for the data and feedback provided.



# Demographic and Composition

## Population Features of Victim/ Survivors in Herefordshire

This section aims to answer the following question: **What are the demographics or population features of victim/survivors identified in Herefordshire and accessing services in Herefordshire?**

The following data was requested from all key services/organisations:

Demographic data:

- Age
- Gender identity
- Marital status
- Sexual identity
- Disability
- National identity/Ethnic group

Socio-economic characteristics:

- Household structure
- Occupation
- Household income
- Education

Information on marital status, household structure, occupation, household income and education was not provided.

### Age

- Police

Figure 1 shows that around half of all victims of recorded DA offences were aged 25-44 years, this proportion has been seen each year since 2017/18. The median age of victims was 30. The data shows that despite the majority of DA offences being committed against those aged 25-44, DA offences affect people of all ages in Herefordshire.

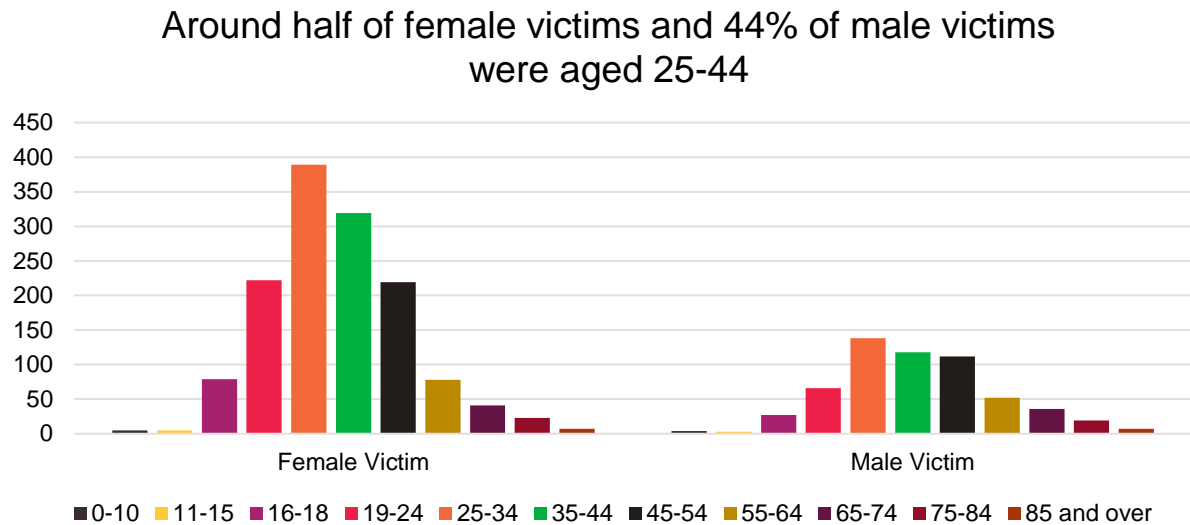


Figure 1. Age profile of victims of DA offences in Herefordshire in 2022/23

- MARAC

Of the 231 cases discussed at MARAC between April 2022 and March 2023, the majority of victims were aged between 25-34 years (71 cases) and 35-44 years (63 cases), reflecting the data above. There were 4 victims aged 16-18 years and 10 victims over the age of 75 years.

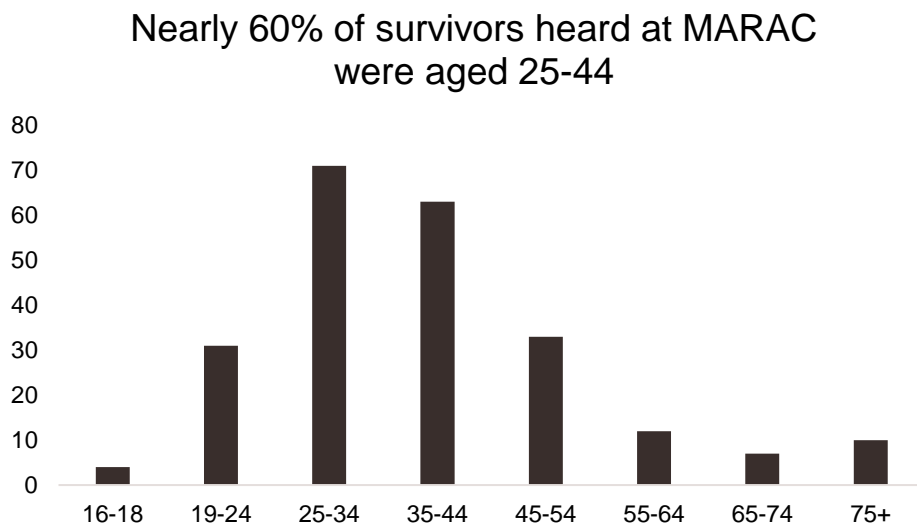
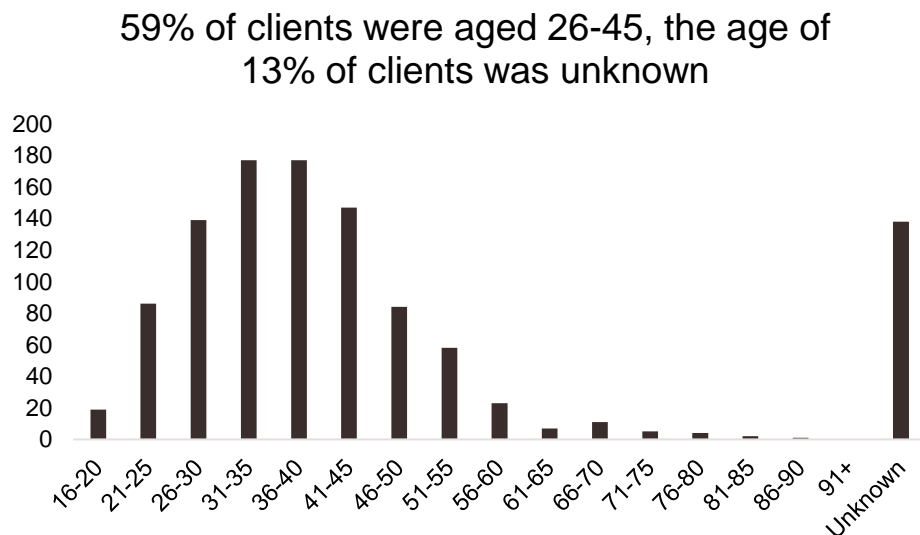


Figure 2. Age profile of victims discussed at MARAC in Herefordshire in 2022/23

- WMWA

Most service users were aged 26-45 (640, 59%) with the age categories 31-35 and 36-40 both having the largest number of clients (177, 16%). There were only 30 clients aged 61+ (3%) supported in 2022/23.



*Figure 3. Age profile of clients accessing WMWA services in Herefordshire in 2022/23*

- Independent Domestic Abuse Advisor (IDVA) service

Experts in domestic violence, IDVA's prioritise victim safety in every aspect of their work. They provide vital emotional and practical support to victims and survivors, to reduce the risk posed by the perpetrator<sup>1</sup>.

From April 2018 to March 2023, those aged 25-34 were most likely to be supported by IDVA, accounting for around a third of all cases. However, since April 2021 there has been a noticeable increase in those aged 35-44 being supported. In addition, there has been an increase in the number of older victims being supported by the IDVA service, although numbers still remain much lower than younger age groups; in 2018/19 those aged 65+ accounted for 4% of victims, this had increased to 9% of victims in 2022/23.

<sup>1</sup> [Domestic abuse response in the UK - SafeLives](#)

Between April 2018 and March 2023, victims aged 25-34 were most likely to use the IDVA service, but there has been a large increase in 35-44 year olds in the past two years

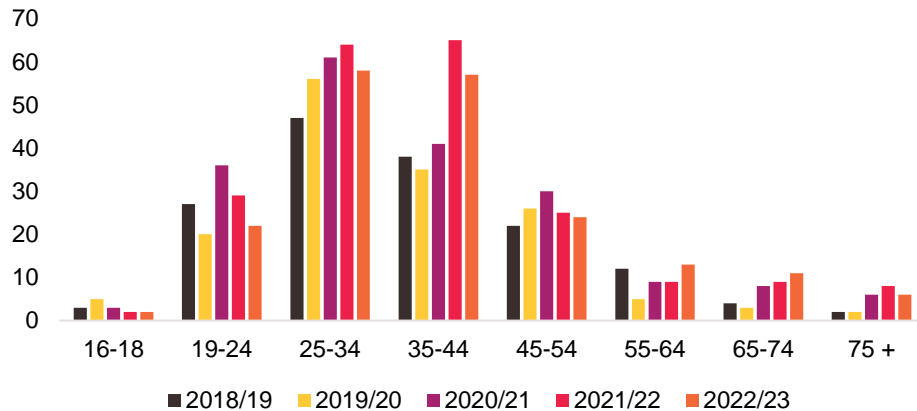


Figure 4. Age profile of clients accessing the IDVA service in Herefordshire, 2018-2023

- Health

GPs across Herefordshire have been seeing patients across all age ranges where DA has been recorded, however, the majority of people were aged between 25 and 44 years.

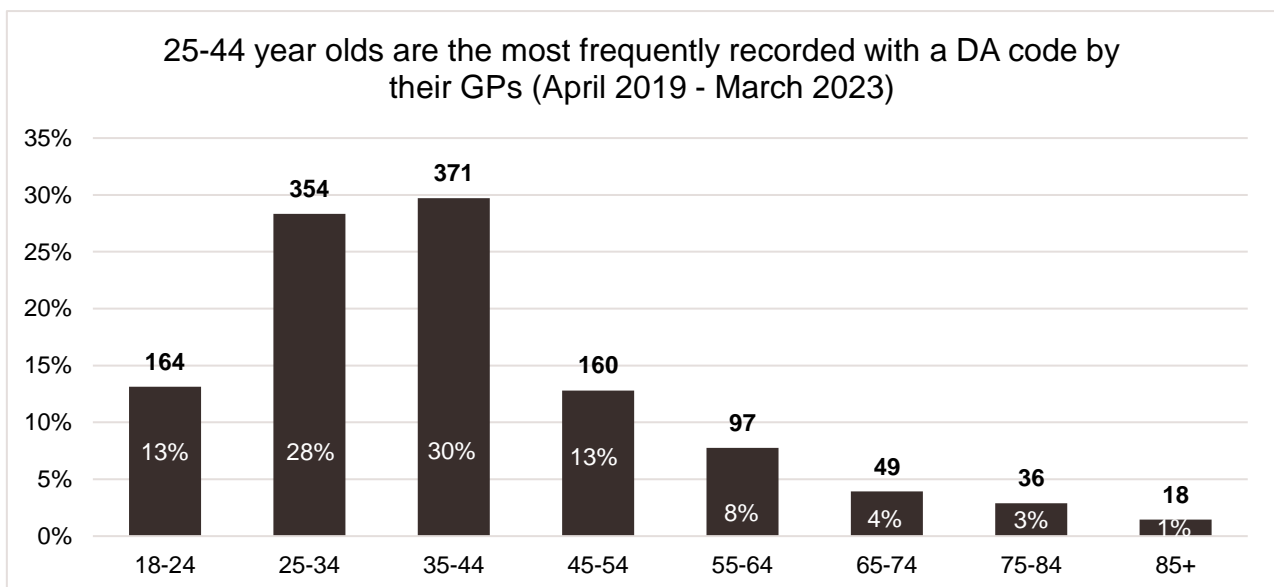


Figure 5. The proportions of DA codes recorded by GPs in Herefordshire by age band, 2019-2023

- Adult Social Care

Most referrals to ASC in 2022/23 where DA is flagged as a factor were for those aged 80-89 for both males and females. However, there are still numerous referrals made for younger adults, with those aged under 40 making up over 25% of referrals. This demographic is markedly different to ASC referrals where DA is not flagged, where those aged under 40 account for only 14% of non-DA referrals.

### Most referrals in 2022/23 to ASC where DA is flagged has been for females aged 80-89

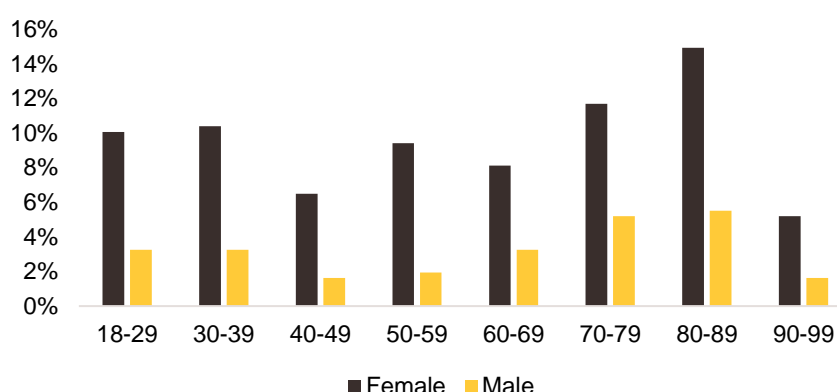


Figure 6. Age profile of ASC referrals where DA is flagged in Herefordshire in 2022/23

- Data on the age range of those accessing Housing Solutions in Herefordshire was requested but not provided.
- The 2023 SafeLives Report estimated prevalence based upon the Crime Survey for England and Wales:
  - SafeLives estimate that there were 1,000 young victims (aged 16-24) of DA in the last year in Herefordshire.  
*The CSEW only provides prevalence rates for 16-19 and 20-24 year olds; therefore, an average of these two was calculated for the 18-24 group.*
  - SafeLives estimate that there were 1,500 older victims aged 60+ in the last year in Herefordshire.  
*Older (75+) victim prevalence rates are based on a proxy rate from the CSEW for abuse in the past year only for those aged 60-74. This is because the CSEW only surveys adults aged 74 and under about their experiences of DA, so there is no prevalence data available for 75+ age group.*

#### Summary:

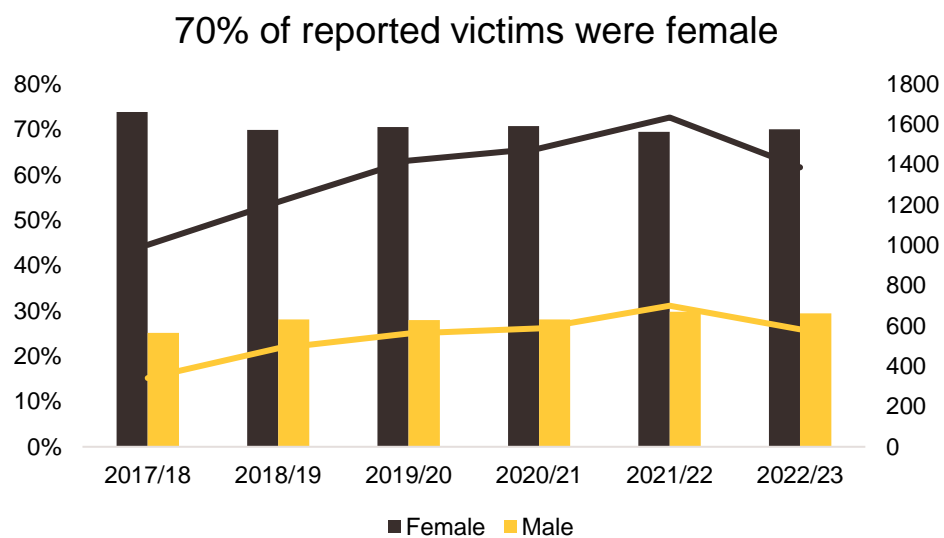
- The most common age group for victim/survivors of DA in Herefordshire was 25-44 years across all agencies but ASC (Police, MARAC, WMWA, IDVA and Health).
- In contrast, most referrals to ASC in 2022/23 where DA is flagged as a factor were for those aged 80-89 for both males and females.

- Based upon the estimated prevalence figures provided by SafeLives (2023), it is evident that figures for younger and older victims are not represented in the data shared by key services/organisations.

## Gender identity

- Police

Figure 7 shows the number of DA victims in Herefordshire recorded by West Mercia Police by gender. Based on the estimated prevalence in Herefordshire, this only accounts for 30% of expected female victims, and 24% of expected male victims. This supports the fact that DA is often a hidden crime which is under reported.



*Figure 7. Gender profile of victims of DA offences in Herefordshire in 2022/23*

Females were more likely to be victims across all age brackets, except in the 85+ category where there were an equal number of male and female victims

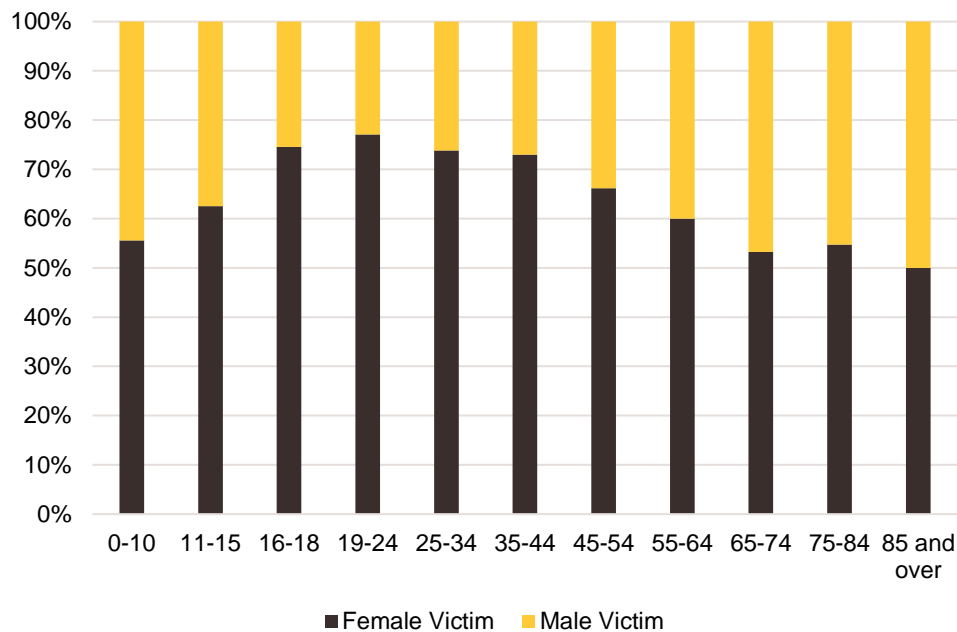


Figure 8. Gender profile of victims of DA offences in Herefordshire in 2022/23

- MARAC

For the year 2022, there were fewer male victims recorded at Herefordshire MARAC (4.8%) compared with national data (6.2%) but the figure for Herefordshire was higher than that of Most Similar Forces (MSFs) (4.4%) and the West Mercia police force area (3.4%). 95.2% of victims discussed at MARAC in Herefordshire during this time period were female.

- WMWA

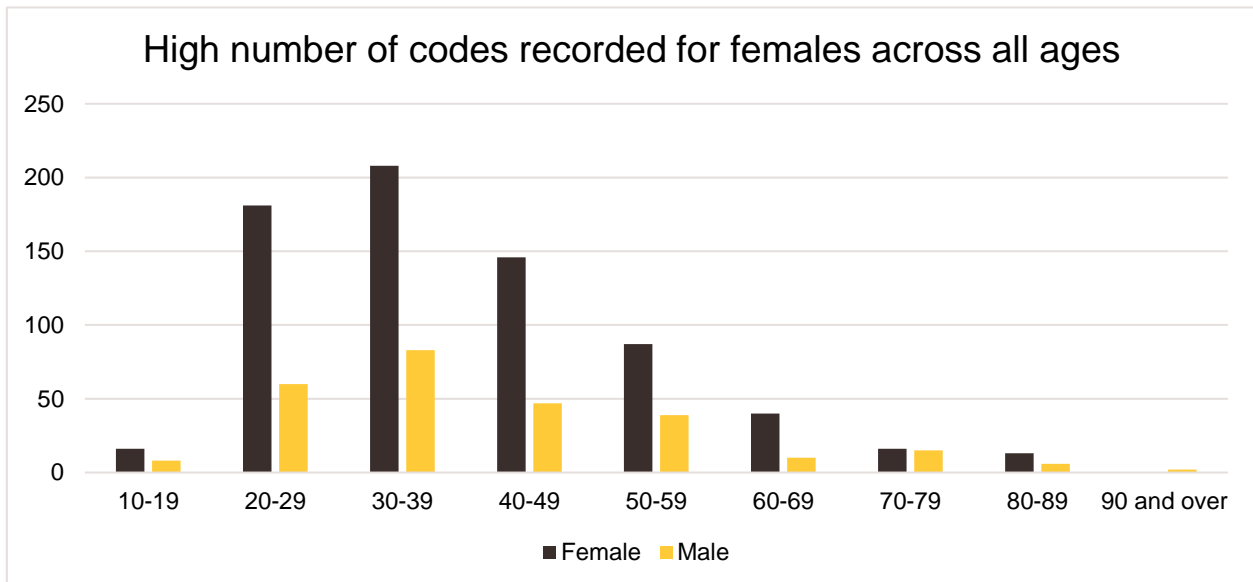
In 2022/23 84% of people who accessed WMWA's support were female, 1% were male and the gender of 15% of clients was unknown (not recorded).

- IDVA

Females accounted for 97% of all victims supported by the IDVA service between April 2018 and March 2023, with males accounting for the remaining 3% of victims. In this time period, no non-binary victims and fewer than 5 transgender victims have been supported by the IDVA service.

- Health

The number of DA codes recorded for female patients was higher than for male patients across all age categories. 72% of all codes were recorded for female patients in the last four years.

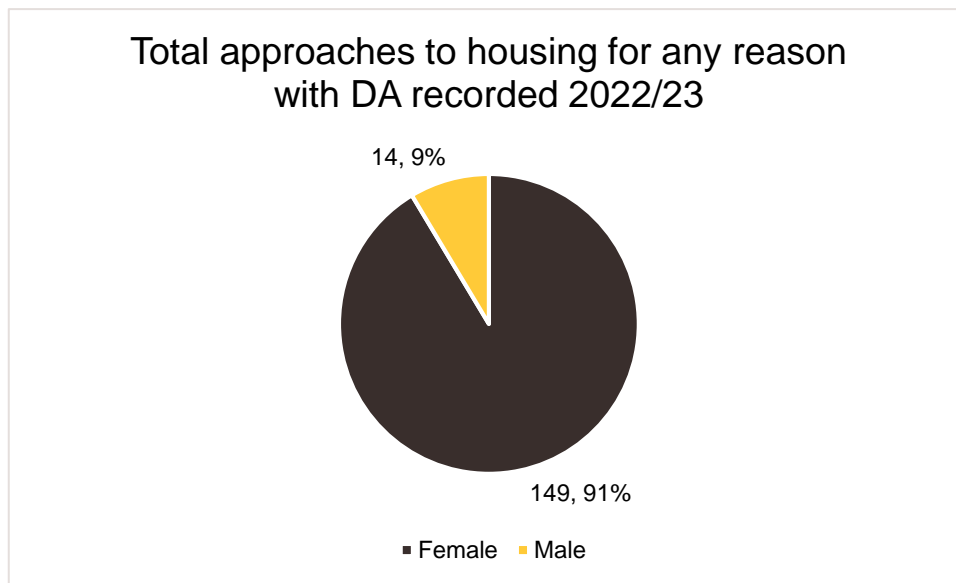


*Figure 9. Gender profile of patients with DA codes recorded in Herefordshire, 2019-2023*

- Housing Solutions

As can be seen in Figure 10, there were 163 approaches to housing where DA was recorded in 2022/23. Of these, 163 instances (91%) were from females and 14 (9%) were from males.

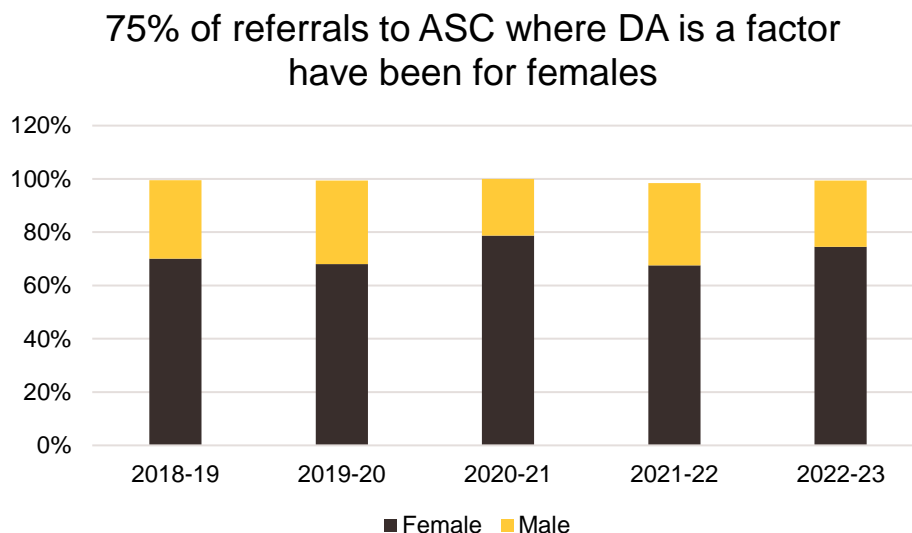




*Figure 10. Gender profile of those approaching housing with DA recorded in 2022/23*

- **Adult Social Care**

Of the 310 people referred to ASC in 2022/23 where DA is flagged, 75% were female which is slightly higher than the previous year but largely in line with the pattern over the previous four years.



*Figure 11. Gender profile of ASC referrals where DA is a factor, 2018-2023*

**Summary:**

- It is evident from the data provided by all agencies that the majority of victim/survivors reporting DA and accessing DA services in Herefordshire are female.

## Sexual identity

- Data on sexual identity was not provided by the Police, Health, Housing or Adult Social Care.

- MARAC

In 2022, just 0.4% of MARAC cases involved a person from an LGBTQ+ group (compared to 1.4% nationally).

- WMWA

In 2022/23, over 60% of referrals to WMWA were for people who identified as heterosexual, the sexuality of 37% of referrals was unknown, and all other sexualities made up the remaining 2% of referrals.

681 (63%) people who accessed WMWA's support were heterosexual, the sexuality for 381 (35%) users was unknown and 16 (1%) people were either lesbian, bisexual or gay. WMWA did not support anyone who identified as pansexual in 2022/23.

- IDVA

Victims who are heterosexual are most represented by IDVA, making up 94% of cases in 2022/23, with lesbian/gay making up 2% of cases, bisexual making up 2% with the final 2% being recorded as other/unknown.

Since 2018/19 the number of other/unknown has fallen from 14% which indicates there has been better recording of victims' sexuality, this has corresponded in an increase in the number of heterosexual victims being recorded, whereas the number of gay, lesbian and bisexual victims has remained constant across the time period.

- 2023 SafeLives Report estimated prevalence based upon the Crime Survey for England and Wales
  - We estimate that there were 1,500 LGBT+ victims of domestic abuse in the past year. *The prevalence statistic for LGBT+ people is based on the CSEW aggregate.*

## Summary:

- It is evident that the vast majority of victims accessing DA services in 2022/23 identified as heterosexual.

## Disability

- Data on disability was not provided by the Police, MARAC, Health, Housing or Adult Social Care.

- WMWA

400 (33%) people who were referred to WMWA were recorded as having a disability in 2022/23. Of those with a disability, 68% was related to mental health, 20% was physical, 8% learning disability, 2% visual disability and 2% was related to hearing.

322 (30%) people who utilised WMWA services were reported as having a disability. Two thirds of those who were identified as having a disability reported their disability was related to mental health, 24% had a physical disability, 8% had a learning disability, 2% a visual disability and 1% had a disability relating to hearing.

- IDVA

The number of disabled victims being supported by the IDVA service has increased over the period April 2018 to March 2023, with over 50% of victims being supported by IDVA service in 2022/23 recorded as having a disability compared to 30% in 2018/19. The data does not break down the types of disabilities so it is unclear what additional needs IDVA clients may be experiencing or how they can be best supported.

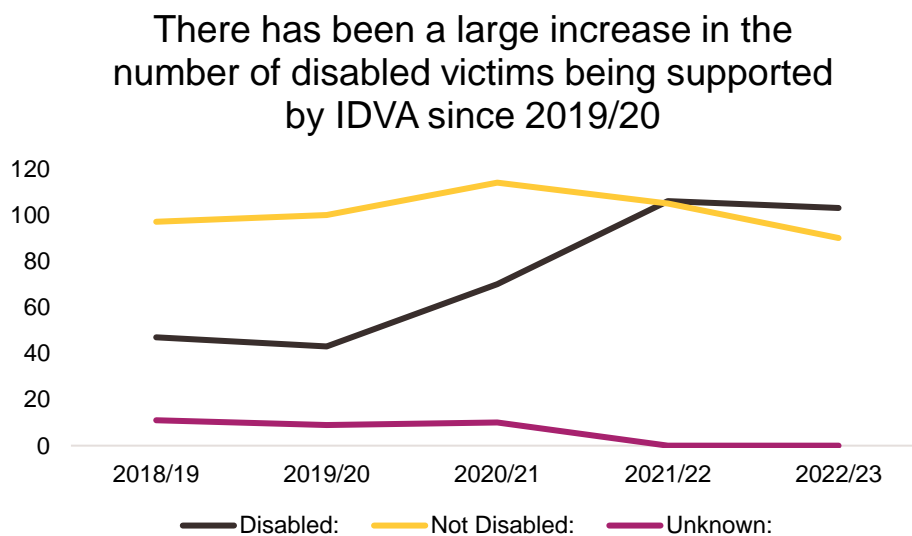


Figure 12. Disability profile of clients receiving IDVA support, 2018-2023

- 2023 SafeLives Report estimated prevalence based upon the Crime Survey for England and Wales
  - SafeLives estimate that there were 1,500 Disabled victims of domestic abuse in Herefordshire in the past year.

Summary:

- Disability data was only provided by WMWA services making comparisons difficult. However, the numbers reported (particularly from the IDVA service) show that a significant number of victim/survivors accessing support within Herefordshire have a disability.

**National identity/Ethnic group**

- Police

Between April 2022 to March 2023, 96% of DA victims for whom an ethnic appearance was recorded by West Mercia Police were determined as being White – North European. This is an unusual way of recording ethnicity as it relies on officers determining a victim's ethnic appearance, and White – North European would encompass those who are White-British, who make up the majority of Herefordshire's population, but could also include other White minority groups. There are also a large number of victims who have no ethnic appearance recorded, so this data is very limited and makes it difficult to draw any conclusions.

For 2022/23 the data also records the individual's self-defined ethnicity; where ethnicity was stated, 92% of victims identified as White British, this is similar to the proportion of White-British people within Herefordshire as a whole which is 91%. The only other ethnic group which accounted for more than 1% of victims, was Any Other White Background, which 5% of victims identified as, which is reflective of the proportion seen in the general population in Herefordshire.

- MARAC

In 2022, 10% (33) of victims discussed at MARAC were from an ethnic minority group (compared to 16% nationally). When compared to the ethnicity makeup of the county (3.1% ethnic group other than White), this is a higher representation.

- WMWA

The majority of referrals were for people with a White British ethnicity (71%), although this is still lower than the proportion of White British people in the county as a whole (91%). The ethnicity of 19% of referrals was unknown, 2% of referrals were for people who were Eastern European (this is not an ethnicity recorded in the Census so cannot be compared to overall population in the county) and 2% for those with a Black African ethnicity (higher than the Black African population as a whole in Herefordshire which is 0.2%). No other ethnicity made up over 1% of referrals.

71% of adults who utilised WMWA support were White British and the ethnicity of 19% of clients was reported as unknown. People who were Eastern European and Black African each made up 2% of clients, no other ethnicity made up more than 1% of adults utilising WMWA's support.

- IDVA

Between April 2018 and March 2023, over 90% of those supported by the IDVA service were recorded as being white. However, the data does not breakdown ethnicity beyond these broad categories, so it is unclear whether these victims were all white British or whether other white ethnicities were being represented.

- Data on the gender profile of those accessing Housing Solutions in Herefordshire was requested but not provided.
- Adult Social Care

In 2022/23, where the ethnicity was recorded, all but 2 of the people referred to ASC where DA was a factor were recorded as white. The data does not breakdown ethnicity further, so it is not possible to determine how many of these people are “White: British” or how many are “White: Other”, which is the largest ethnic minority group in Herefordshire. In addition, 12% of people referred did not have their ethnicity recorded, so it is difficult to fully understand the ethnic demographics of people who are referred to ASC where DA is flagged.

- 2023 SafeLives Report estimated prevalence based upon the Crime Survey for England and Wales
  - We estimate that there were 100 Black, Asian and racially minoritised victims who have experienced domestic abuse in the past year.  
*The CSEW does not accurately reflect the impact of domestic abuse on Black Asian and racially minoritised people, thus, we multiply the number of victims with the Black Asian and racially minoritised proportion of the area including the following: 'Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh', 'Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African', 'Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups', 'White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller', 'White: Roma', and 'Other ethnic group' (data obtained from the ONS census 2021).*

#### Summary:

- The large majority of victim/survivors reporting DA and accessing services in Herefordshire were recorded as white. This reflects the general population in Herefordshire, however, there are some issues related to all white ethnicities being recorded under one umbrella (i.e., white British and white other).

#### **Perpetrator demographics**

- Police

In 2022/23, 74% of suspects were male, 25% were female and 1% were recorded as unknown.

### Men are most likely to be suspects across all age brackets

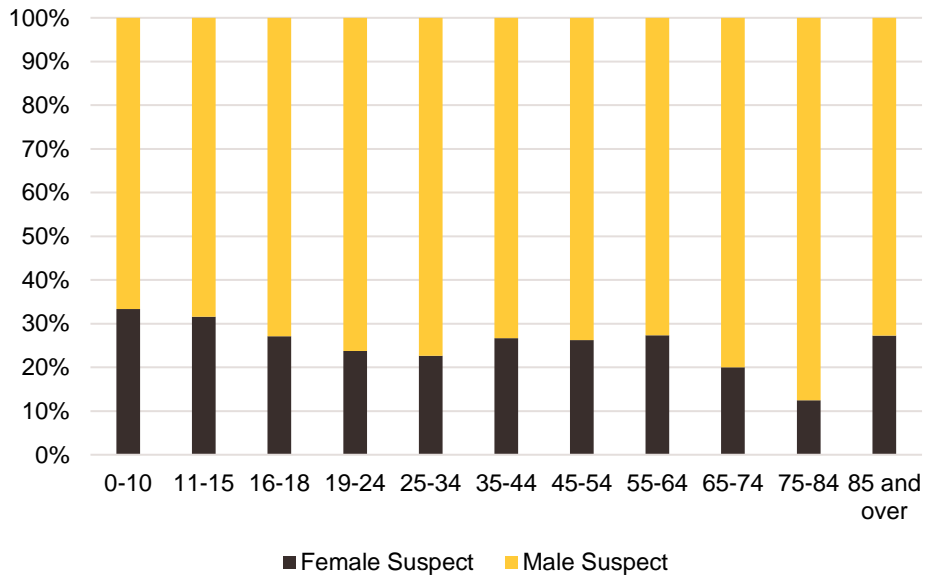


Figure 13. Gender profile of suspects of DA offences in Herefordshire in 2022/23

### Around 55% of all suspects were aged 25-44

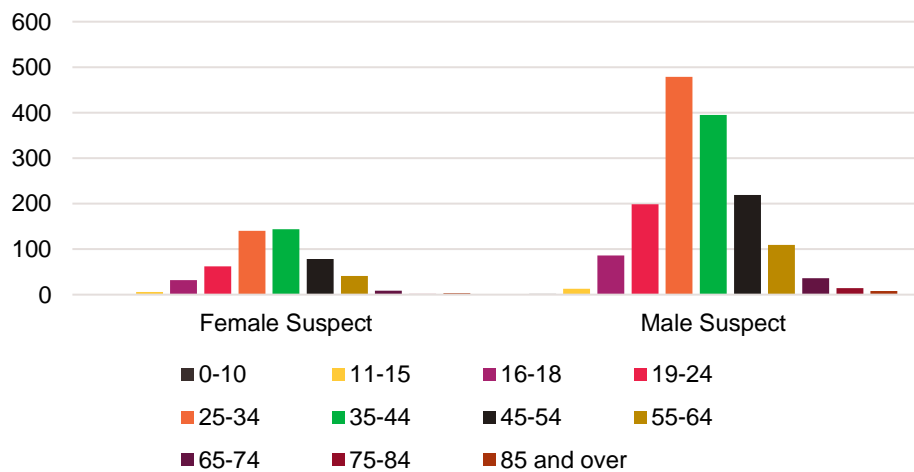
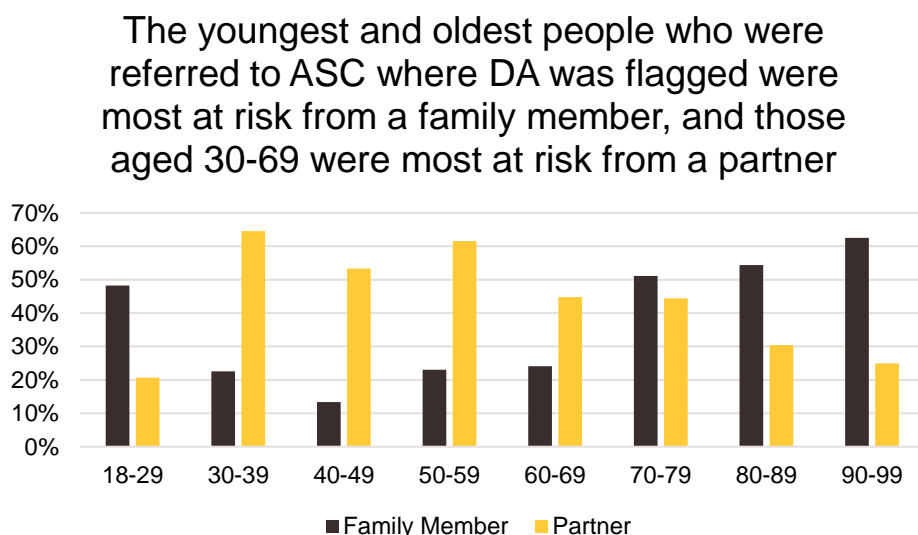


Figure 14. Age profile of suspects of DA offences in Herefordshire in 2022/23

### Relationship type demographics

- Adult Social Care

For 82% of people referred to ASC where DA was flagged (and the source of risk was recorded) the source of risk was identified as either a family member or a partner. In total, 40% of people that were referred identified a partner as the source of risk and 42% cited a family member as the source of risk, however the source of risk varies across the age groups.



*Figure 15. Age profile and relationship type for ASC referrals with a DA flag in Herefordshire in 2022/23*

CSEW suggests that partner abuse is around twice as prevalent as familial abuse, which does not match this data. This might suggest that familial abuse is disproportionately prevalent in those who have care and support needs. However, this is the only data set that separates out partner abuse to familial abuse, so it is not known whether this pattern is seen across Herefordshire or is specific to those with care and support needs.

### Limitations

- During this process it became apparent that services'/agencies do not currently gather the breadth of data required for this needs assessment (this has also been found by many local authorities nationally).
- Only the IDVA service were able to provide data on victims' marital status and no agency/service was able to provide data on socio-economic characteristics. The IDVA service stated that data on the victim's employment status is recorded, but in 79% of cases the status is recorded as unknown so it is not possible to accurately consider this data.
- There is a lack of data regarding the type of relationship recorded between victim and perpetrator (i.e. intimate relationships, familial relationships), only ASC provided this data.
- Agencies/services use a range of categories when collating their data making direct comparisons difficult (for example, age categories).

## Recommendations

- Significant improvements are required with regards to data collection across several services. This includes both demographic and socioeconomic factors. The data collection template developed for DA needs assessments should continue to be utilised moving forward, to guide the development of enhanced data collection across Herefordshire. More accurate data recording is required in the future to provide more meaningful insights.
- The collection and consideration of equalities data and information, to routinely identify and respond to need on a consistent basis, is particularly important in enabling us to improve our response to DA victim/survivors with complex needs and/or multiple disadvantage/ intersectionality (particularly LGBTQ, people from ethnic minority backgrounds and Disability).
- The number of people with protected characteristics accessing services is lower than CSEW data suggests it should be. As such, steps need to be taken to identify, understand and address the barriers faced by victim/survivors with protected characteristics within Herefordshire. This could include undertaking work with survivors who have lived experience to understand the issues and barriers they may be experiencing and implement a plan of action to address these. For example, is there a lack of knowledge around the services that are available and/or are there issues relating to the accessibility of these services?
- An increased focus on capturing the demographic composition features of perpetrators of DA in the future. This could then be used to inform and target prevention efforts.
- Additional data needs to be gathered around the issue of domestic abuse in older people to enable a better understanding of this issue and what support is required. A multi-agency approach is required to improve data collection on domestic abuse in older people within Herefordshire. All relevant partner agencies need to collect accurate records to identify where domestic abuse among older people has occurred (i.e., West Mercia Police, WMWA and, importantly, within health and social care settings).
- Further exploration on the variance in data on age is also needed – for example, comparisons between the ASC data and the police/WMWA data which varies for older victim/survivors.

There are concerns that DA perpetrated against older victims is not always recognised as DA, but instead classified as “Elder Abuse”, which then means that victims are not receiving specialist DA support. This is an area that requires further exploration, including an appraisal of the needs to determine which services would be best placed to provide the kind of support that will meet those needs.

Herefordshire has an older population profile compared to England and Wales averages, so we could reasonably expect to see higher levels of DA amongst the elderly, which is not the case.



# Children and Young People

## Children Social Care

Children's Social Care (CSC) have provided data where DA is recorded as a primary issue.

Table 1 shows how many contacts, assessments and plans were recorded with DA as the primary issue in 2022/23. Unfortunately this data does not include the total number of contacts/assessments/plans so it is not possible to establish the proportion of contacts where DA is the primary issue. The data also does not include cases where DA is an issue but not the primary issue, so there may be more cases where DA is present but is not included in this table.

As data was not provided in 2021/22, it is not possible to consider any trends to see if the number of cases with DA has changed over time.

*Table 1. DA recorded as primary issue in CSC in 2022/23*

Total contacts to Front Door with DA recorded as primary issue	449
Total initial assessments with DA recorded as primary issue	193
Total child protection plans with DA as primary issue	34
Total Children in Need plans with DA as primary issue	72
Total Early Help involvement with DA as primary issue	43

Referrals to CSC can come from a number of sources, but as can be seen in Figure 16, the number of referrals are not equal amongst sources, with 69% of referrals in 2022/23 coming from the police, with primary health and schools being the second and third most common referral agencies.

### Over two thirds of referrals to CSC for DA concerns came from the police

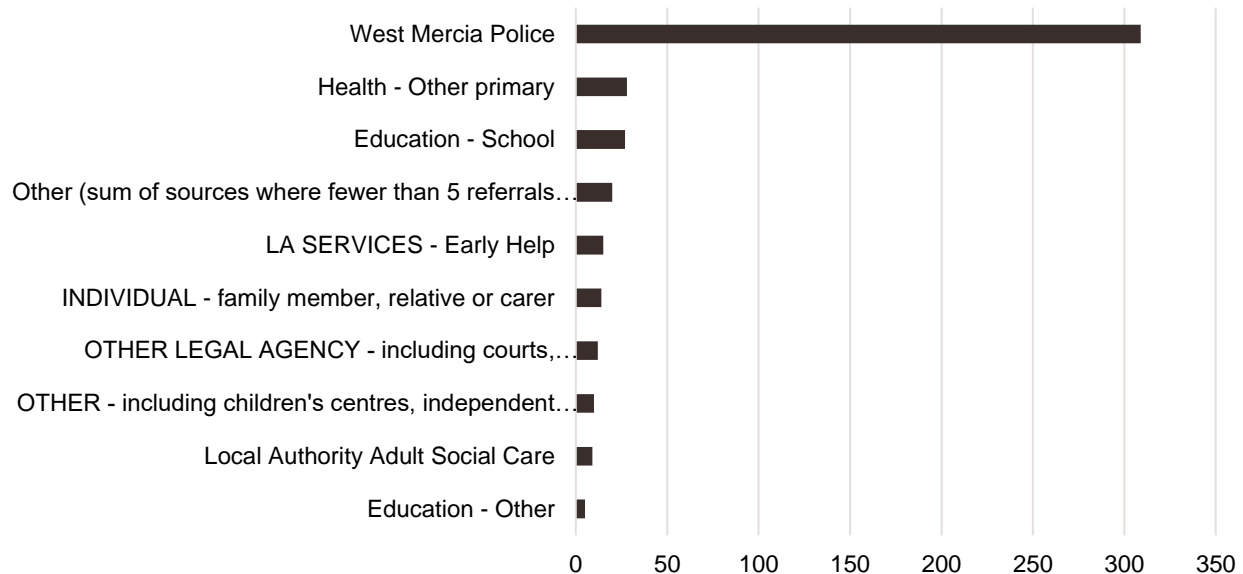


Figure 16. Source of referrals to CSC in 2022/23 for DA concerns

### WMWA Children and Young People Services

WMWA provides support to children and young people who have been affected by domestic abuse. Their work has a strong focus on self-esteem, self-care and on understanding healthy relationships. This includes support for young people who are themselves experiencing abuse in their teen relationships.

WMWA have the following services available across Herefordshire which are run through their WMWA Children and Young People Services (CYP) team:

Helping Hands is for children aged 7-12. The group will help to increase children's understanding of feeling safe and to explore and promote behaviours which will contribute to a safe environment.

The Children and Young People Recovery Toolkit is an evidenced based 8-week programme for any young person that has witnessed or experienced domestic abuse and are able to take part in a group. Children & Young People must not be living with domestic abuse any more to be able to safely attend. The aim of the group is to help children and young people cope and recover from the trauma that domestic abuse can cause. It is integrated in its approach using a combination of trauma – informed resilience focused work, specific trauma focused cognitive behavioural therapy and person-centred therapeutic principles.

CRUSH is a structured group for young people that are affected by ANY form of domestic abuse whether it is witnessed, experienced or perpetrated and is suitable for both young men and young women.

The Young Person's Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (YPIDVAs) provide support to individual young people – aged 13-19 – who are currently experiencing domestic or teenage relationship abuse and who are considered high risk. The YPIDVA will work alongside the young person and other professionals to create an individual safety and support plan, bringing a specialist understanding of the impact experiencing abuse can have on young people. WMWA's YPIDVA's can also provide advice and resources to professionals working with young people who are impacted by domestic abuse, and can support an identified lead professional to complete domestic abuse/healthy relationships work with <sup>[L]</sup><sub>SEP</sub> a young person if this better suits the needs of the individual.

Bespoke support is available to children whose needs would be better met via support from a worker that they already have a relationship with; WMWAs Children & Young People's team can support professionals to complete work directly. This could include safety planning, feelings and self-esteem work and healthy relationships.

#### Referrals:

- 185 referrals to WMWA for children and young people were made in 2022/23, of these 121 referrals were recorded as refused. The most common reasons for refusal were: needs met elsewhere – referred to another service within WMWA (30%), other (16%), needs met elsewhere – referred to partner agency (13%) and unable to contact client (13%).
- Nearly half of referrals for children and young people were internal (44%), large proportions of referrals also came from Early Help (23%) and Children's Services (15%) with smaller numbers coming from other sources such as education and employment (8%), self-referral (3%) and health services (3%).
- Those aged 6-10 made up the majority of referrals (43%), followed by 0-5 (33%), 11-15 (22%), and 16-20 (2%). There is an overlap between adult services and CYP service for the older cohort as some 16-20 year olds were supported by adult services.
- 65% of referrals were for CYP who are White British, the ethnicity of 27% of referrals was unknown and no other ethnicity accounted for more than 2% of referrals.
- There was an equal split of referrals by gender with males and females both making up 39% of referrals, the gender of the remaining 22% of referrals was unknown.
- Of the 185 referrals, 28 (15%) recorded a disability. Of this number 57% had mental health issues, 25% had a learning disability and 18% had a physical disability.

#### Profile of CYP receiving support:

- WMWA supported 96 CYP in 2022/23.

### 49% of CYP supported by WMWA were aged 6-10

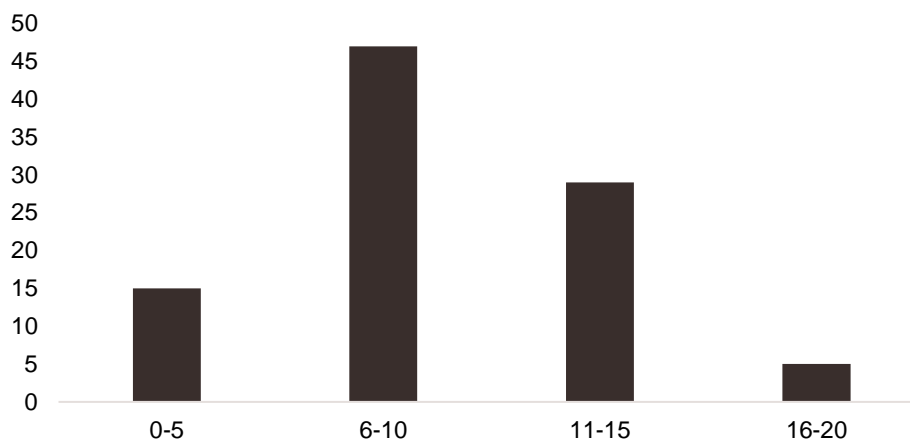


Figure 17. Age profile of CYP supported by WMWA in 2022/23

- Nearly half of the children supported were aged 6-10, 30% were aged 11-15, 16% were 0-5 and 5% were aged 16-20. There were also 16-20 year olds supported by WMWA via their adult services.
- Two thirds of CYP supported by WMWA were White British and the ethnicity of 22% was unknown. No other ethnicity had 5 or more CYP clients.
- 14 (15%) of the CYP supported were recorded as having a disability, with mental health recorded as the most common disability.

#### IDVA

- Nearly two-thirds of victims supported by IDVA between April 2018 and March 2023 had children in the household; 51% of cases refer to a single adult with children, 13% of cases having more than one adult and children in the household and 36% are for adult(s) with no children.

#### Refuge:

- Over three quarters of the people accessing refuge were either pregnant (12%) or had children in the household (65%).

#### Recommendations:

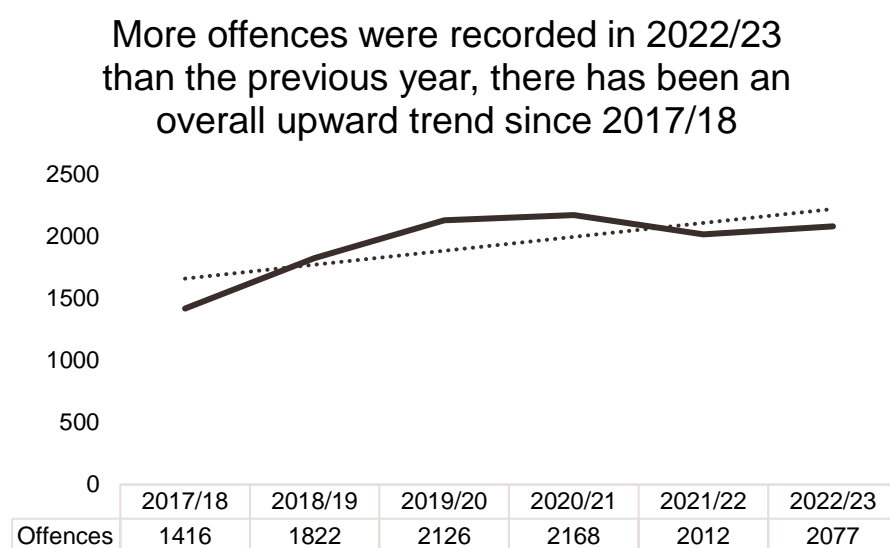
- Only 15% of 185 referrals to WMWA CYP services came from Children's Social Care. Further exploration of what steps can be taken to increase these numbers should be undertaken.
- It would also be beneficial to establish how many of the CSC cases with DA recorded as a primary issue resulted in referrals to WMWA CYP services and how many were supported in house.

# Domestic Abuse – Incidents and Homicides

## West Mercia Police Data

The following data was provided by West Mercia Police in April 2024 and covers offences recorded in Herefordshire that had a DA “flag”. Since April 2015, crimes should be “flagged” as being domestic abuse-related by the police if the offence meets the government definition of domestic violence and abuse.

Figure 18 shows that there has been an increase in the number of recorded DA offences in Herefordshire in 2022/23 compared to the previous year, and although offences are lower than they were in 2019/20 and 2020/21, there has been an upward trend since 2017/18. This may be due to an actual increase in DA offending, but the figures could also be affected by other factors such as better recording and recognition of DA within the police or an increase in the reporting of crime. However, the levels are far below the CSEW and SafeLives estimates for Herefordshire.



*Figure 18. Number of DA offences recorded by West Mercia Police by year in Herefordshire*

Of the 2077 offences recorded in 2022/23, 1907 were recorded with an outcome. Of these, over half resulted in the victim not supporting (or withdrawing support of) police action (57%). The proportion of offences resulting in victims not supporting police action is the lowest it has been since 2017/18, which is a welcome development. However, the number of charge/summons remains low, despite a small increase being seen since 2021/22.

Figure 19 shows the 4 most common outcomes for DA offences. It is not clear from the data why the majority of victims are not supporting police action, but it is clearly not unusual for victims to

do so. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services suggested that police forces need to undertake further work in order to understand the circumstances in which victims do not support police action and what additional steps can be taken to address this. In order to support a prosecution, police and prosecutors should consider pursuing evidence led prosecutions wherever possible. This is the case in Herefordshire where officers are advised to consider evidence led investigations on all DA cases where the victim is not supportive (taking into account the other evidence available). Officers have access to a toolkit on the WMP intranet and the college of policing provide advice and investigation strategies.

The most common outcome for DA offences is recorded as 'evidential difficulties; victim does not support police action', but there has been a recent increase in 'victim supports police action but evidential difficulties prevent further action'

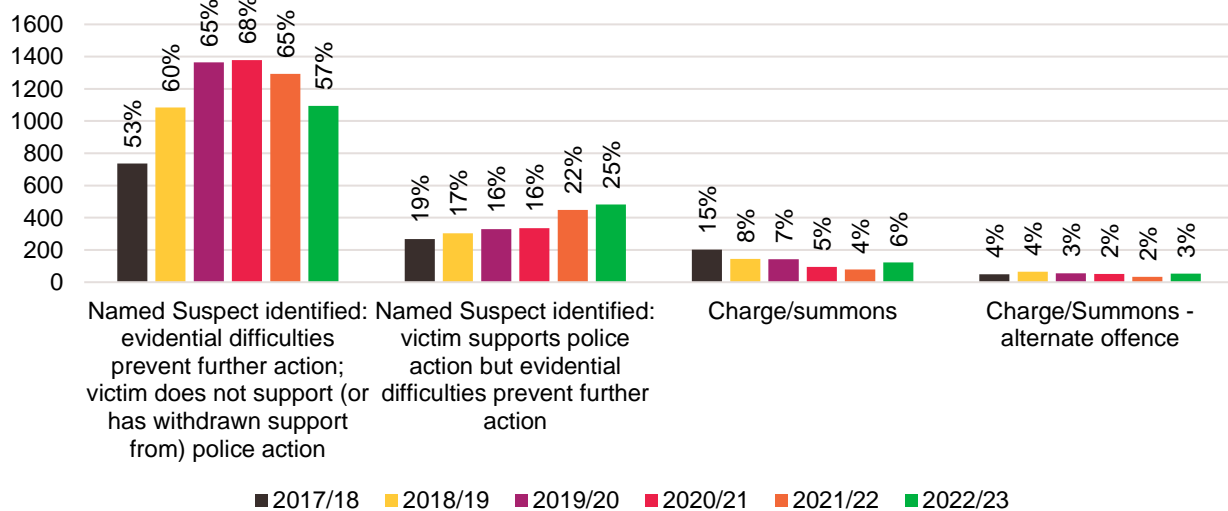


Figure 19. Top most common outcomes of offences recorded by West Mercia Police in Herefordshire

## Domestic abuse offences by area

Prevalence of Domestic Abuse Incidences and Offences Compared to County Average in 2022/23

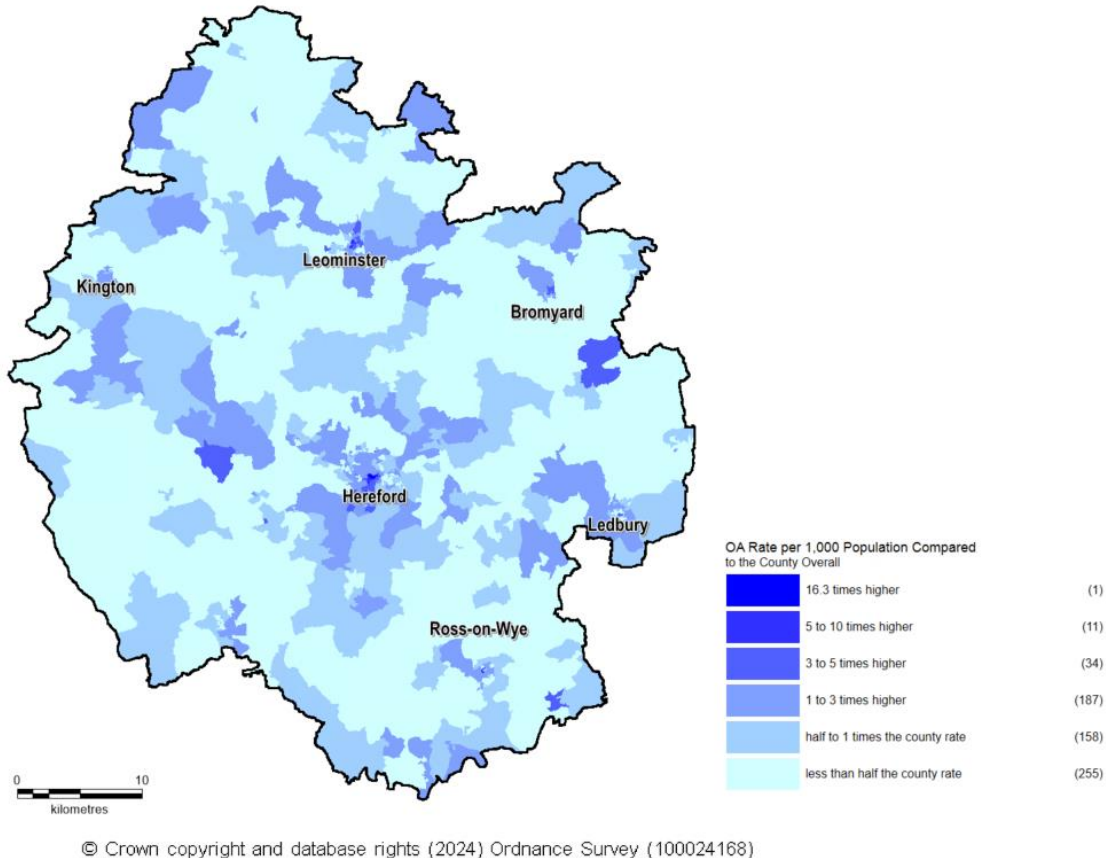


Figure 20. Map showing levels of police reported DA incidents/offences around Herefordshire compared with the county as a whole.

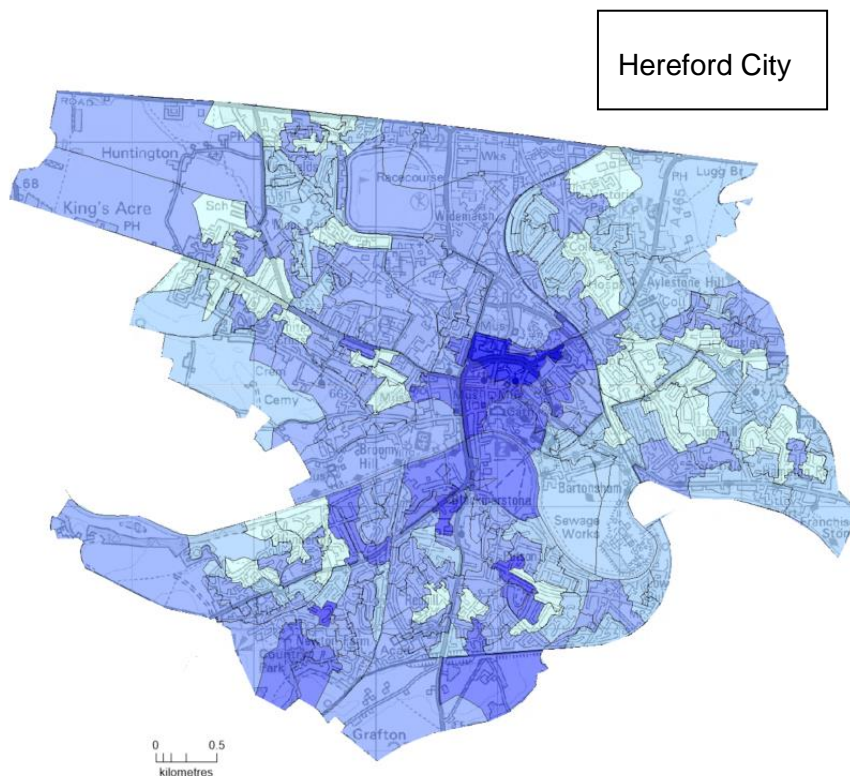
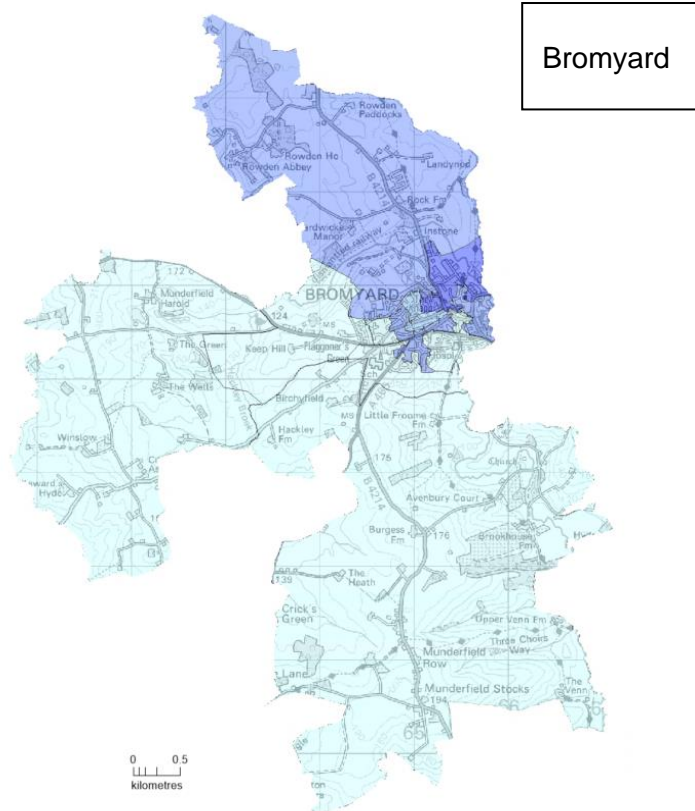
Levels are defined by the proportion of addresses within an Output Area (OAs) where a police reported incident or offence has been committed, between April 2022 and March 2023.

Over half (51%) of OAs with levels that are twice or more than the average for Herefordshire are located in Hereford city; followed by around 16% in Leominster, 8% in Ledbury, 6% in Ross-on-Wye and 5% in Kington. The remaining 13% are dotted randomly around the county. Of particular note, there has been a significant increase in the number of incidences and offences recorded in Leominster compared to last year (9% to 16%).

The highest level was recorded in Hereford City Centre, which had rates over 16 times the county average (the only area with rates above 10 times the county average). This area largely consists of commercial properties, including shops, pubs, restaurants and the railway station. Offences and incidences are recorded at the location of where the incidence/offence takes place rather than the home address of the victim or suspect, so this may suggest that a number the incidences/offences are occurring not in the home, but instead when out. Other areas with notably high rates (above 5x county rate) include the John Kyrle area of Ross-on-Wye, areas of South Leominster and areas of South Hereford.

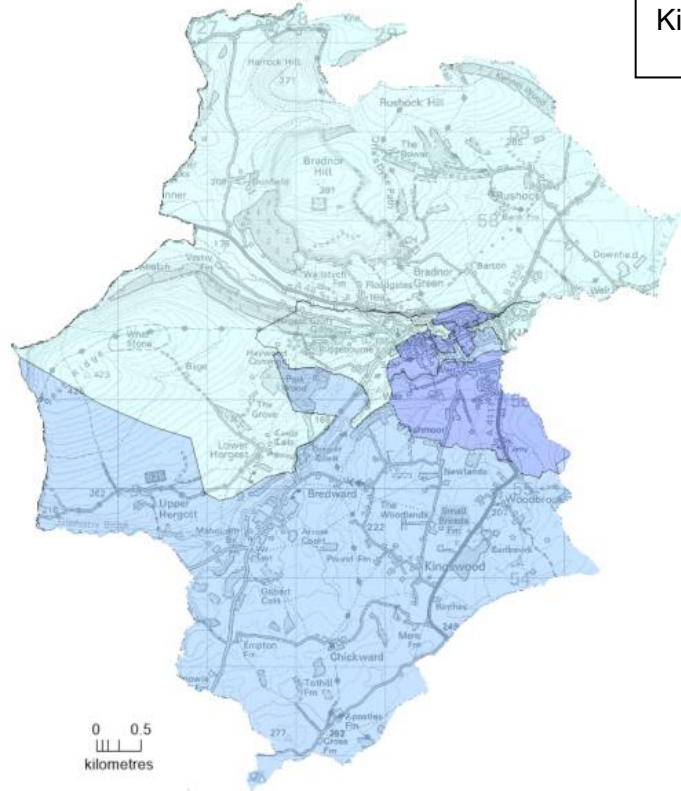


The below figures show a map of hotspots of DA incidences and offences prevalence vs county average.

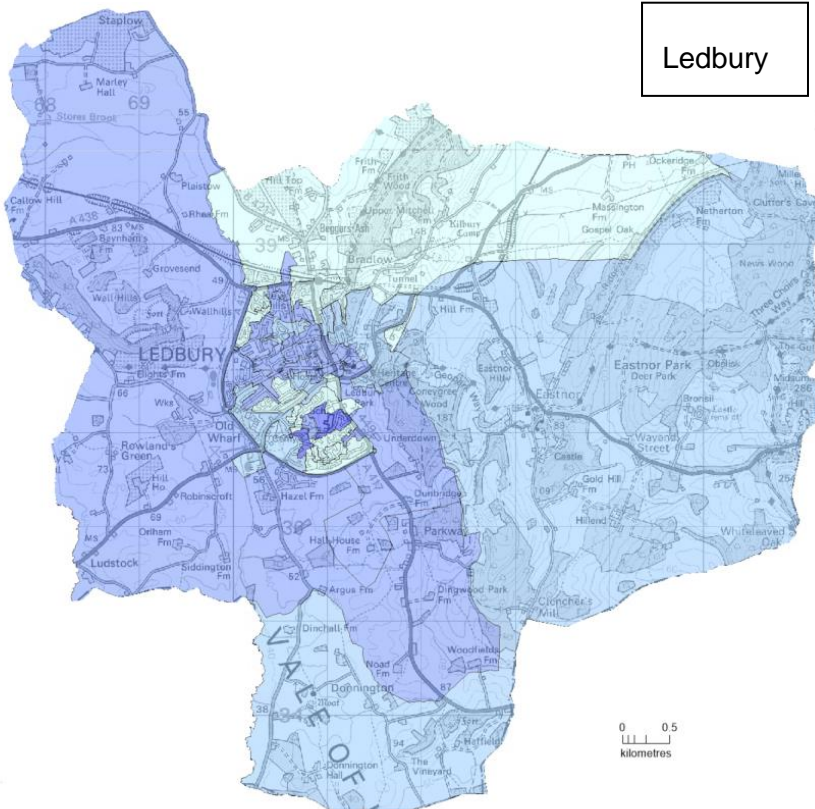


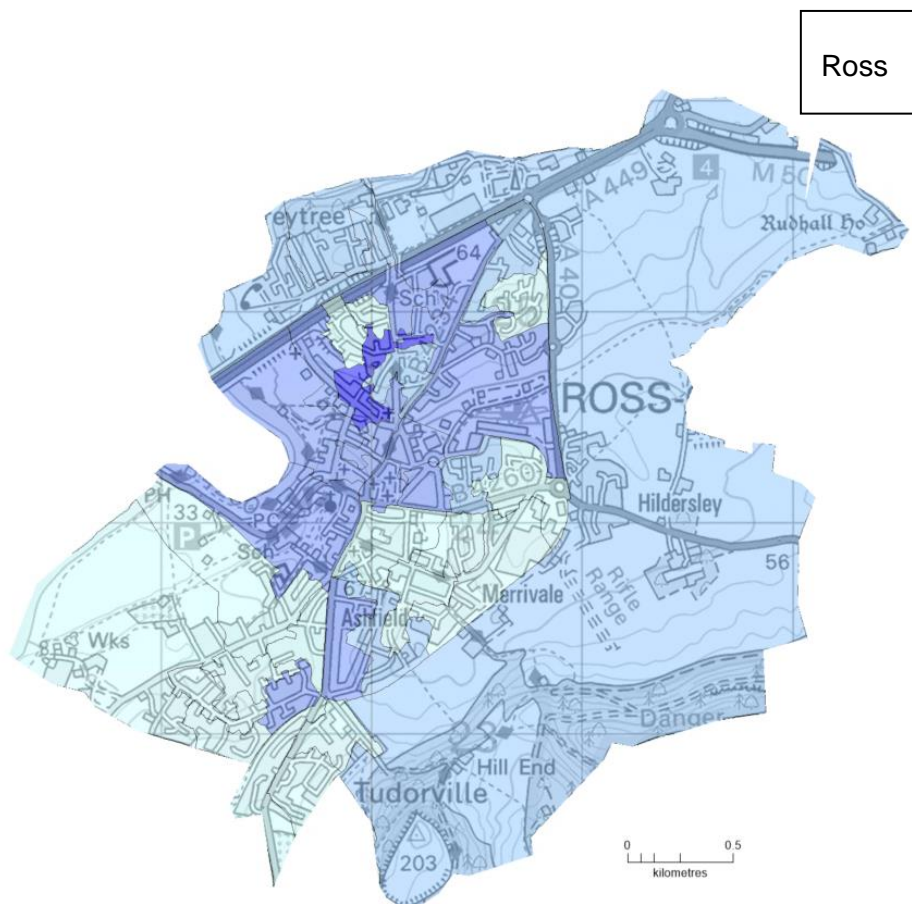
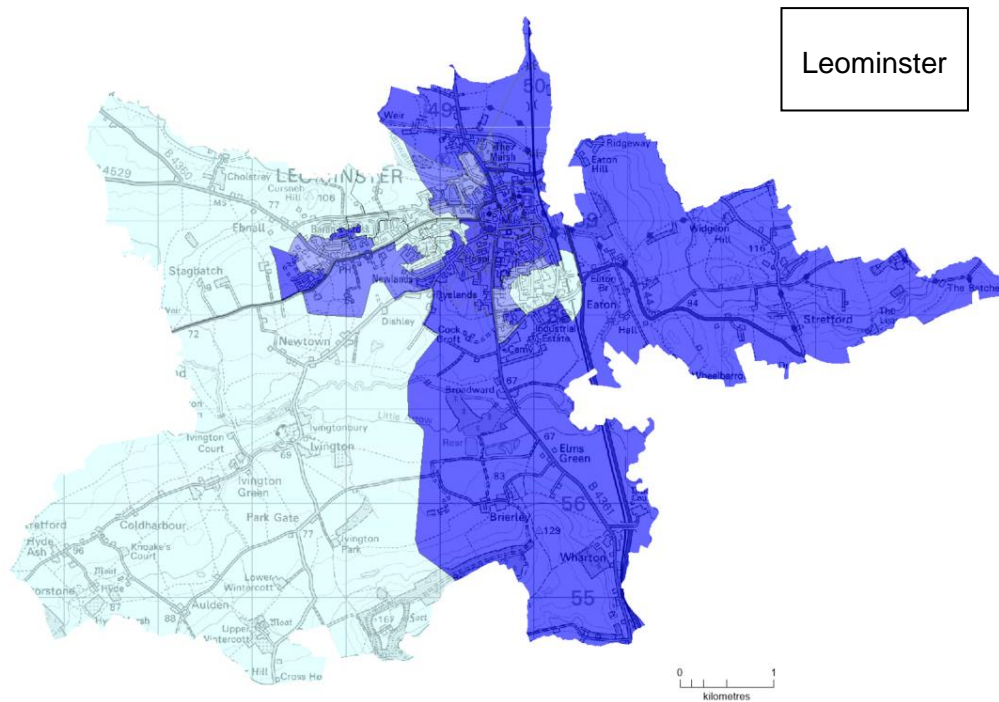


Kington

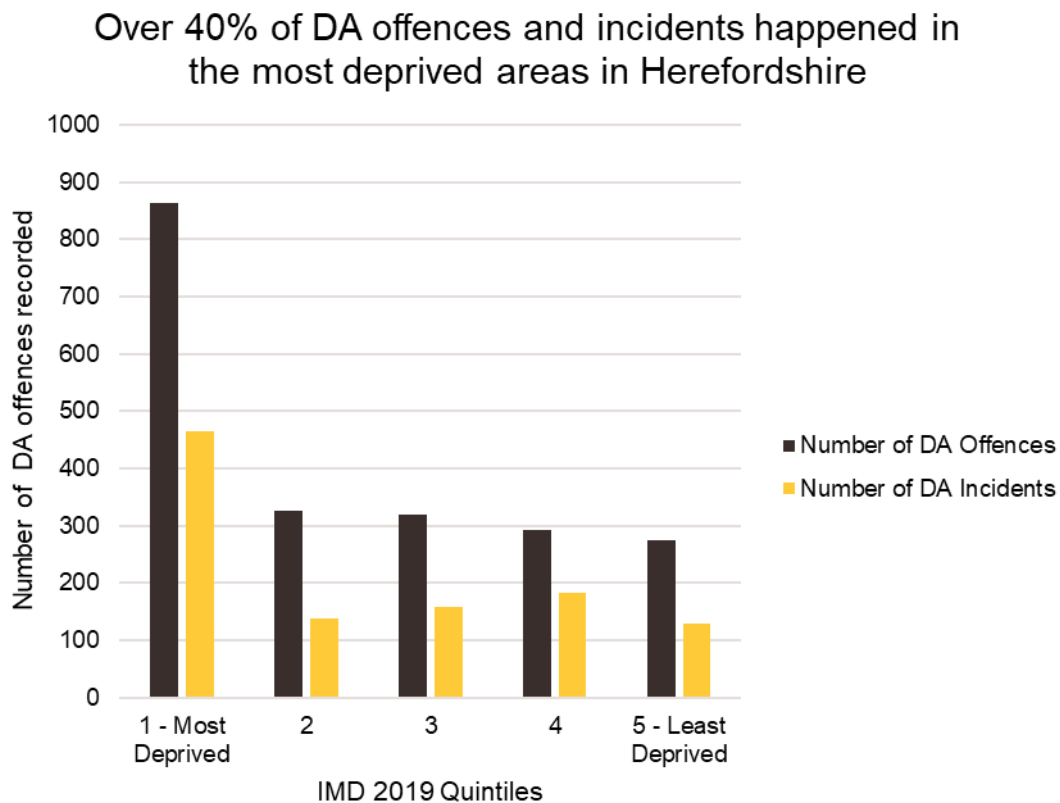


Ledbury





There appears to also be a link between DA offences and deprivation, with over 40% of all DA offences and incidents being recorded in the most deprived parts of Herefordshire, as seen in Figure 21.



*Figure 21. Number of offences with DA flag recorded in 2022/23 in Herefordshire by IMD 2019 quintile*

For context, Herefordshire has the fourth lowest population density in England, with 188,700 residents scattered all over its 842 miles. Over half (100,800; 53%) live in areas defined as 'rural', with the majority of these (81,400 people; 43% of the total) in the most rural 'village and dispersed' areas. A third of the population live in Hereford city (61,900 people), and a fifth in one of the five market towns – Leominster (11,900), Ross (11,100), Ledbury (9,600), Bromyard (4,700) and Kington (3,200). The rural nature of Herefordshire and pockets of isolation are challenging in terms of access to services and understanding the prevalence of domestic abuse.

The National Rural Crime Network issued a report on [domestic abuse in rural](#) areas in 2019. The report highlighted the commonalities and differences between rural and urban experiences based upon a comprehensive examination of the impact of rurality on domestic abuse victims and services. The key findings were as follows:

- Abuse lasts, on average, 25% longer in rural areas.
- The policing response is largely inadequate.
- The more rural the setting, the higher the risk of harm.
- Rurality and isolation are deliberately used as weapons by abusers.
- Close-knit rural communities facilitate abuse.
- Traditional, patriarchal communities control and subjugate women.
- Support services are scarce – less available, less visible and less effective.
- Retreating rural resources make help and escape harder.
- The short-term, often hand to mouth funding model has created competing and fragmented service provision.
- An endemic date bias against rural communities leads to serious gaps in response and support.

## Domestic homicides

A Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) means a review of the circumstances in which the death of a person aged 16 or over has, or appears to have, resulted from violence, abuse or neglect by— (a) a person to whom he was related or with whom he was or had been in an intimate personal relationship, or (b) a member of the same household as himself/herself, held with a view to identifying the lessons to be learnt from the death.

The purpose of a DHR is to:

- a) establish what lessons are to be learned from the domestic homicide regarding the way in which local professionals and organisations work individually and together to safeguard victims;
- b) identify clearly what those lessons are both within and between agencies, how and within what timescales they will be acted on, and what is expected to change as a result;
- c) apply these lessons to service responses including changes to inform national and local policies and procedures as appropriate;
- d) prevent domestic violence and homicide and improve service responses for all domestic violence and abuse victims and their children by developing a co-ordinated multi-agency approach to ensure that domestic abuse is identified and responded to effectively at the earliest opportunity;
- e) contribute to a better understanding of the nature of domestic violence and abuse; and
- f) highlight good practice.

Police data for Herefordshire in 2022/23 recorded no homicides where DA was a factor.

Herefordshire's Community Safety Partnership received one referral for a Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) between April 2022 and March 2023. This review is on-going and further details relating to this case will not be provided within this report to preserve the anonymity of the individuals involved. Lessons learnt from the DHR will be shared with organisations across the county once the review has been completed. They will also be used to inform the action plan for the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board.

## Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme - Clare's Law

Clare's Law, or the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS), enables the police to release information about any previous history of violence or abuse a person might have.

Under Clare's Law you can:

- Apply for information about your current or ex-partner because you're worried they may have a history of abuse and are a risk to you (right to ask).
- Request information about the current or ex-partner of someone you know because you're worried they might be at risk (right to know).

*Table 2. DVDS data from West Mercia Police in 2023*

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Right to ask</b>	<b>Right to know</b>
Number of DVDS applications received in 2023	188	134	54
Number of applications which resulted in disclosure in 2023	75	49	26
Number of applications which did not result in disclosure in 2023 (Non-Disclosure)	59	46	13
Number of applications which were withdrawn in 2023	54	39	15
Reasons applications were withdrawn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The applicant or person at risk has indicated that they don't require the information because they have left the relationship and have no intention of resuming or having any further contact.</li> <li>- The person at risk has declined the information.</li> </ul>		
Other reasons for non-disclosure	The only other reason for non-disclosure is self-explanatory in that there is no previous history to disclose.		

- The above figures demonstrate that 40% of the total DVDS applications received in 2023 resulted in disclosure (37% of right to ask and 48% of right to know applications).
- 31% of the total DVDS applications did not result in disclosure as there was no previous history to disclose (34% of right to ask and 24% of right to know disclosures).
- 29% of the total DVDS applications were withdrawn (29% of right to ask and 28% of right to know disclosures). This could be for a variety of reasons, for example, the applicant or person at risk has indicated that they don't require the information because they have left the relationship and have no intention of resuming or having any further contact or the person at risk has declined the information.



- It is evident that there is a significant difference in the number of disclosures delivered when the application is based upon a right to know request as opposed to a right to ask request. This may be due to the fact that the majority of right to know requests are submitted by professionals who may already have prior knowledge of a perpetrator's DA offending history.

These figures are generally in line with those provided by the West Mercia police force and national figures for the year ending March 2023:

- 50.2% of 'Right to Know' applications resulted in disclosure in West Mercia (105 of 209) and 42.4% of 'Right to Know' applications resulted in disclosure nationally (7,609 of 17,925), compared to 48.1% in Herefordshire (26 of 54).
- 31.6% of 'Right to Ask' applications resulted in disclosure in West Mercia (215 of 681) and 35.8% of 'Right to Ask' applications resulted in disclosure nationally (9,829 of 27,419) compared to 36.6% in Herefordshire (49 of 134).

### **Domestic Violence Protection Notices and Domestic Violence Protection Orders**

Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs) and Domestic Violence Protection Notices (DVPNs) were rolled out across all 43 police forces in England Wales from 8 March 2014. DVPOs are a civil order that fills a "gap" in providing protection to victims by enabling the police and magistrates' courts to put in place protective measures in the immediate aftermath of a domestic violence incident where there is insufficient evidence to charge a perpetrator and provide protection to a victim via bail conditions. It is important to note that bail with conditions and protective measures can be used simultaneously to build up greater protection for the victim.

A DVPN is an emergency non-molestation and eviction notice which can be issued by the police, when attending to a domestic abuse incident, to a perpetrator. Because the DVPN is a police-issued notice, it is effective from the time of issue, thereby giving the victim immediate support. Within 48 hours of the DVPN being served on the perpetrator, an application by police to a magistrates' court for a DVPO must be heard. A DVPO can prevent the perpetrator from returning to a residence and from having contact with the victim for up to 28 days. This allows the victim a degree of breathing space to consider their options with the help of a support agency. Both the DVPN and DVPO contain a condition prohibiting the perpetrator from molesting the victim.

- Data shared by West Mercia Police show that from April 2022 to March 2023, three DVPNs and three subsequent DVPOs were issued/granted.
- These numbers are particularly low due to a number of issues which have since been addressed by the central team within Herefordshire (for example, magistrates and judges not authorising these orders where there were bail conditions already in place).
- Following these efforts, numbers have increased substantially with data from April 23 to Feb 24 showing that a total of 35 DVPNs were issued and a total of 29 DVPOs.

### **Probation:**

West Mercia Probation Service was unable to provide the data required for the time period requested (April 2022 to March 2023). They did, however, share the data below which represents the DA picture for Herefordshire Probation at the time the data was shared (29/02/2024):

*Table 3. DA data provided by Probation on 29/02/2024*

Cases recorded with at least one DA flag	199
Cases flagged as DA victim	21
Cases flagged as DA perpetrator	172
Cases flagged as DA history	36
Individuals with a requirement or condition to complete the Building Better Relationships (BBR) programme	30
Number of individuals who have completed the BBR programme in the past 12 months	8

### Recommendations:

- As outlined above, most domestic abuse offences in Herefordshire which resulted in no further action were recorded as 'evidential difficulties - victim does not support police action', with a recent increase in 'victim does support police action but evidential difficulties' also preventing further action'. As such, further efforts should be made to explore this in more depth including ways in which to reduce these numbers.
- Regarding DA in a rural context, several important recommendations have been provided by the National Rural Crime Network Report (2019) to include:
  - Services and commissioners must analyse demand by postcode in future, using a common definition of rurality to develop a meaningful dataset, ensuring prevention and intervention work is also targeted at areas where there is apparently little demand – this report strongly indicates there will be demand, just hidden. Crime data provided within this report can be utilised to achieve the above.
  - Education and outreach must be prioritised and must focus on symptoms and patterns of abuse. Greater education and awareness is needed in rural areas regarding the warning signs of domestic abuse and the ability to act or help a victim to act. GPs and religious groups like church communities are the most likely allies in rural areas. Access and reference to Clare's Law, the right to ask, needs to be made more public in rural areas so that victims know they have an option to revert to. Resources need to be freed up to allow an effective awareness campaign to be provided to rural communities which target the recognition of behaviours symptomatic of domestic abuse. We believe that bringing symptoms into the spotlight is more effective than talk about domestic abuse per se.

- Domestic Abuse Service Commissioners need to proactively consider servicing rural communities. Incidence rates for domestic abuse are slightly higher in urban areas as evidenced by the CSEW - 4.6% in urban areas vs 3.9% in rural areas. Commissioners have an obligation to take a data-led approach to plan service provision, but for Commissioners with significant rural areas there must also be an obligation to ensure that data adequately represents the potential for domestic abuse cases in rural areas. With the knowledge that rural victims are half as likely to report incidents, outreach activity should be directed at low incidence or no incidence areas. Efforts should be made to look at where reporting of abuse is not happening, as well as where it is. I.e. are there very low incidences in some areas for no apparent reason and are there demographics and deprivation indices would suggest there should be more incidents?

These recommendations will be integrated into the domestic abuse new action plan which will form part of the new Domestic Abuse Strategy.

## Health and Adult Social Care Data

### Health

#### General Practice

The following data was provided by Taurus, the GP practice federation in Herefordshire for the time period from April 2019 to March 2023.

The figures are counts of when a GP records a code relating to DA on a patient's record, a list of the codes can be found in Appendix A.

There was a marked increase in the number of patients with a recorded DA code in 2021/22 across all age groups, but the figures fell in 2022/23 to the levels recorded in 2020/21. This could be that face to face GP appointments resumed and that they were able detect DA amongst their patients which was not the case in 2019/20 when the majority of the appointments were conducted online or via telephone. The number of patients with mental ill health and also

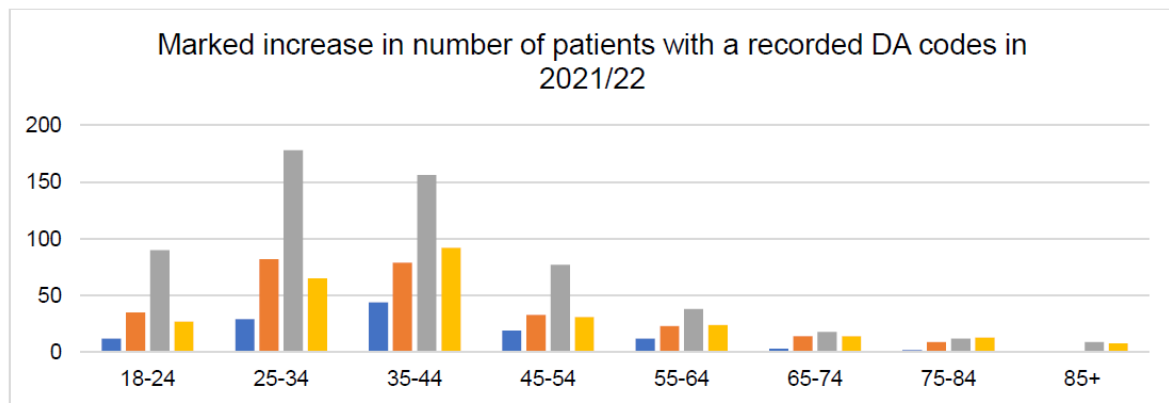


Figure 22. The count of DA codes recorded by GPs in Herefordshire by age group and by year, 2019-2023

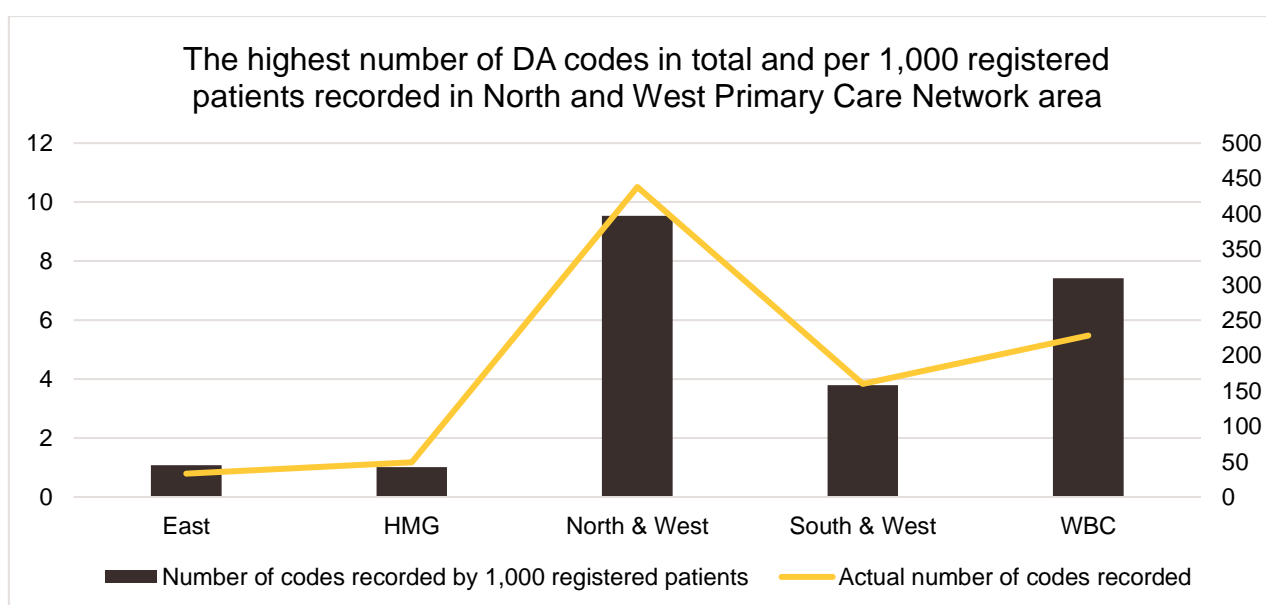


recorded with a DA code has doubled between 2021/22 and 2022/23 although in context the numbers are small.

Around 45% of patients who were recorded with DA code live in an area that is in the top 25% most deprived areas in Herefordshire.

GP practices are working together with community, mental health, social care, pharmacy, hospital and voluntary services in their local areas in groups of practices known as primary care networks (PCNs). These enable greater provision of proactive, personalised, coordinated and more integrated health and social care for people close to home. There are five PCNs which cover the whole of Herefordshire and a small area of the bordering county of Worcestershire. Three that cover more rural areas and market towns; East Herefordshire, North West Herefordshire, South West Herefordshire, and two based in Hereford City; Hereford Medical Group (HMG) and Wargrave, Belmont and Cantilupe (WBC).

According to Figure 23 the highest number of DA codes recorded per 1,000 registered patients were recorded by GP practices in the North and West primary care network (PCN) areas over the last four years (from April 2019 to March 2023). In particular, The Ryeland surgery in Leominster (one of the GP practices included in North & West PCN) recorded the most DA codes. It may be helpful to investigate further as to why this is the case. The IRIS programme has been piloted in Herefordshire during 2023//24; IRIS is a specialist DA training, support and referral programme for GP surgeries. It is anticipated that this will positively impact the recording of DA whilst ensuring that GP surgeries have the skills and resources needed to support victims of domestic abuse to access specialist services.

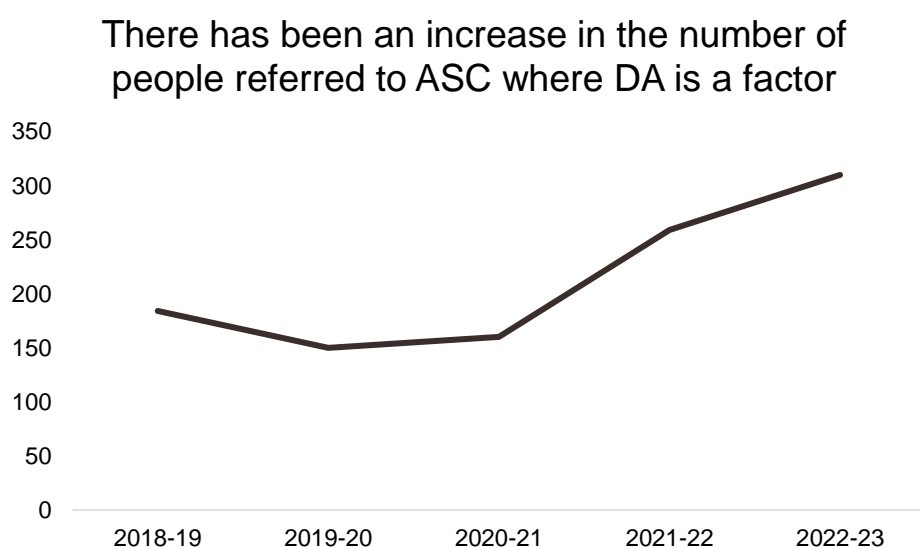


*Figure 23. The count of DA codes recorded by GPs in Herefordshire by PCN*

## Adult Social Care

There are two ways of recording DA in Herefordshire Council's adult social care safeguarding referral recording system. One way of recording domestic abuse is ticking 'DA' box from a list of 'type of abuse'. And the other way is flagging DA as a factor when recording other types of abuse. In 2022/23, 1,588 people were referred to adult social care, 310 of these individuals referred had DA flagged as a factor, and a further 3 people were referred where domestic abuse was the abuse type but DA was not flagged as a factor. Referrals where DA was the abuse type or where DA was flagged accounted for 20% of the people referred to adult social care in 2022/23.

In 2022/23 there has been an almost two-fold increase in the number of people referred to ASC where DA is recorded as a factor compared to 2020/21, as can be seen in the graph below.



*Figure 24. The number of people referred to ASC where DA is a factor between 2018 and 2023*

In 2022/23, psychological/emotional abuse was cited as a source of abuse for 60% of people who were referred to ASC where DA was flagged. People can be referred for more than one type of abuse which is why the number of people referred for each abuse type adds up to more than the total number of people referred.

*Table 4. The type of abuse cited in people referred to ASC where DA was flagged.*

Abuse Type	Number of people referred for this type of abuse	% of people referred for

		this type of abuse
Psychological/Emotional	187	60%
Physical	134	43%
Domestic Abuse	121	39%
Financial and Material	104	34%
Neglect and Omission	52	17%
Self Neglect	47	15%
Sexual	23	7%
Sexual Exploitation	8	3%
Discriminatory	6	2%
Modern Slavery	4	1%
Organisational	4	1%
Total number of people referred to ASC where DA is a flag	310	

Since there have been people physical

2018/19, been fewer referred for abuse

where DA is flagged, but an increase in the number of people who are referred for financial and material abuse.

Referrals to ASC can come from numerous different sources, with 21 potential sources listed in the data, although the numbers of referrals from each source can vary considerably. Between 2018/19 and 2022/23, most referrals came from Wye Valley Trust (16%), however, there has been a considerable increase in the number of referrals coming from the police since 2021/22, rising from 5% of people referred in 2020/21, to 14% of people referred in 2022/23. The table below shows the 10 most common sources of referral for people referred to ASC where DA is flagged, which account for 99% of all people referred between 2018/19 to 2022/23.

*Table 5. Source of referrals to ASC where DA is flagged between 2018 and 2023*

Source of referral	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	Grand Total

WVT - Acute	23	27	29	33	41	146
Other	23	20	21	44	39	139
Family Member	25	9	24	29	36	120
Social Care staff	16	23	12	42	29	118
Police	6	3	8	31	43	85
Health - other	9	10	12	22	34	84
Provider - Dom Care	11	15	11	15	13	59
GP	11	9	5	13	23	59
WVT - Community	15	10	13	8	14	58
Housing	13	8	11	10	15	54

## MARAC

SafeLives describes Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) as *“a meeting where information is shared on the highest risk domestic abuse cases between representatives of local police, health, child protection, housing practitioners, Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs), probation and other specialists from the statutory and voluntary sectors. After sharing all relevant information they have about a victim, the representatives discuss options for increasing the safety of the victim and turn these into a co-ordinated action plan. The primary focus of the MARAC is to safeguard the adult victim. The MARAC will also make links with other fora to safeguard children and manage the behaviour of the perpetrator. At the heart of a MARAC is the working assumption that no single agency or individual can see the complete picture of the life of a victim, but all may have insights that are crucial to their safety. The victim does not attend the meeting but is represented by an IDVA who speaks on their behalf.”*

There were 231 DA cases discussed at MARAC's between April 2022 and March 2023. This equates to 30 cases per 10,000 population, which is relatively low compared with national figures (49) but high compared with the West Mercia area (24) (Domestic Abuse in England and Wales, ONS, 2023).

There has been a notable increase in the number of cases discussed at MARAC – Figure 25. Alongside this overall increase in cases, the number of children in households of MARAC cases has been increasing too. The average number of children in households per case discussed in

Herefordshire during 2022/23 was 1.7; compared with 1.3 nationally, 1.2 for MSFs and 1.4 for the West Mercia policing area.

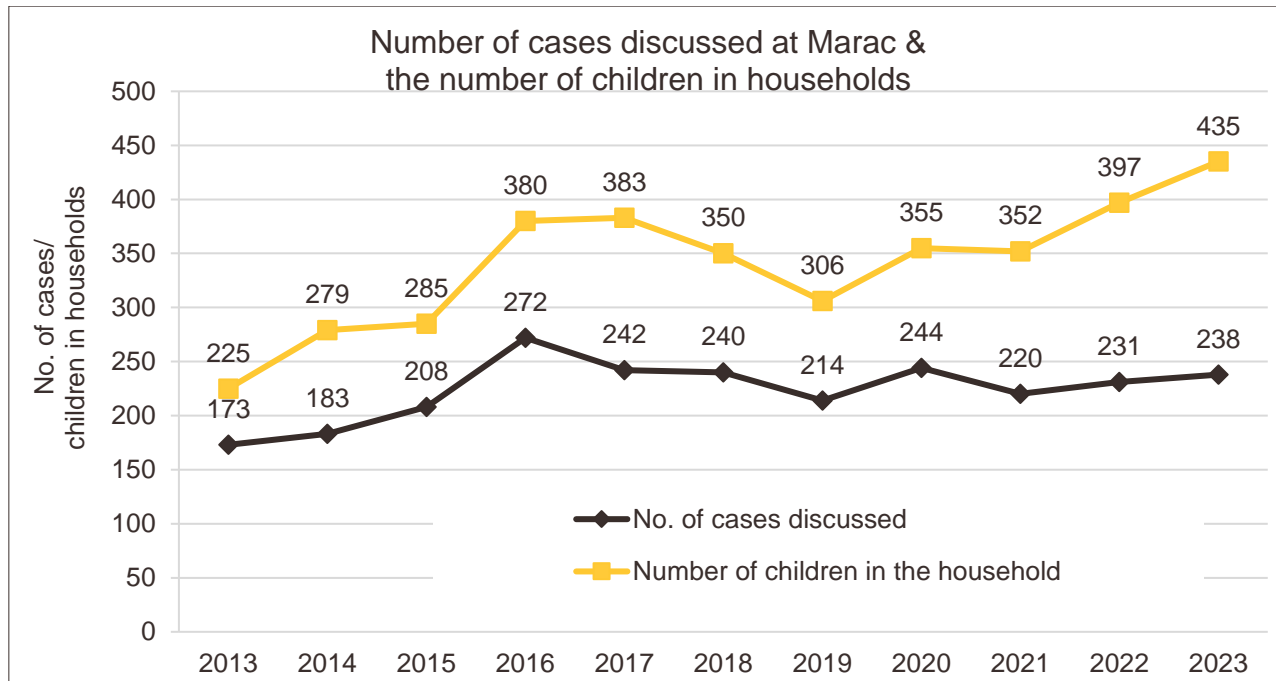


Figure 25. The number of cases discussed at MARAC and the number of children in households discussed at MARAC between 2013 and 2023.

Of the total number of cases discussed at MARACs in 2022/23, 17.75% (41) were repeat cases. Herefordshire's repeat cases figure is significantly lower than the national (33%), MSFs (30%) and West Mercia policing area (25%) figures.

There has been a continuous increase in the number of high-risk domestic abuse cases discussed in MARAC over the last 10 years, with the large majority of referrals (63%) coming from the police followed by the IDVA service. In terms of police referrals specifically, this is slightly less than the national (66%) but equivalent to West Mercia figures (63%).

### 63% of MARAC cases were referred by the police

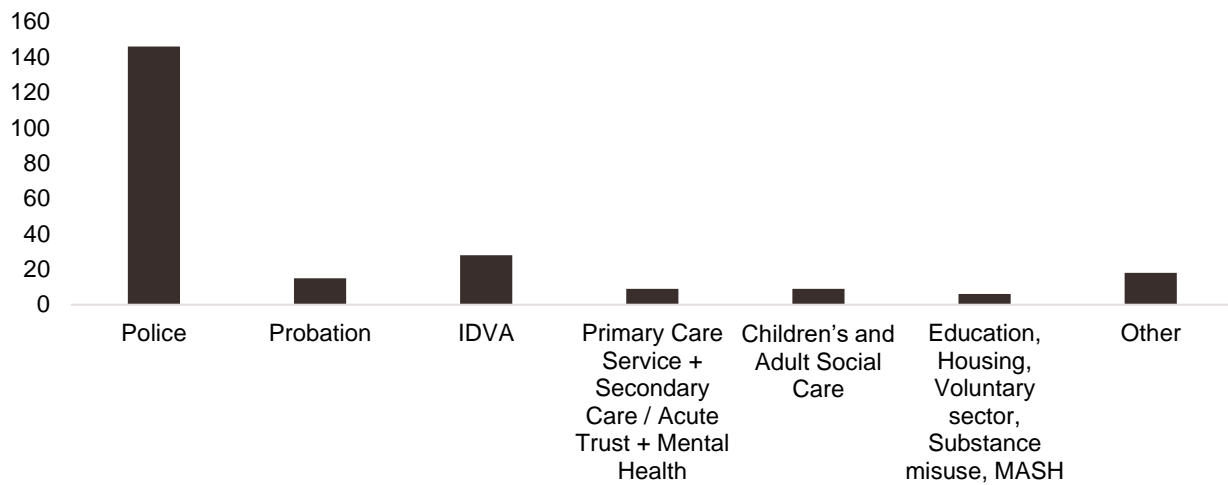


Figure 26. The source of MARAC referrals, 2022-2023

There were fewer victims aged 16-17 years in the cases discussed in Herefordshire MARAC meetings (0.9% of all cases) compared to other areas; 1.3% nationally and 2.2% in the West Mercia police force area.

### Nearly 60% of survivors heard at MARAC were aged 25-44

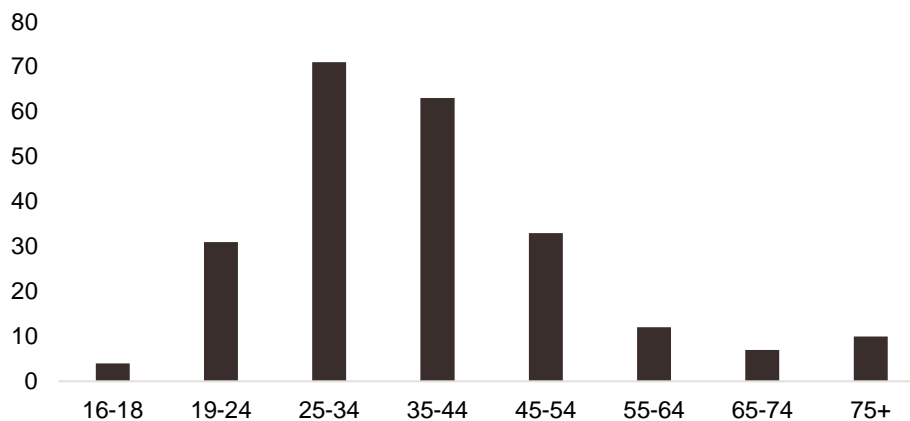


Figure 27. Age profile of victim/survivors discussed at MARAC in the 2022-2023 time period

Whilst data relating to the 2022/23 period specifically is not available for the following demographic factors, data relating to the year 2022 is provided.

Just 0.4% of cases involved a person from an LGBTQ+ group (compared to 1.4% nationally).

There were fewer male victims recorded in Herefordshire (4.8%) compared with national data (6.2%) but the figure for Herefordshire was higher than that of MSFs (4.4%) and the West Mercia police force area (3.4%).

In 2022, 10% (33) of cases discussed at MARAC were from an ethnic minority group (compared to 16% nationally). When compared to ethnicity makeup of the county (3.1% ethnic group other than White), this is a higher representation.

Data was requested regarding the relationship between the victim/survivor and perpetrator of the cases heard at MARAC, however, this was not available.

### **Practitioner engagement: Feedback from the 2023 SafeLives Report (interview and survey feedback from professionals)**

- 76% felt the MARAC Greatly or Somewhat improved the safety of victims
- 79% felt the MARAC Greatly or Somewhat improved the safety of children
- 60% felt the MARAC Greatly or Somewhat addresses the behaviour of those who harm
- Professionals frequently commented on MARAC working well. They referred to MARAC chairing, governance, as well as agencies generally seeing the value in it.
- Lack of attendance was referenced in regards to key people missing or reduced capacity, possibly resulting in inconsistent attendance and sending in of information. One professional pointed out how the lack of key individuals with knowledge meant insufficient challenge was available.
- Repeat cases were also highlighted as a concern.

Feedback provided by professionals in relation to MARAC:

*“The MARAC is well run and works well, it is effectively chaired by someone with great experience and is well attended by professionals.”* Professional, Domestic Abuse Service.

*“More awareness for professionals needed from MARAC and to understand why some cases don't go/aren't applicable to go to MARAC.”* Professional, Voluntary or community sector

*“I think referral could be scrutinised more and other options discussed for cases not quite meeting the criteria. I have witnessed MARAC's being full a month before they happen. How can this be a response to a high-risk victim if they have to wait to get on to an agenda?”* Professional, Domestic Abuse Service

*“Training to provide the right attendees to Multi Agency meeting to share relevant information”.* Professional, Domestic Abuse Service

### **MARAC themes and reflections from the SafeLives review**

- The nine core agencies were present during the observed meeting, with the exception of substance misuse service.
- Some good action planning was observed.
- Risk identification around animals and subsequent actions was impressive.
- Children's social services were present but represented by a multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) lead. This process should ideally be reviewed to ensure all relevant

information and action planning can be as effective as possible; thus being represented by a senior manager within CSC. There was a significant lack of actions from this agency.

- Statutory housing representation demonstrated best practice from this core agency at MARAC.
- Action planning was not SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timely) in the majority of the cases.
- Issues around identification of the primary victim and person who harms was demonstrated, which potentially was caused by a lack of domestic abuse knowledge and confidence.
- Too much historic information and duplication of information.
- The chair displayed skill and empathy; with examples of intervention which would not have occurred without this person.
- Overall conscious and unconscious victim blaming and judgement, was peppered throughout the cases. This was compounded by a couple of cases overtly displaying compassion for the person who harms and not the victim, for example, language and terminology highlighted empathy for the perpetrator at the expense of displaying detrimental language towards the victim. The victim did not engage and used substances, thus little time was spent on her needs/wants and safety planning, as agencies overall felt her too difficult.
- There appeared to be a large emphasis on the victim providing disclosure and engaging without agencies being proactive to support them achieving this.
- Lack of victims' voice and institutional challenging in the room in many cases.
- Use of laws such as stalking and harassment and coercive control appeared to be missed.
- Lack of preparation by many representatives.
- No representatives gave bespoke timings according to risk with their actions.

#### **Recommendations:**

- To address the above improvements as identified by the SafeLives review.
- There needs to be a clearer focus on addressing the behaviours of those who harm within MARAC.
- Improvements in data collection are needed for future needs assessments. Specifically around certain demographic factors and the relationship type between victims and perpetrators.
- The number of cases discussed at MARAC in Herefordshire where victims are from an ethnic minority group, LGBTQ+, disabled or male are very low. CSEW data suggests that DA is actually more prevalent in people with disabilities and those who are from the LGBTQ+ community. This suggests that there are likely to be unseen disabled and LGBTQ+ victims and efforts should therefore be made to promote services to people with protected characteristics.

## **Non-Accommodation Based Domestic Abuse Service Provision**



## **Victim/Survivor Services**

### **The IDVA Service**

WMWA IDVAs are specialist trained Domestic Abuse safety workers who support people who are at high risk of immediate and significant harm from domestic abuse. IDVAs work with both male and female victims/survivors across Herefordshire.

IDVA's are specialist workers providing a lifeline for victims at a time when they are most vulnerable, supporting them in making their own decisions to preserve their well-being. IDVAs provide both emotional and practical support and information, enabling them to make their own choices about the action that they wish to take in order to promote their long-term safety. IDVA services in Herefordshire are predominately funded by the Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia.

IDVAs work closely with a range of organisations to help victims to get the best possible support, and to ensure that the support is well coordinated. IDVAs are independent of all statutory agencies and advocate specifically for the victims of domestic abuse, ensuring that their voice is heard by the other agencies that are working to support them. Client confidentiality is guaranteed unless there is a safeguarding concern, and will only be reviewed if the IDVA feels that they need to share information about concerns for someone's safety.

In 2022/23, 193 people were supported by the IDVA service in Herefordshire.

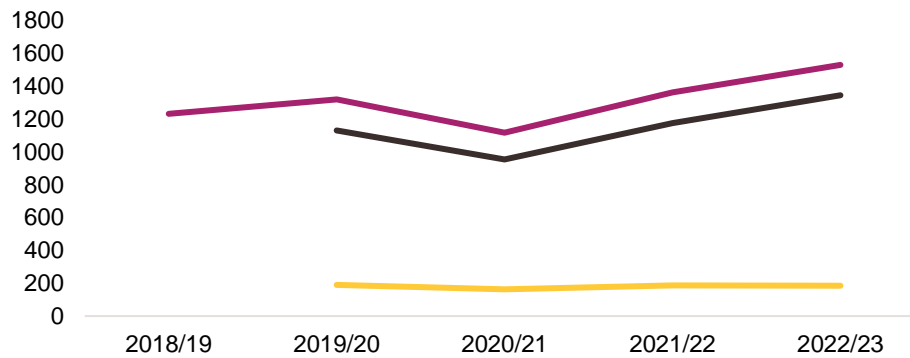
#### Professional feedback – Interviews (SafeLives Report):

IDVAs were spoken of highly. Their presence at MARAC meetings, interactions with victims, and their ability to be easily contacted were all identified as positives for both staff and victims.

### **West Mercia Women's Aid**

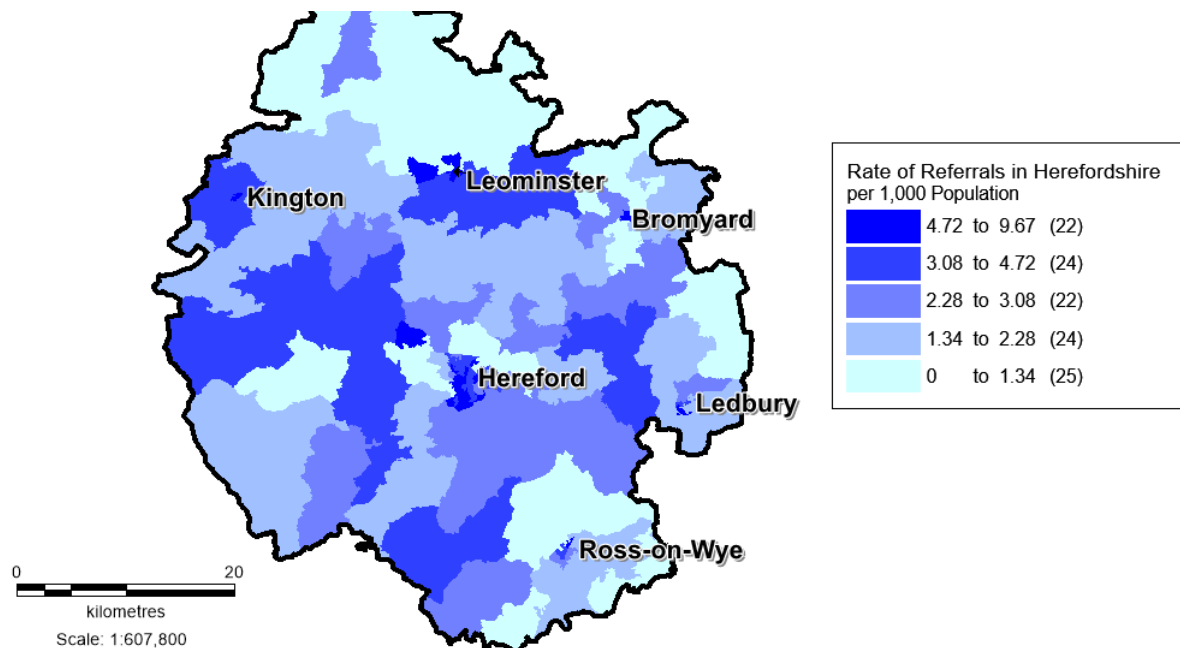
- 1,530 referrals in total for 2022/23 with 88% (1,345) of referrals being for adult services. Most referrals for adult services were either self-referral (62%) or internal referral (25%) with a small number coming from other sources including Children's Services (4%), Health Services (2%) and Police (2%).
- 165 adult referrals were refused, the most common reasons for refusal were: other (30%); unable to contact client (20%), no space/capacity to support (16%) and client does not want support (15%).
- Just over half of the referrals received were for helpline support (679), 448 referrals were for group support (33%), 7% were for refuge (98) and the remaining 9% of referrals were split between the extended housing support project, 1-2-1 support (complex needs and marginalised communities) and Men & Boys.
- WMWA supported 1,078 adult service users in 2022/23 in Herefordshire.

Referrals for children and young people has been stable but there has been an increase in referrals for adults since 2020/21



#### Rate of Referrals to West Mercia Women's Aid in 2022/23 in Herefordshire per 1,000 Population

Figure 28. Number of referrals to WMWA adult and CYP services between 2018 and 2023.



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Figure 29. Rate of referrals to West Mercia Women's Aid in 2022/23 in Herefordshire per 1,000 population

Between April 2022 to March 2023, Hereford South West had the most referrals to WMWA per 1,000 residents at 7 referrals per 1,000 residents, followed by South Leominster and Hereford South (5 & 4 per 1,000 residents respectively). Penyard, Llangarron & Goodrich and Colwall, Cradley & Wellington had the fewest referrals with fewer than 2 referrals per 1,000. The data shows that whilst

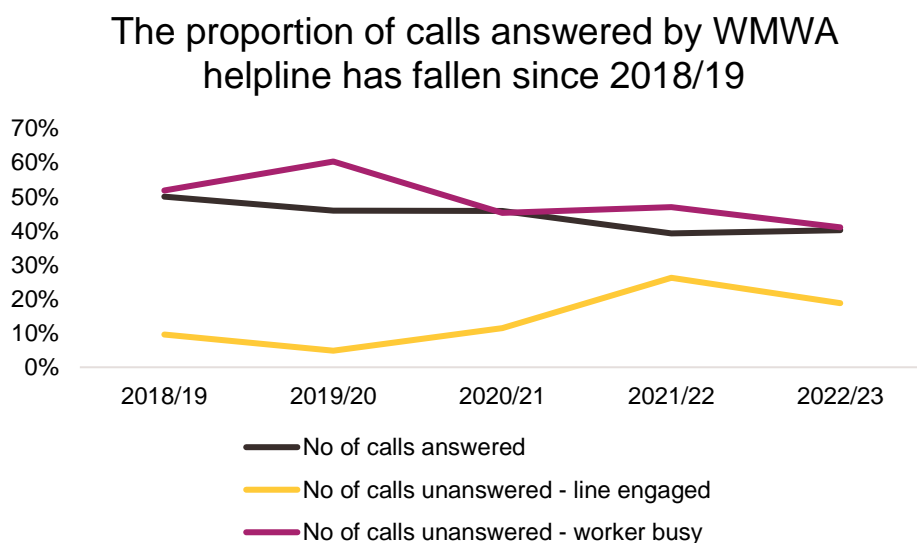
WMWA did receive referrals from across the county, most referrals came from Hereford and Leominster.

- WMWA helpline

WMWA Helpline is both the main ‘front door’ of WMWA services, and a service in itself. All calls are kept confidential unless there are concerns for someone’s safety. Trained workers will support anyone who calls the Helpline – providing information and advice on safety planning, reporting to the Police, housing, and access to both WMWA services and those of other agencies. Sometimes the most effective thing they do is just to listen, and believe, and let callers know that they are not alone and that there is help out there for them – as and when they are ready.

WMWA received 1,785 calls to their Herefordshire helpline in 2022/23, 75% of these calls were repeat contact and 25% were first contact.

WMWA received 3,002 calls to their helpline across Herefordshire and Shropshire in 2022/23 although 553 calls were hung up before the system transferred calls. Of the remaining 2,449 calls, 40% were answered, 41% were unanswered due to the worker being busy and 19% of calls were unanswered due to the line being engaged. Please note that WMWA have changed their helpline resourcing model since this time.



*Figure 30. The proportion of helpline calls answered by WMWA, 2018-2023.*

- The Recovery Pathway Group Programmes

WMWA’s ‘Recovery Pathway’ is a programme of safe and welcoming groups that help survivors to build their own knowledge and confidence, and to help and support each other on their recovery journey. Groups include the Freedom Programme, Power to Change and Recovery Toolkit and a programme to support parents where children have been affected. When groups are unable to meet, then WMWA provide support over the

telephone or through online forums. Support is available to women living in their own homes or in temporary accommodation, and for those at all stages of an abusive relationship – whether they are still in the relationship or have left. All groups are conducted within strict rules of confidentiality, respect and kindness. Bringing together women with a common experience of domestic abuse also helps to develop a network of survivors who can continue to support each other long after the Recovery programme has concluded.

Number of referrals received to group programmes during the 2022/23 period: 448  
Group service users completing programme of support during the 2022/23 period:

- Number of Service Users who completed programme of support = 171
- Number of Service Users who did not complete programme of support = 147

## **Perpetrator Programmes**

### **Risk factors for domestic abuse perpetration**

Research has suggested that particular factors are associated with an increased risk of perpetrating domestic abuse. It is key to note that these ‘risk factors’ are not causal, rather they are factors which have been associated with domestic abuse perpetration. In other words, their presence does not cause domestic abuse but can make it more likely to occur.

It is also important to recognise that risk factors exist across multiple levels of influence - *individual, relationship, community and societal* – and there is often a complex interaction between these factors, as well as those which would be considered protective.

A summary of the key risk factors for domestic abuse perpetration, as outlined in the academic literature (Clemmow et al., 2023; Morrison et al., 2022; SafeLives, 2019), are provided below:

- Attitudes and behaviours – hostility towards women, misogynistic and patriarchal beliefs, permissive attitudes towards violence, attitudes that condone or normalise domestic abuse.
- Adverse childhood experiences – exposure to violence during childhood (including witnessing domestic abuse within the home) and/or direct experience of abuse during childhood.
- Mental health problems – depression, anxiety, personality disorders, suicidal ideation/attempts.
- Substance misuse – drug and alcohol abuse.
- External factors – recent stress, financial difficulties, unemployment, criminal peers.

Research has suggested that the underlying drivers for domestic abuse perpetration differ for men and women (Clemmow et al., 2023). There is very limited evidence regarding risk factors for perpetrators of domestic abuse against older adults, which is a key area of focus within Herefordshire (Bows et al., 2022).

It is key to gain an understanding of the role that such factors can play in order to inform early intervention efforts aimed at reducing the likelihood of an individual perpetrating domestic abuse (for example, via preventative programmes delivered within schools).

- DRIVE programme
  - The Drive Project is a collaborative approach to tackling domestic abuse, by liaising with police officers, support agencies, caseworks and directly with those presenting abusive, challenging and violent behaviour. Drive provides a case manager who acts as a single point of contact for perpetrators. This project focuses on high risk and serial perpetrators, in order to encourage more engagement with recovery programmes and tackle the greatest risk of harm. Referrals to the Drive programme either come from MARAC via partner agencies or directly from the police.
  - According to the case management system for Hereford Drive, between 01 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, there were:
    - 62 cases allocated
    - 62 cases completed
    - 62 victims/survivors provided with services
    - 141 children and young people involved
  - These figures are higher than the 2021/2022 time period where 52 cases were allocated and only 16 completed.
  - The University of Bristol undertook an independent, three year, evaluation of the Drive Project during its first phase of delivery (2016-19). The evaluation concluded that the Drive Project reduces abuse and the risk perpetrators pose.
- Men and Masculinities programme
  - The Men & Masculinities programme is an evidence based programme that provides a safe space for people who have engaged in abusive, harmful and damaging behaviour within their relationships. The 24-week programme is voluntary and explores what it means to display appropriate behaviour within relationships and highlights how conflict, aggression and anger can deeply impact the lives of others. Importantly, the programme also offers a linked (ex-) partner support service.
  - Between April 2022 and March 2023, 42 men attended the Men and Masculinities programme in Herefordshire, with 20 completing the programme.

### **Practitioner engagement: Local support provision for victims and families – Feedback from the 2023 SafeLives Report**

As part of their review of the domestic abuse system in Herefordshire, SafeLives carried out a survey and interviews with practitioners working across the domestic abuse system and victims.

- Three quarters of respondents (75%) described it as easy or very easy to share information with other agencies and refer to specialist domestic abuse services.
- Two in ten respondents (22%) felt it was difficult or very difficult to find services that could help them.

Professionals were asked the following question: When you identify a victim or family is experiencing domestic abuse, what do you usually find to be the biggest challenges in ensuring they get the support they need?

- Responses identified victim-survivor engagement as the greatest challenge due to lack of trust in services, perpetrator behaviour, and maintaining support.
- Comments on funding, capacity, and waiting lists were also identified as challenges in ensuring support with professionals providing the following quotes:

*“Lack of funding for one-to-one support for victims deemed as low- medium risk. Waiting lists also for services, highlighted for a number of services.”*

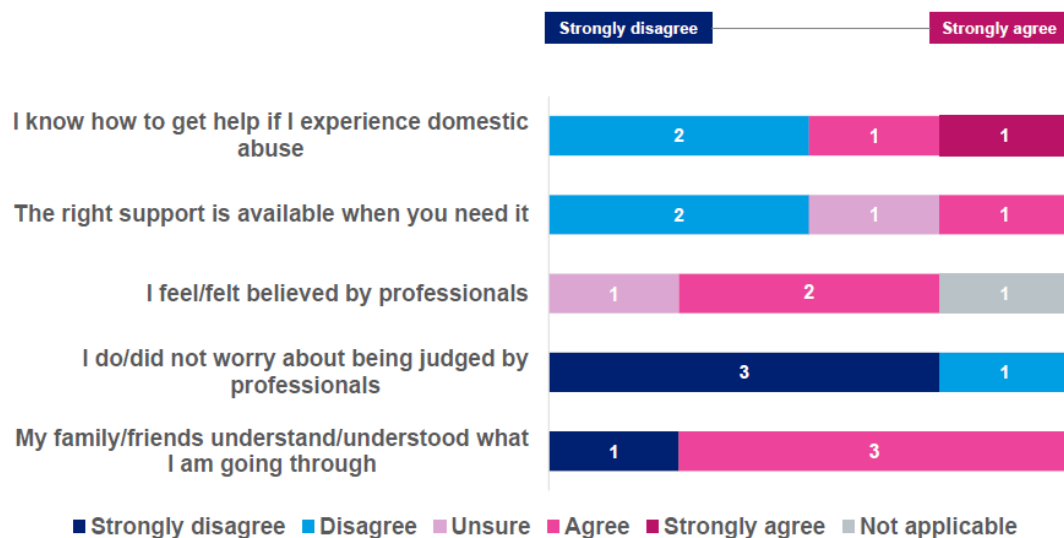
*“Lack of resources across voluntary and statutory agencies, lack of housing, lack of 1-2-1 community support.”*

*“The shortage of services available for the numbers of individuals and families affected. How far people might have to go to access refuge support and the impact this has on theirs and their children’s’ lives.”*

### Survivor engagement: Victim/Survivor Survey and Interviews (SafeLives Report 2023)

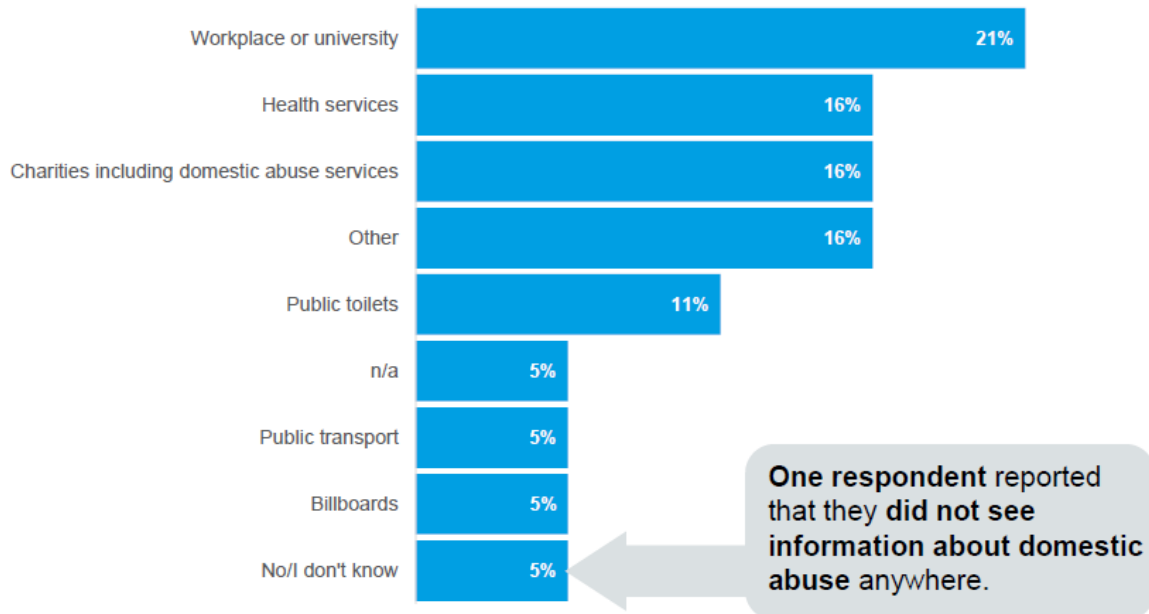
#### Experience of seeking help

Respondents rated how much they agreed with the following statements:



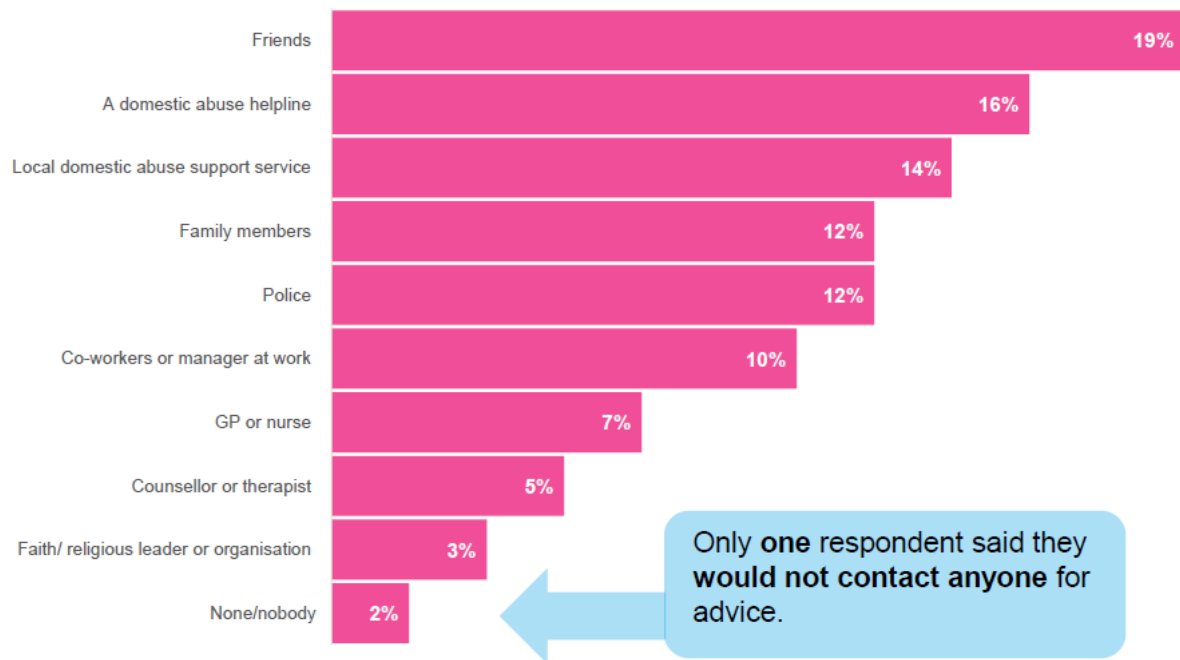
#### Awareness of domestic abuse support

In the local area, respondents most commonly had seen information about domestic abuse in workplace or place of study, followed by health services, charities, and other spaces.



#### Preferred support and services for victims

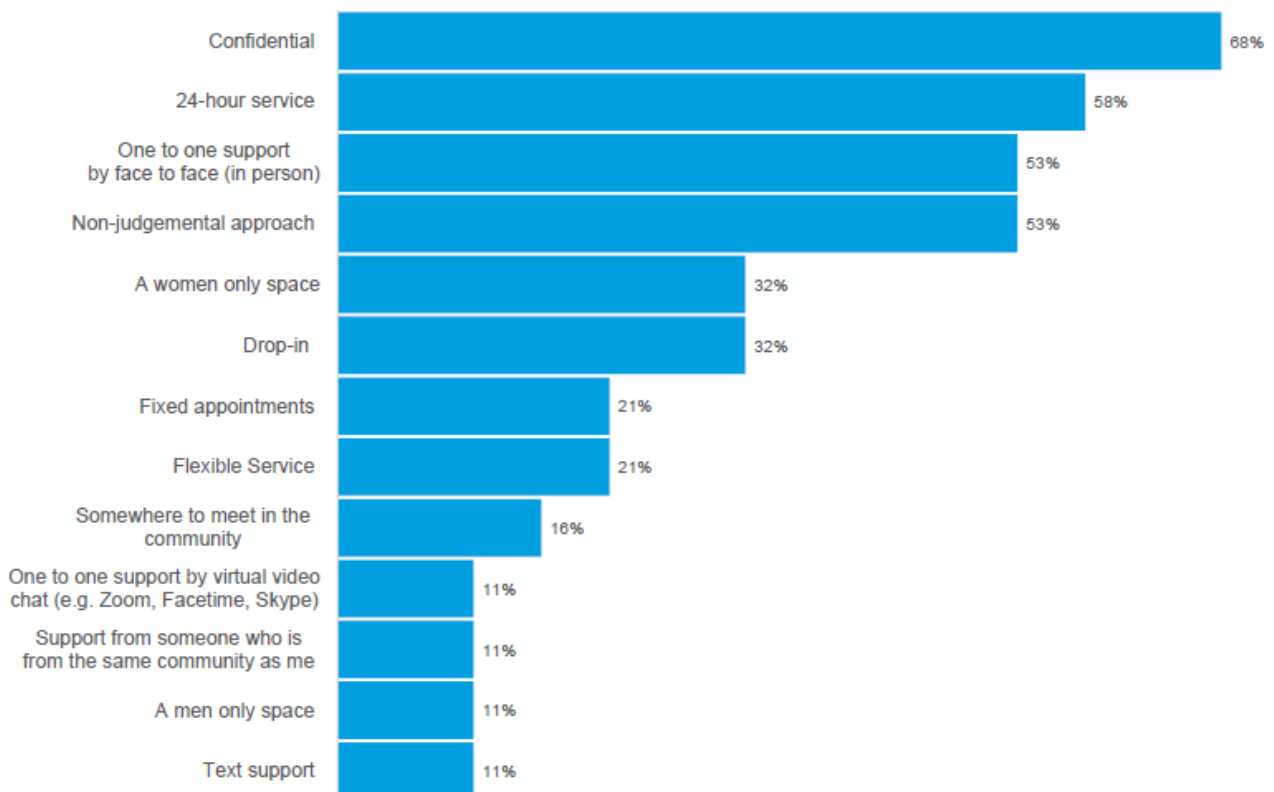
Respondents would most likely contact friends, a domestic abuse helpline or a local domestic abuse support service for advice if they experienced domestic abuse in the future.



### Preferred support and services for victims

It was most important to respondents that support was confidential, a 24-hour service, in person, and non-judgemental.





### Recommendations:

- Regarding support for victim/survivors in the community – Work needs to be undertaken to address the perceived lack of support for low-medium risk clients and the waiting lists for these services.
- Consideration needs to be given to the operating model of the helpline; only 40% of calls were answered.
- Feedback from those with lived experience showed that some were unsure of how they could get help if they were experiencing DA. As such, on-going efforts should be made to raise awareness of the support services available and how to access these by engaging with the community using a variety of methods.
- In addition, further efforts need to be made with regards to improving understanding of DA across public-facing agencies to ensure they provide effective responses (for example, by facilitating appropriate referrals into specialist services). This can be addressed via the provision of effective and accessible training.
- Following on from the above, understanding and working to improve referral numbers from external agencies to specialist DA support services. For example, those provided by WMWA as only 4% of referrals were received from social care, 2% from health services and 2% from the police.

# Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation

In this section we will be looking at service mapping, noting the safe accommodation that currently exists in Herefordshire. Much of the data obtained was provided by the local safe accommodation services who provided information on the services they provide.

## Safe accommodation provision

Herefordshire currently meets recommended minimum number of refuge spaces based upon the Council of Europe's recommendation of one unit\* of safe accommodation per 10,000 population.

According to the latest ONS Census data from mid-2021, the population of Herefordshire was 187,600, meaning a minimum of 19 units of safe accommodation is required within the county.

During the 2022/2023 time period, Herefordshire offered 19 units of safe accommodation in total, as outlined below:

- A 10 unit refuge provided by WMWA
- 9 units of dispersed safe accommodation provided by Connexus in partnership with WMWA
- Additional units of dispersed safe accommodation were commissioned during this period but were not in full use (4 units).

*\*One unit refers to accommodation for one person or one person and their children. Units can vary in size and the number of children they can house. In Herefordshire, all 19 units are self-contained accommodation.*

It is important to note that those seeking safe accommodation often access a refuge outside of their local area due to the potential risks associated with remaining in the area they originally resided in. In addition, they are largely dependent on where refuge spaces are available at the time, meaning they may have to access safe accommodation in a different area to where they originally presented. As such, it is difficult to quantify local demand given that refuges are a national provision and current figures indicate that there is a national shortage in the number of units of safe accommodation available based upon the recommendations provided by the Council of Europe, as outlined below.

*Table 6. The recommended number of safe accommodation units in England and Herefordshire*

	England	Herefordshire
Population (ONS Census data from mid-2021)	56,536,000	187,600
Number of units of safe accommodation	4,332	19

Recommended number of units of safe accommodation (based on the Council of Europe's recommendation of 1 units per 10,000)	5,654	19
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A particular strength of the DA housing provision within Herefordshire relates to the flexibility of the accommodation available. For example, dispersed units are available to male or female victim/survivors and several units allow pets (something that we know is a key barrier that prevents many victim/survivors of DA from accessing safe accommodation). The Pets and Domestic Abuse Survey conducted by the Dogs Trust (2019) found the following:

- 97% of professionals said pets are often used as a means of controlling and coercing someone experiencing domestic abuse.
- 9 out of 10 professionals said that some survivors won't leave their home without knowing their pet will be safe.

#### **Other DA Housing Related Services within Herefordshire:**

The aim of the following services is to ensure that victim/survivors of domestic abuse can stay in their own home by improving the safety and security of their properties. These measures can prevent homelessness and reduce the need for other forms of safe accommodation such as refuge.

- Sanctuary / Target Hardening - Provided by West Mercia Police

The aim of this scheme is to improve the safety and security of victim/survivors through the installation of target hardening measures at their home address. This can include the installation of security measures such as additional lighting and the fitting of new locks.

Target hardening is available to all high risk victim/survivors in Herefordshire where appropriate to their specific situation. The service is offered by the Design Out Crime Officer at West Mercia Police. 171 people in total received this service between April 2022 and March 2023.

- Smart Water initiative - Provided by West Mercia Police.

Smartwater is a DNA based property marking solution which has been deployed by Police forces and community safety partnerships throughout the country for a number of years. It is first and foremost a deterrent to those intent on criminality, particularly acquisitive crime. Overt signage is deployed promoting the use of SmartWater within the property and or/area. The basis for this initiative is to deploy Smartwater at the addresses of high risk victims of domestic abuse and to notify the perpetrator of its deployment as a deterrent.

The overarching principles of the initiative are:

- To improve confidence in domestic abuse victims.

- To improve the partnership approach to protecting domestic abuse victims.
- To bring offenders who continue to pose a risk to justice.

There are two types of Smartwater products being used, a basic Home Security Kit (Level 1) and for some victims also 'Smart Tag', a hand held spray device (Level 2). Both these items have their own DNA properties so are unique to the victim and their address and can be used to identify that a suspect has been in the vicinity of a victim or their home.

The first referral to this service was received on May 23<sup>rd</sup> 2022 and there were a total of 34 referrals from this date to the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023. Of these 34 referrals, 25 victim/survivors received a service from the SmartWater initiative.

West Mercia Police spoke to 15 victims who had received the SmartWater initiative and received the following feedback:

- 14 stated there had been no further incidents since the SmartWater letter was sent. There was 1 repeat incident but this was a chance meeting and the perpetrator did not attend the home address.
  - All stated that they felt safer, reassured and that their confidence in West Mercia Police had increased. They would all recommend SmartWater.
- Home Fire Safety Visits - Provided by Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service

A Home Fire Safety Visit is a free home safety visit that is tailored to an individual's needs. The visit includes a home safety check to help reduce the risk of arson in the home and to ensure victims feel safer in their own homes. This includes the checking and fitting of smoke alarms and other equipment (such as the installation of fire reduction letterboxes) where required.

Between the April 2022 and March 2023 the Fire Service received 29 MARAC referrals. Visits were successfully completed for 27 of these referrals. This consisted of 6 safe and well checks, 20 Home Fire Safety Checks and 1 equipment only visit. Two of the referrals did not result in a visit (1 was refused and 1 did not answer the door/phone).

## WMWA

### Refuge:

- There were 96 referrals for refuge in 2022/23 with 41 referrals coming from Herefordshire residents and 55 referrals coming from out of county. Of those which came from out of county, 16 came from Worcestershire, 6 from Birmingham, 5 from Telford & Wrekin, 4 from Dudley and 3 from Shropshire. Worcestershire has consistently been the source of most of the out of county referrals since 2018/19.
- Since 2018/19 there have been more referrals from out of county, however, the number of referrals from within Herefordshire has been rising since 2020/21.

### Referrals from out of area decreased in 2022/23, but referrals from Herefordshire are on an upward trend

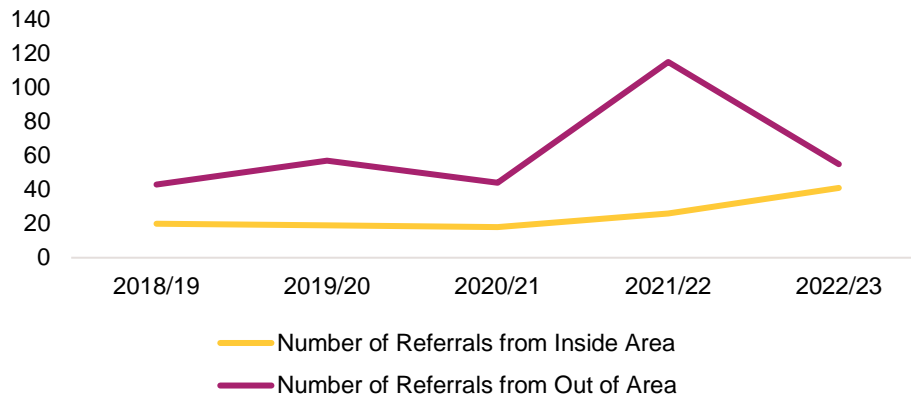


Figure 31. The number of refuge referrals from inside area and out of area from 2018 to 2023

- Of the 96 referrals in 2022/23, nearly 60% were denied with no space or clients not wanting to continue with the referral cited as the most common reasons for denial.

### Number of Unsuccessful Referrals/Access Denied. (Unable to be supported at all)



Figure 32. The number of unsuccessful referrals/access denied to refuge by WMWA, 2018-2023

- 55% of referrals between April 2018 and March 2023 were classed as medium risk, 30% as high risk and 15% as standard risk.
- Between April 2018 and March 2023, almost a quarter of referrals for refuge were self-referral and a similar number came through the local helpline.
- Referrals that came through WMWA's website were classified as either a self-referral or professional referral until 2021/22 when it was added as a distinct route for referral.

Table 7. The source of referrals to WMWA refuge between 2018 and 2023

Source of referral	April 2018-March 2023
Self-Referral	138
Local Helpline	136
Other Professional	108
Website <i>These referrals have only been logged since 2021/22, they were previously classified as self-referral or referral from a professional</i>	72
Housing	54
Police/Criminal Justice	27
Local Authority	23
Medical	8
National Domestic Abuse Helpline	0
Other	0
Total	566

- Nearly half of the people accessing refuge were previously living in social housing, 23% had come from temporary accommodation, 16% lived in other supported housing, 9% were private renters and 5% were private/owner occupiers before moving into refuge.
- The average length of stay between 2018/19 to 2022/23 was 85 days, which is similar to the average length of stay seen in 2022/23 which was 84 days.

#### Demographic composition/population features of service users accessing refuge:

- Over 70% of the people accessing refuge between April 2018 and March 2023 were aged between 25 and 44. There were no referrals for anybody aged 75+, and only 18 for those aged 55-74 of which 56% were refused. There were 7 referrals to refuge for 16-18 year olds during this time period but all referrals were declined as they are referred to Children's Social Care who would then be accommodated in suitable supported accommodation for that age group. i.e. Connexus Young Persons Service.
- Between April 2018 and March 2023 all but 1 of the people accessing refuge identified as female, during this period 2 people who did not identify as female were refused access to refuge.
- 83% of people accessing refuge were heterosexual, 15% had another sexual orientation or preferred not to disclose, and 2% identified as bisexual.

- 77% of people accessing refuge were white, 7% were Asian/Asian British, 5% Black/Black British, 4% Mixed ethnicity, 2% Gypsy/Roma/Traveller and 5% from other/unknown ethnicity.
- Between April 2018 to March 2023, there were 42 referrals for people who have a visa, are an asylum seeker, refugee or have no immigration leave/expired leave. Of these 42 referrals, 33 people with these immigration statuses were able to access refuge accommodation.
- 204 referrals were made for refuge for people who were recorded as having a disability, of which 108 were accepted, meaning that disabled people made up 49% of all people accessing refuge. 61% of the disabled people in refuge were recorded as having mental health issues, 17% had a physical disability, 12% had a learning difficulty, 7% had other long-term conditions, 2% had a visual impairment and 1% had a speech impairment or communication difficulties.

### **Pathway Mapping Examples**

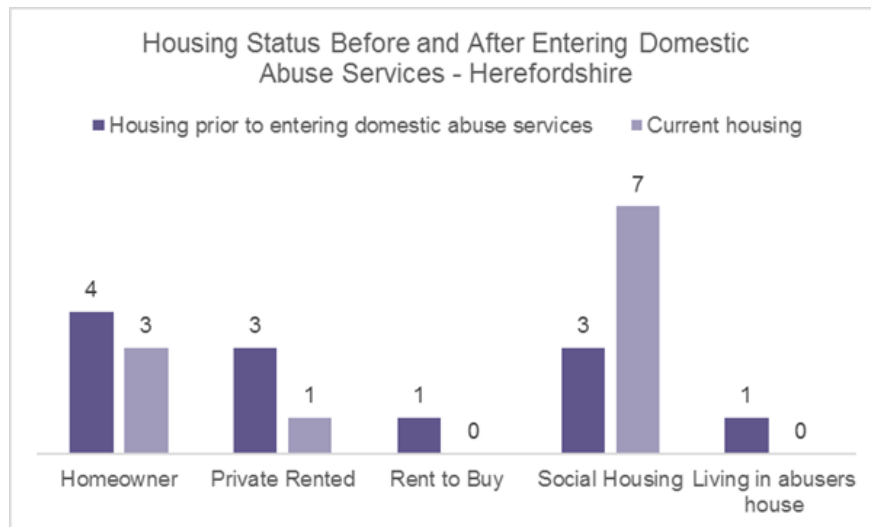
Some examples of pathway mapping for victim/survivors of DA in Herefordshire have been provided by the specialist DA organisation, WMWA. These anonymised examples explore the end-to-end journey taken by DA victim/survivors, and their children, in trying to access DA support within safe accommodation during the 2022/23 time period. This includes detailing what a pathway of support in Herefordshire looks like, from victim/survivors needing support, to accessing and receiving support and then to moving on from support. Five examples are provided within Appendix D of this report and they capture a range of victim/survivors including those with complex needs. These examples are included in order to provide context and identify some potential themes/barriers associated with accessing DA housing provision in Herefordshire.

### **Survivor Engagement - Lived Experience Advisory Group (LEAG) Housing Survey**

The first LEAG survey was produced and disseminated in June 2023. The survey focuses on feedback from those who have experienced the current Housing provision. This was distributed internally, to partner professionals, online and via the WMWA website, social media and survivor network. Further details relating to the methodology can be found in Appendix B.

The survey closed on 31st July 2023 and there were a total of 28 responses. 12 of the 28 responses were from survivors residing in Herefordshire (11 female and 1 male).

Figure shows what each Herefordshire participants' housing status was both before and after accessing support for domestic abuse.



*Figure 33. LEAG survey - Housing status of participants before and after entering domestic abuse services in Herefordshire*

The survey indicated that just over half of victim/survivors stated that they were homeowners prior to entering DA services and the majority of victim/survivors stated that they were living in social housing after entering DA services. However, it appears the largest change before and after entering DA services related to victim/survivors leaving privately rented accommodation and accessing social housing instead.

These figures demonstrate the importance of ensuring that victim/survivors have adequate access to social housing. Domestic Abuse is recognised in the Council's housing allocations scheme. There is no requirement for victims of domestic abuse to have a local connection to Herefordshire in line with statutory guidance.

Figure illustrates how survey participants residing in Herefordshire rated their experience of the housing system on a scale of 1 (Unsatisfactory) to 5 (excellent).



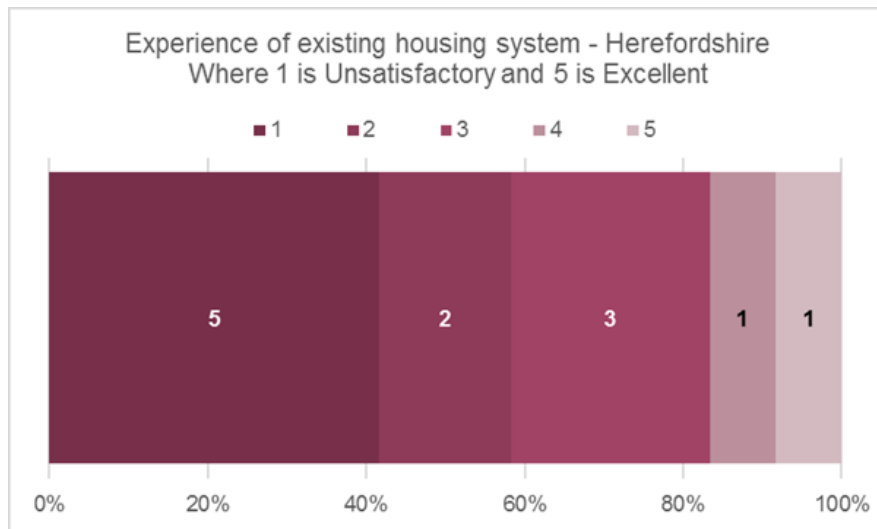


Figure 34. LEAG survey - Participants experience of the existing housing system

As outlined above, the majority of participants rated their experience as 'unsatisfactory.' The free text boxes in the following questions provided opportunity for further elaboration. When asked where gaps lie in current housing provision, participants made the following comments:

*"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."*

*"Support with process of staying in existing housing"*

There were also some suggestions made for new services that had been beneficial in other areas:

*"At a previous property in XXXX the police installed a direct line 'emergency phone' at my home and sent a specialist to assess the safety of the property. This has never been offered or mentioned in Herefordshire but would benefit so many."*

In the initial questions, participants had started to advocate for support with remaining in their existing properties. When asked about this directly 63% of respondents opted for staying in their own home rather than being supported to move to alternative accommodation (Figure ).

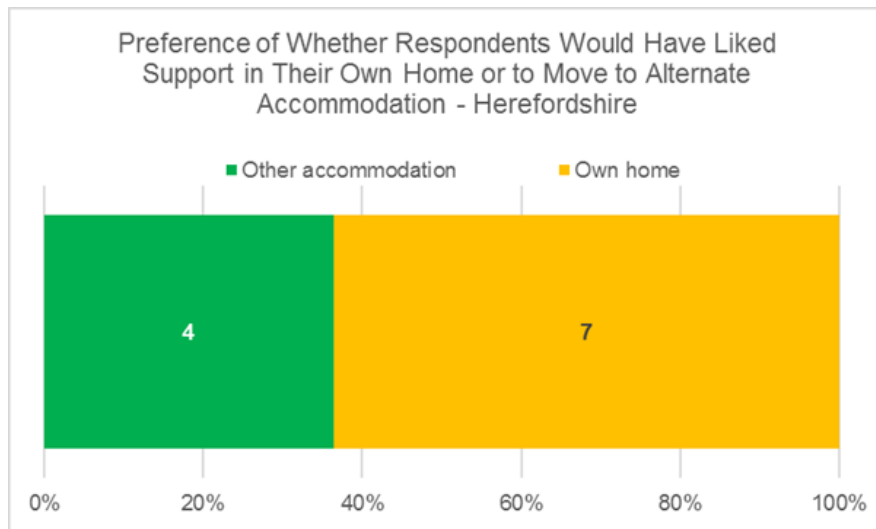


Figure 35. LEAG survey - Participants preference regarding support to stay in their own home or moving to alternative accommodation

When asked to elaborate on ways in which they could be supported to feel safer in their own homes, the following comments were made:

*“Make sure the perpetrator had restrictions in the area I live”*

*“Target hardening and police understanding coercive control better”*

*“Housing understanding more on how abuse works and providing panic alarms or safe rooms for victims if they prefer to stay in the home.”*

*“Support with making the property safer e.g., help with funding for doors, fences etc. to make it more secure.”*

### Practitioner Engagement

Email feedback was sought from practitioners working with victim/survivors and/or perpetrators of DA within Herefordshire. The specific questions asked can be found in Appendix C, however, the following themes were identified:

- Strengths of current DA housing provision

*“My thoughts based on my experiences during my health visiting career are that housing provision has progressed greatly over the last few years. Refuge provision is so much better now that survivors can move into self-contained flats rather than an old, unpleasant building based around communal-living. It's also great that there are other satellite properties in the community that survivors can utilise.”* Professional, NHS Trust.

*“[Housing Solutions Officer] really understood DA and has influenced the service provided to survivors by the Housing Solutions Team. Hopefully the new person in post will continue the good work. I always felt like I could contact [Housing Solutions Officer] directly if I was supporting a survivor and she would do her best to help the survivor. I*

*think another massive strength in Herefordshire is the amazing support provided by the three women's aid workers in XXXX refuge. Survivors gain so much from the support these workers provide to both the adult and child victims."* Professional, NHS Trust.

- Gaps in current housing provision

*"The issue always revolves around the lack of available accommodation in Herefordshire and therefore victims of DA are offered emergency accommodation in Travelodge's or similar establishments in Hereford, Worcester and Gloucester and can often be accommodated there for several weeks (months). Whilst I know their first priority should be their personal safety, it must appear to many of the victims of DA that they are being punished due to the actions of the perpetrator."* Professional, West Mercia Police.

*"I think housing is a problem in general in Herefordshire as there is short supply, so this must be impacting on the options for victim/survivors."* Professional, NHS Trust.

*"There is a real need for more available/allocated housing/flats (permanent accommodation) for victims of DA. I understand this is all down to budgets and therefore it is extremely unlikely that anything will change."* Professional, West Mercia Police.

*"The LA is placing families in hotels which should not be the case and is inappropriate. There is no cooking facilities and the family are in just one room. The stress this can cause will lead to families/women returning to the abusive relationship. Some are often placed in temp out of area which can affect support networks, school attendance, etc."* Professional, Domestic Abuse Service.

*"Sometimes, however, survivors and young children have been placed in really unsuitable properties with really unsuitable neighbours (who actually pose a risk of harm) so that hasn't always been helpful for survivors who have already left their comfortable homes. I wondered, is the need great enough to have another refuge, potentially in Ross or Leominster?"* Professional, NHS Trust.

*"My understanding is that Housing Solutions have over the last 12 months changed in the way they deal with DA victims and instead of having specialist DA housing officers, the DA cases are spread amongst the available staff. From my perspective, having staff dedicated to victims of DA was a better way of supporting victims' housing needs and allowed us the opportunity to liaise with persons who understood the needs of DA victims and were aware of the ongoing cases we were dealing with and what would assist/help the individual victim's needs."* Professional, West Mercia Police.

*"Women fleeing unable to access Homepoint if they have a mortgage. They can look at private renting but we have a lack of privates within our area, or they are unaffordable (this is another issue to add to the list). Just because someone has a mortgage it may take years for the equity to be released, for e.g., if perp seeks legal in regards to him keeping the home until the children reach a certain age. We have had this recently and a woman had to view a bedsit within a property that contained drug addicts – this adds to their vulnerability or leaves the woman to feel they have no choice but to return to the abusive relationship."* Professional, Domestic Abuse Service.

*“Storage of furniture/belongings – the Code of Guidance states that the LA should provide this but they don’t do this. This could deter a woman to leave if it means losing what they have built up over the years/losing their belongings.” Professional, Domestic Abuse Service.*

*“Housing Associations insist on applicants paying RUF (rent up front) which is generally a month. Without the VRF we would have many families unable to access social housing. They are mainly in receipt of benefits so RUF would be wholly unaffordable.” Professional, Domestic Abuse Service.*

*“Homepoint advertise properties that can only be bid on by those that have a Sec 106 Local Connection. Women fleeing from other areas won’t have the LC but would very much like to be part of a community and would use the local amenities, such as schools, shops, parks, GP, etc. This shouldn’t be a blanket policy but part of looking to the applicant’s individual situations. The team are now aware that this is being looked at.” Professional, Domestic Abuse Service.*

- Housing for perpetrators of DA

*“Whilst I think the needs of victims should always come first, if there is available accommodation for perpetrators to access away from the victim’s address, then this would make perfect sense and would help in reducing the level of risk to the victim. Once the perpetrator is away from the victim’s address then we can look at putting in the appropriate security measures to protect the victim.” Professional, West Mercia Police.*

*“Re-housing perpetrators is a tricky one. In some ways it could be helpful if the survivor wants to stay in the home. I think it is something that could be explored as I don’t feel I know enough about it currently.” Professional, NHS Trust.*

## Recommendations

- Although based upon a small number of participants, it is evident from both the quantitative and qualitative data provided above that the majority of victim/survivors who responded to the survey would have preferred to remain in their own homes as opposed to accessing other accommodation. It is also clear that access to target hardening was considered particularly important in terms of supporting victim/survivors to feel safer in their own homes.

This is further supported by a report by the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner (Senker & Scott, 2020) which highlighted that many victims want to remain in their own homes, and feel that being the one that has to leave is an additional “punishment”.

Whilst each situation will be unique, efforts should be made to allow victims to stay in their home if this is their wish and it is safe to do so.

Further work could be undertaken here to understand and map the current pathways in place for the Sanctuary Scheme. However, it is relevant to note that during the time period this Needs Assessment relates to (2022-2023), target hardening was offered by the Design Out Crime Officer at West Mercia Police only. More recently, additional funding was secured for 2 years in 2023 to add capacity to the sanctuary scheme in

Herefordshire. The additional capacity is being delivered through the Councils You at Home Service who will be installing the sanctuary equipment. Data in relation to the provision of this service will be included in the refresh of next year's DA Needs Assessment.

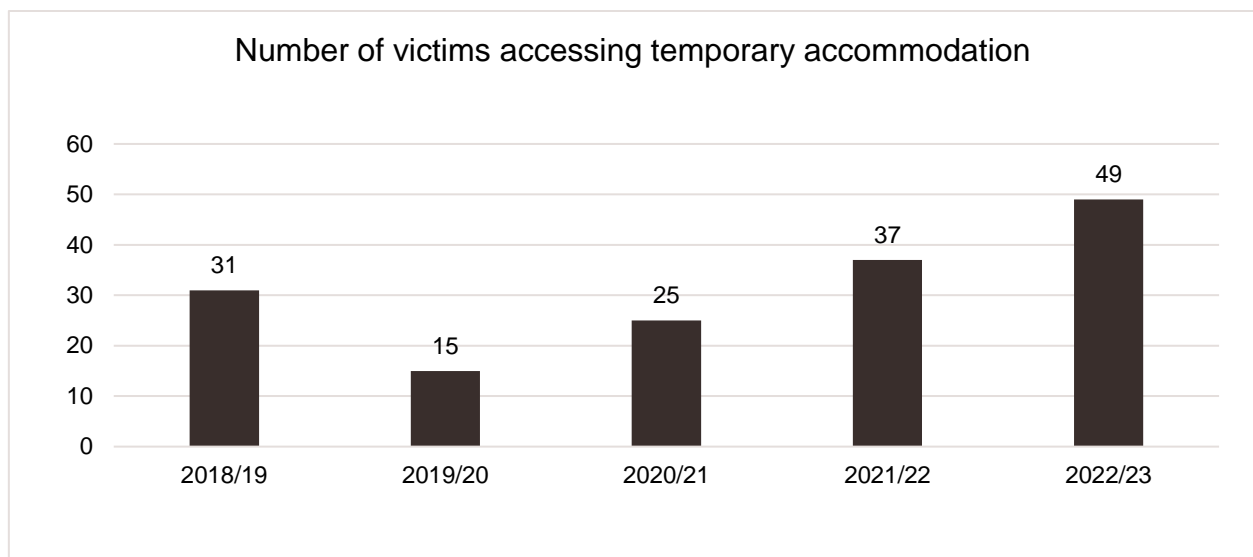
- There needs to be more consideration around the low number of victim/survivors aged 55 and above accessing safe accommodation (particularly those aged 75+ years). It is evident from the data provided above that victim/survivors aged 75 years and above are not accessing safe accommodation within Herefordshire. There were no referrals to WMWA for anybody aged 75+ years between April 2018 and March 2023 and referrals were particularly low for those aged between 55 and 74 years.
- As stated above, 47% of referrals to refuge for disabled people were refused. Further work needs to be undertaken to understand why this number of referrals were refused and what steps can be taken to reduce this.
- Regarding DA in a rural context, several important recommendations have been provided by the National Rural Crime Network Report (2019) to include:
  - Providing better access to refuge and safe houses for rural catchments.
  - One of the key differences between rural and urban refuges is the need for rural victims to stay more local to their former home due to the ties they feel they have with children's schools and the immediate area. By contrast, urban victims can more easily relocate in other parts of a city. The need for some continuity of a former life in the area victims are living in, is key to their ability to move on. Where it is deemed safe to do so a rural relocation should be made available.
  - While acknowledging the difficulty we believe that refuges and particularly the options for safe houses should be planned, financed and maintained regionally more than locally where there may be more likely to cuts as budgets continue to be squeezed. Partnerships with Housing Associations for refuge or safe houses may prove a more viable alternative and allow for distribution across rural as well as urban fringe locations. Local control of housing supply should continue to ensure the primary selection of victims and particularly those with children to rehome.

## Housing and Homelessness Data

Data provided by the Housing Solutions Team within Herefordshire Council indicates that there were 157 instances where DA victims presented for temporary accommodation between April 2018 and March 2023. It is important to note that the number of presentations are not equal to the number of victims as some victims presented for temporary accommodation more than once during this period. Domestic abuse is extremely complex and we know that:

- 85% of victims sought help on average five times from professionals in the year before they got effective help to stop the abuse (SafeLives, 2023).
- On average victims experience 50 incidents of abuse before getting effective help (FearFree, 2023).

According to data in figure 36, the number of presentations for temporary accommodation has been increasing in recent years. It is likely that with increasing national awareness of domestic abuse, more victims realise their situation and flee from abusive homes hence there is an increasing demand for temporary accommodation. However, SafeLives reports that as a consequence of the cost-of-living crisis, victims face no choice other than remaining in unsafe homes or been homeless due to the financial hardship. Other national charities also warn that the current housing crisis is having a devastating impact on victims, putting them at greater risk of violence and abuse.



*Figure 36. Number presentations of DA victims accessing temporary accommodation April 2018 - March 2023.*

*Note: Please note that these figures do include some repeat presentations as outlined above.*

Women make up 86% of DA victims supported by Housing Solutions Team in Herefordshire, many with children or pregnant (52%). However, there is a marked increase in single females accessing temporary accommodation in the year ending March 2023.

*Table 8. The makeup of DA victims presenting for temporary accommodation, between April 2018 and March 2023*

Victim/s	No.	%
Female alone	57	36%
Female with child/ren	73	46%
Pregnant female (with or without children)	9	6%
Male alone	16	10%

Male with child/ren	2	1%
Total	157	100%

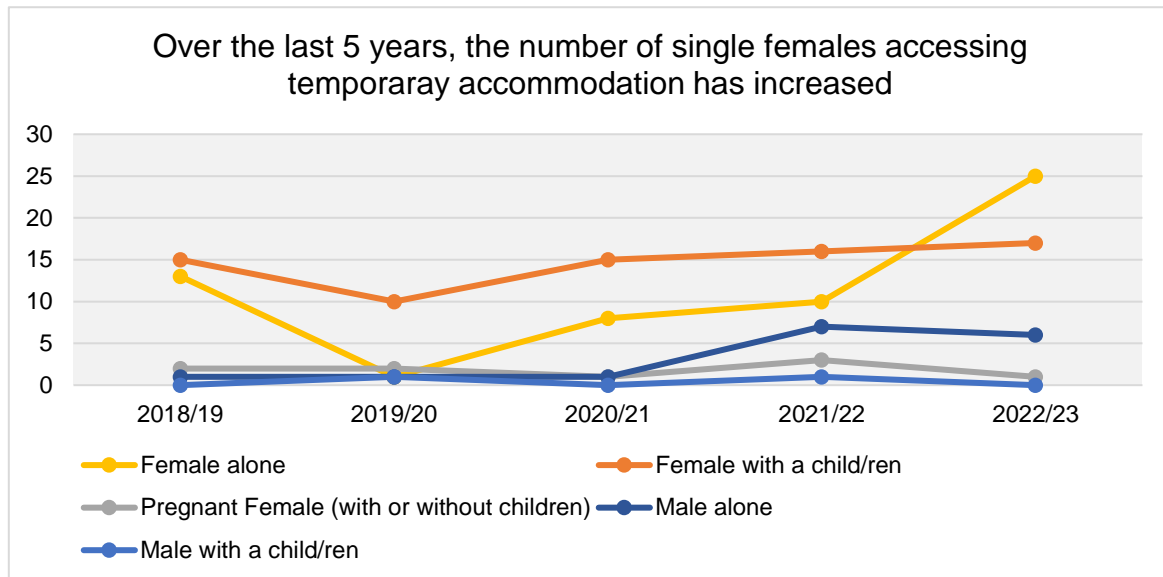


Figure 37. The makeup of DA victims who have accessed temporary accommodation, 2018-2023

There were 41 households registered with Home Point in need of accommodation as a result of domestic abuse in 2021/22 and the figure has increased to 50 households in 2022/23.

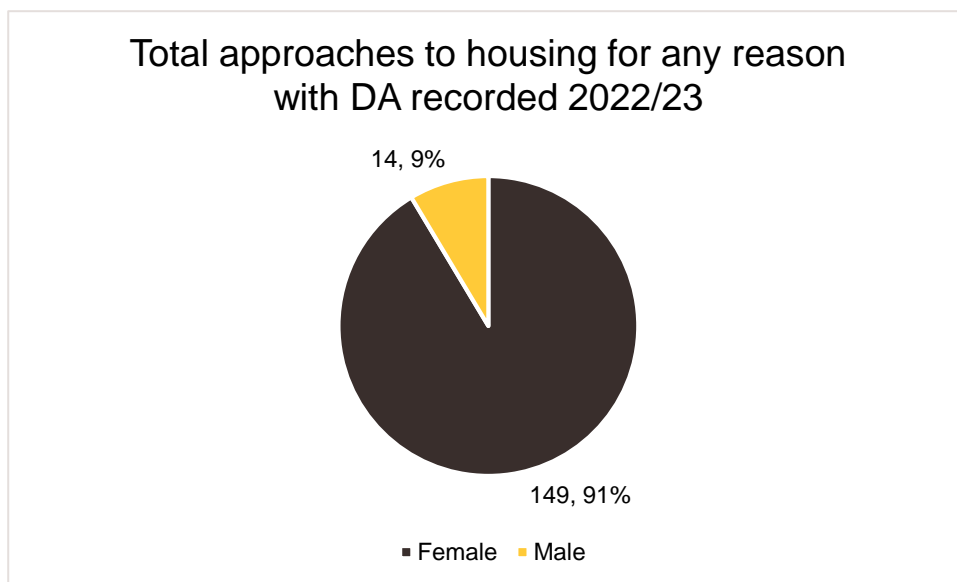
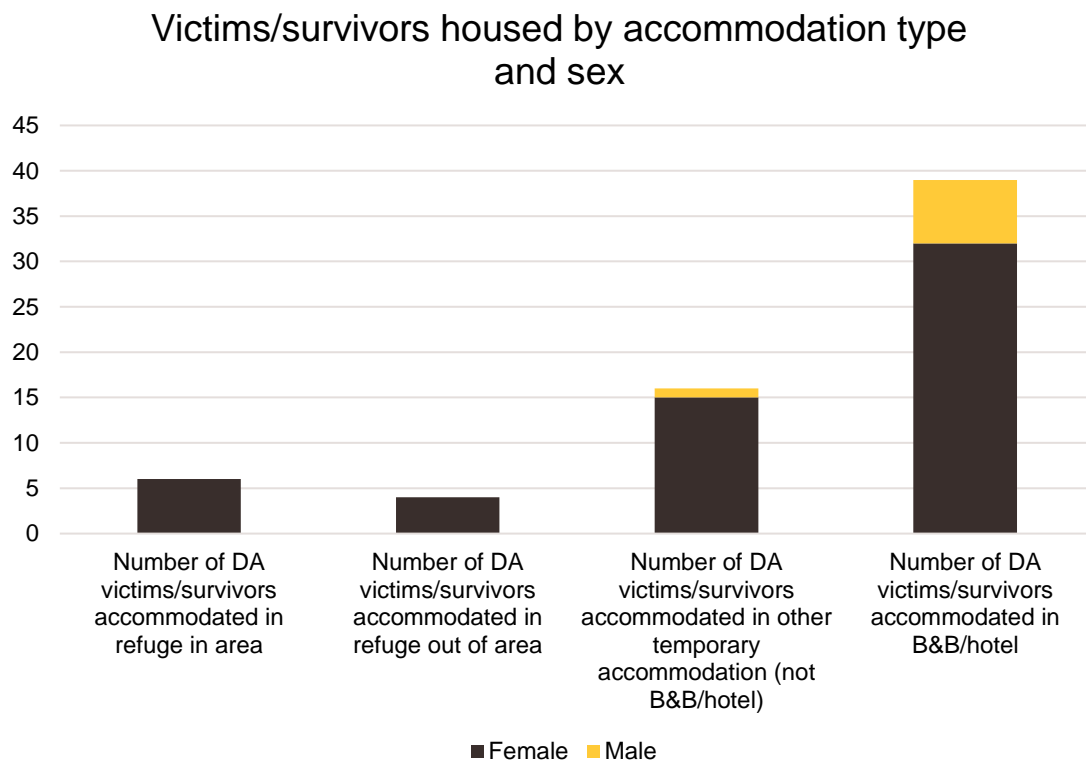


Figure 38. The number of approaches to housing with DA recorded in 2022/23

There were 163 approaches to housing where DA was recorded in 2022/23. Of these 163 instances, 91% were from women and 9% were from men. All 14 approaches by men were accepted, but 2 approaches by women were refused as the applicants were not eligible for access to public funds. All of those who were accepted were considered to be in / reason to believe priority need due to DA.

Figure shows that in 2022/23, 57 women and 7 men were accommodated in temporary accommodation due to being DA victims/survivors, with the majority being placed in a B&B/hotel.



*Figure 39. Number of victims/survivors housed by accommodation type and sex in 2022/23*

The reasons why the prevention and relief duties ended for victims/survivors are outlined in Table 9 and Table 10. Table 11 outlines the reasons why main duty was discharged, with nearly 90% of women accepting a social housing offer.



Table 9. Reasons for ending of prevention duty for applicant who approached with DA in 2022/23

Prevention duty ended for those applicants who approached with DA	Female	Male
Homeless	24	0
Secured alternative accommodation for 12 or more months	11	0
Contact lost	9	0
Secured existing accommodation for 12 or more months	5	0
Secured alternative accommodation for 6 months	3	0
Secured existing accommodation for 6 months	2	0
Withdrew application / applicant deceased (Retired)	1	0

Table 10. Reasons for ending relief duty for those applicants who approached with DA in 2022/23

Relief duty ended for those applicants who approached with DA	Female	Male
56 days elapsed	53	4
Contact lost	25	6
Secured accommodation for 12 months	18	2
Secured accommodation for 6 months	10	0
Withdrew application / applicant deceased (Retired)	4	2
No longer eligible	1	0

Table 11. Main duty discharge reason for applicants who approached with DA in 2022/23

Main duty Discharge Reason	Female	Male
Accepted a Housing Act 1996 Pt6 social housing offer	42	2

Accepted a Private Rented Sector offer	3	1
Applicant withdrew or lost contact	1	0
Ceased to occupy temporary accommodation	1	0

### Recommendations:

- Several recommendations have been identified for housing solutions specifically:
  1. The importance of having key members of staff within housing solutions who have specialist knowledge of DA and can build a strong rapport with relevant services.
  2. More housing support for victim/survivors who have a mortgage.
  3. More housing support for victim/survivors who have fled from another area and therefore do not have a 'local connection'.
- The importance of ensuring that Herefordshire Council adopts a Whole Housing Approach, with consideration given to gaining Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) Accreditation.
- More consideration is needed around the provision of housing for DA perpetrators (where the victim/survivor wishes to remain in their own home).

## Next Steps and Recommendations

### Demographic and composition population features of victim/survivors in Herefordshire

- Significant improvements are required with regards to data collection across several services. This includes both demographic and socioeconomic factors. The data collection template developed for DA needs assessments should continue to be utilised moving forward, to guide the development of enhanced data collection across Herefordshire. More accurate data recording is required in the future to provide more meaningful insights.
- The collection and consideration of equalities data and information, to routinely identify and respond to need on a consistent basis, is particularly important in enabling us to improve our response to DA victim/survivors with complex needs and/or multiple disadvantage/ intersectionality (particularly LGBTQ, people from ethnic minority backgrounds and Disability).
- The number of people with protected characteristics accessing services is lower than CSEW data suggests it should be. As such, steps need to be taken to identify, understand and address the barriers faced by victim/survivors with protected characteristics within Herefordshire. This could include undertaking work with survivors who have lived experience to understand the issues and barriers they may be experiencing and implement a plan of action to address these. For example, is there a lack of knowledge around the services that are available and/or are there issues relating to the accessibility of these services?

- An increased focus on capturing the demographic composition features of perpetrators of DA in the future. This could then be used to inform and target prevention efforts.
- Additional data needs to be gathered around the issue of domestic abuse in older people to enable a better understanding of this issue and what support is required. A multi-agency approach is required to improve data collection on domestic abuse in older people within Herefordshire. All relevant partner agencies need to collect accurate records to identify where domestic abuse among older people has occurred (i.e., West Mercia Police, WMWA and, importantly, within health and social care settings).
- Further exploration on the variance in data on age is also needed – for example, comparisons between the ASC data and the police/WMWA data which varies for older victims.

There are concerns that DA perpetrated against older victims is not always recognised as DA, but instead classified as “Elder Abuse”, which then means that victims are not receiving specialist DA support. This is an area that requires further exploration, including an appraisal of the needs to determine which services would be best placed to provide the kind of support that will meet those needs.

Herefordshire has an older population profile compared to England and Wales averages, so we could reasonably expect to see higher levels of DA amongst the elderly, which is not the case.

### Children and Young People

- Only 15% of 185 referrals to WMWA CYP services came from Children's Social Care. Further exploration of what steps can be taken to increase these numbers should be undertaken.
- It would also be beneficial to establish how many of the CSC cases with DA recorded as a primary issue resulted in referrals to WMWA CYP services and how many were supported in house.

### West Mercia Police Data

- As outlined above, most domestic abuse offences in Herefordshire which resulted in no further action were recorded as 'evidential difficulties - victim does not support police action', with a recent increase in 'victim does support police action but evidential difficulties' also preventing further action'. As such, further efforts should be made to explore this in more depth including ways in which to reduce these numbers.
- Regarding DA in a rural context, several important recommendations have been provided by the National Rural Crime Network Report (2019) to include:
  - Services and commissioners must analyse demand by postcode in future, using a common definition of rurality to develop a meaningful dataset, ensuring prevention and intervention work is also targeted at areas where there is apparently little demand – this report strongly indicates there will be demand, just hidden. Crime data provided within this report can be utilised to achieve the above.
  - Education and outreach must be prioritised and must focus on symptoms and patterns of abuse. Greater education and awareness is needed in rural areas regarding the warning signs of domestic abuse and the ability to act or help a victim to act. GPs and religious groups like church communities are the most likely allies in rural areas. Access and reference to Clare's Law, the right to ask, needs to be made more public in rural areas so that victims know they have an option to revert to.

Resources need to be freed up to allow an effective awareness campaign to be provided to rural communities which target the recognition of behaviours symptomatic of domestic abuse. We believe that bringing symptoms into the spotlight is more effective than talk about domestic abuse per se.

- Domestic Abuse Service Commissioners need to proactively consider servicing rural communities. Incidence rates for domestic abuse are slightly higher in urban areas as evidenced by the CSEW - 4.6% in urban areas vs 3.9% in rural areas. Commissioners have an obligation to take a data-led approach to plan service provision, but for Commissioners with significant rural areas there must also be an obligation to ensure that data adequately represents the potential for domestic abuse cases in rural areas. With the knowledge that rural victims are half as likely to report incidents, outreach activity should be directed at low incidence or no incidence areas. Efforts should be made to look at where reporting of abuse is not happening, as well as where it is. I.e. are there very low incidences in some areas for no apparent reason and are there demographics and deprivation indices would suggest there should be more incidents?

## **MARAC**

- To address the MARAC improvements as identified by the SafeLives review.
- There needs to be a clearer focus on addressing the behaviours of those who harm within MARAC.
- Improvements in data collection are needed for future needs assessments. Specifically around certain demographic factors and the relationship type between victim/perpetrator.
- The number of cases discussed at MARAC in Herefordshire where victims are from an ethnic minority group, LGBTQ+, disabled or male are very low. CSEW data suggests that DA is actually more prevalent in people with disabilities and those who are from the LGBTQ+ community. This suggests that there are likely to be unseen disabled and LGBTQ+ victims and efforts should therefore be made to explore these findings further.

## **Non-accommodation based domestic abuse service provision**

- Regarding support for victim/survivors in the community – Work needs to be undertaken to address the perceived lack of support for low-medium risk clients and the waiting lists for these services.
- Feedback from those with lived experience showed that some were unsure of how they could get help if they were experiencing DA. As such, on-going efforts should be made to raise awareness of the support services available and how to access these by engaging with the community using a variety of methods.
- In addition, further efforts need to be made with regards to improving understanding of DA across public-facing agencies to ensure they provide effective responses (for example, by facilitating appropriate referrals into specialist services). This can be addressed via the provision of effective and accessible training.
- Following on from the above, understanding and working to improve referral numbers from external agencies to specialist DA support services. For example, those provided by WMWA, as only 4% of referrals were received from social care, 2% from health services and 2% from the police.

## **Domestic abuse safe accommodation**

- Although based upon a small number of participants, it is evident from both the quantitative and qualitative data provided by those with lived experience that the majority would have preferred to remain in their own homes as opposed to accessing other accommodation. It is also clear that access to target hardening was considered particularly important in terms of supporting victim/survivors to feel safer in their own homes.

This is further supported by a report by the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner (Senker & Scott, 2020) which highlighted that many victims want to remain in their own homes, and feel that being the one that has to leave is an additional “punishment”.

Whilst each situation will be unique, efforts should be made to allow victims to stay in their home if this is their wish and it is safe to do so.

- Further work could be undertaken here to understand and map the current, scope, pathways in place for the Sanctuary Scheme. However, it is relevant to note that during the time period this Needs Assessment relates to (2022-2023), target hardening was offered by the Design Out Crime Officer at West Mercia Police only. More recently, additional funding was secured for 2 years in 2023 to add capacity to the sanctuary scheme in Herefordshire. The additional capacity is being delivered through the Councils You at Home Service who will be installing the sanctuary equipment. Data in relation to the provision of this service will be included in the refresh of next year’s DA Needs Assessment.
- There needs to be more consideration around the low number of victim/survivors aged 55 and above accessing safe accommodation (particularly those aged 75+ years). It is evident from the data provided above that victim/survivors aged 75 years and above are not accessing safe accommodation within Herefordshire. There were no referrals to WMWA for anybody aged 75+ years between April 2018 and March 2023 and referrals were particularly low for those aged between 55 and 74 years.
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### **Housing and homelessness data**

- Several recommendations have been identified for housing solutions specifically:

- The importance of having key members of staff within housing solutions who have specialist knowledge of DA and can build a strong rapport with relevant services.
- More housing support for victim/survivors who have a mortgage.
- More housing support for victim/survivors who have fled from another area and therefore do not have a 'local connection'.
- The importance of ensuring that Herefordshire Council adopts a Whole Housing Approach, with consideration given to gaining Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) Accreditation.
- More consideration is needed around the provision of housing for DA perpetrators (where the victim/survivor wishes to remain in their own home).

The above recommendations will be integrated into the new domestic abuse action plan which will form part of the new Domestic Abuse Strategy.

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# Appendix

## Appendix A

Table 2 Count of DA codes recorded by Herefordshire GPs

Code Term	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
Advice about domestic abuse	1	0	2	0	3
Advice about domestic violence	2	2	1	0	5
DASH (Dom Abuse Stalking Harassment HBV) 2009 Risk Checklist	0	6	0	0	6
DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment and Honour Based Violence) 2009 Risk Checklist	0	0	8	22	30
Domestic abuse	0	1	12	2	15
Domestic abuse of adult	0	0	3	0	3
Domestic abuse victim in household	4	0	0	0	4
History of domestic abuse	3	7	12	1	23
History of domestic emotional abuse	1	1	1	0	3
History of domestic sexual abuse	1	0	0		1
History of domestic violence	10	10	11	3	34
Routine enquiry about domestic abuse	1	4	7	7	19
Routine enquiry about domestic abuse declined		0	1	0	1
Routine enquiry about domestic abuse not made	1	0	0	0	1
Victim of domestic abuse	23	22	35	17	97

## Appendix B

### Lived Experience Advisory Group (LEAG) Housing Survey

The survey focuses on feedback from those who have experienced the current Housing provision. This was distributed internally, to partner professionals, online and via the WMWA website, social media and survivor network.

The survey included the following questions:

1. Prior to entering domestic abuse services what was your housing status? Options: home owner, rent to buy, private rented, social housing, other – please specify (free text box)
2. What is your current housing status? Options: home owner, rent to buy, private rented, social housing, other – please specify (free text box)
3. What are your experiences of the existing housing system? Please rate your experience of existing housing system (1- unsatisfactory to 5 – excellent).
4. Where do you feel the gaps lie in the housing system? (free text box)
5. What support have you benefited from in accessing housing? (free text box)
6. Are there services you have seen elsewhere that you would benefit from locally? (free text box)



7. Would it be your preference to be supported to stay in your own home or to move to alternative accommodation? Options: own home, other accommodation.
8. Are there ways in which you could be made to feel safer in your own home? (free text box)

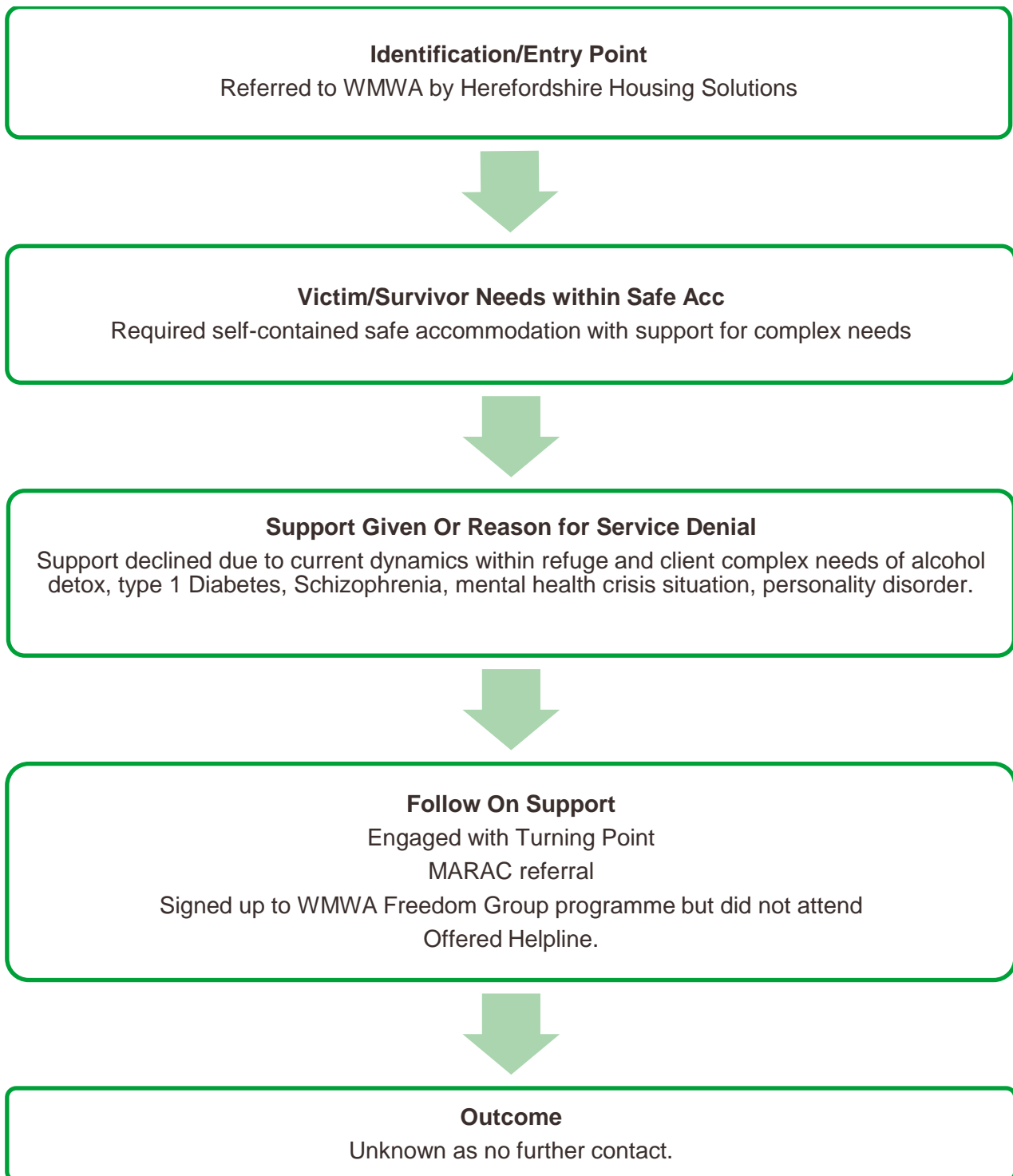
## Appendix C

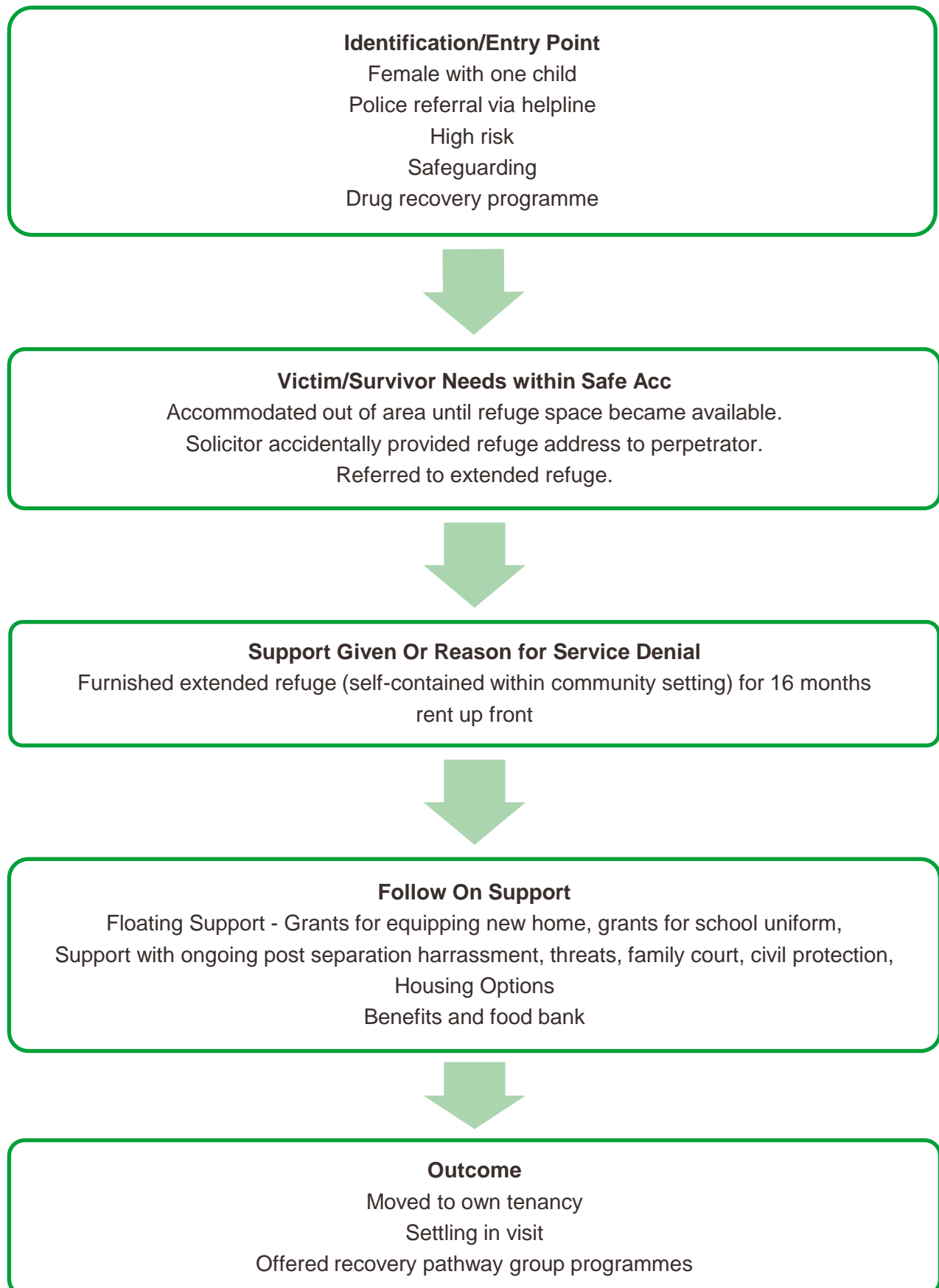
Practitioner engagement – The below questions were distributed amongst relevant agencies/organisations working with victim/survivors and/or perpetrators of DA in Herefordshire

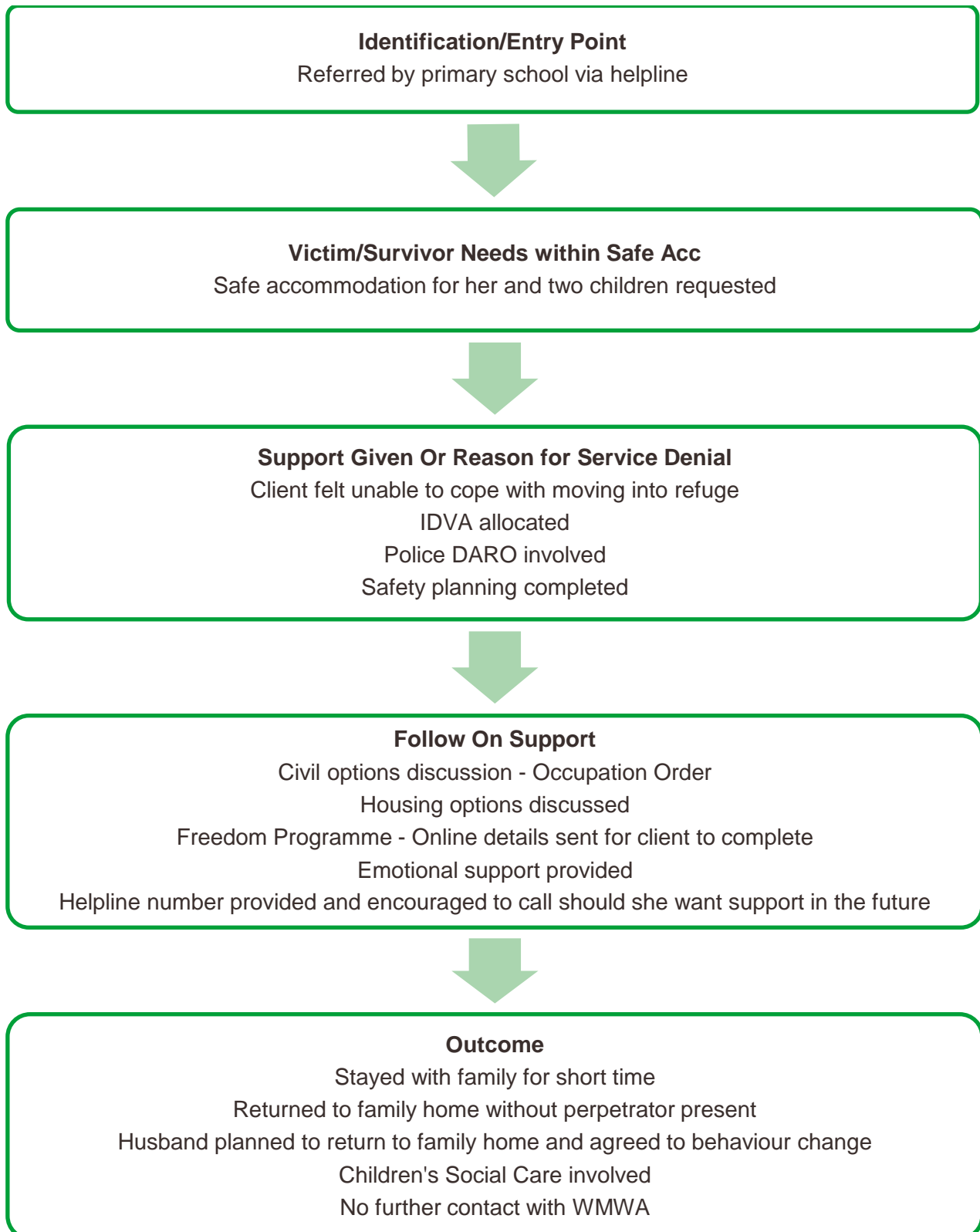
1. Are the existing housing support provisions for victim/survivors of DA in Herefordshire currently meeting need?  
  
If no, please expand. (I.e. what are the gaps in DA housing service provision in Herefordshire? Do we need additional options and what would this look like taking into account factors such as the age/sex of the victim/survivor and the size, number and location of the units?)
2. What are the key challenges victim/survivors face when accessing DA housing services in Herefordshire?
3. What are the strengths of the existing housing support provisions for victim/survivors of DA in Herefordshire? (I.e. what works well)
4. What are your thoughts on the provision of housing for perpetrators of DA (where the victim/survivor wishes to remain in their own home) – is this something that you would like to see explored / developed?
5. Any other comments:

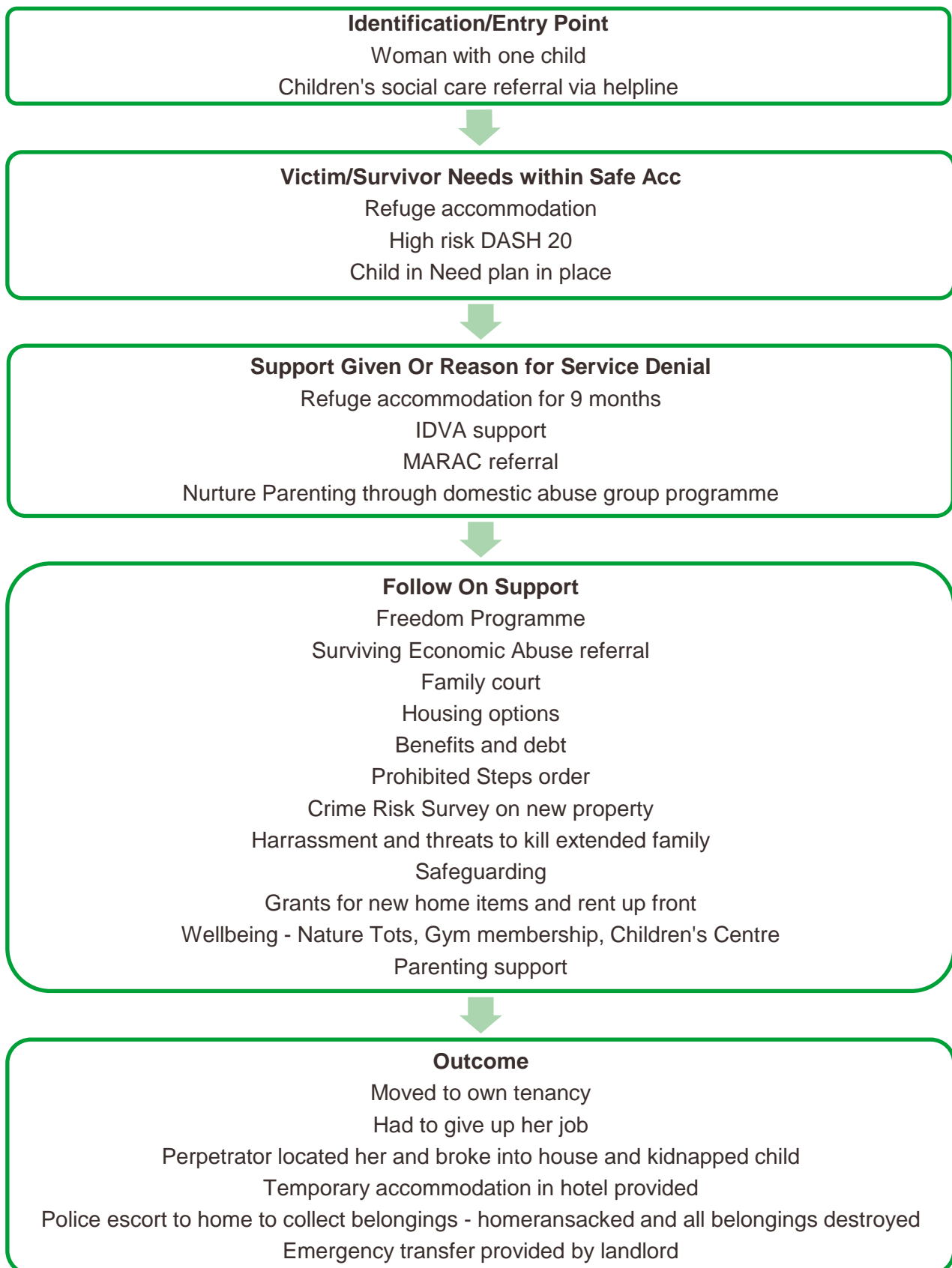
## Appendix D

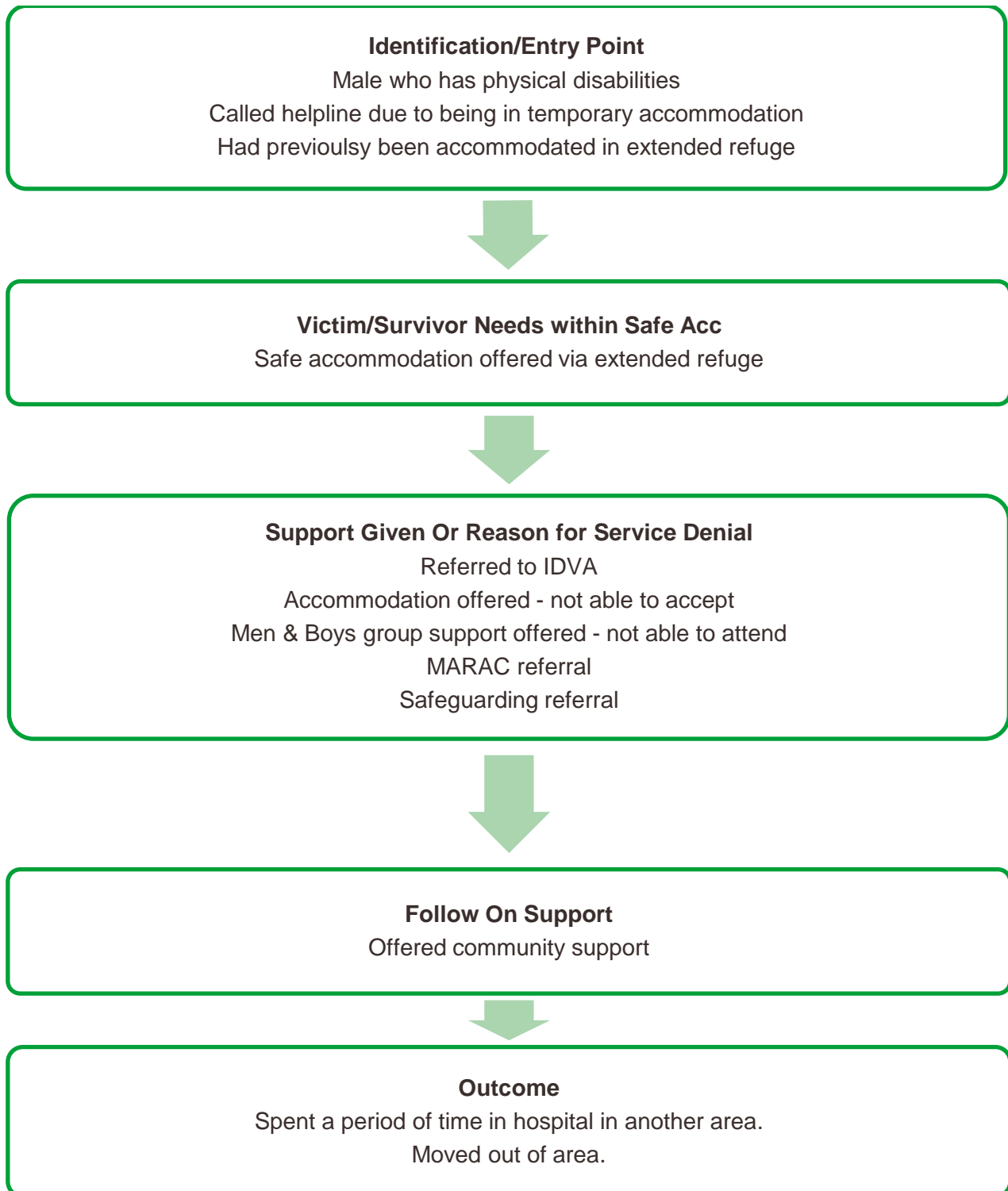
### Pathway Mapping Examples











# Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Form

## 1. Service Area/Directorate

Name of Head of Service for activity being assessed:

Directorate:

Name of lead person for this activity:

Individual(s) completing this assessment: Hannah McSherry / Wendy Dyer

Date assessment completed: 12.03.25

## 2. What is being assessed

Activity being assessed (eg. policy, procedure, budget, service redesign, strategy etc.)

Domestic Abuse Strategy 2025- 2028

What is the aim, purpose, or intended outcome of this activity?

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places a range of new duties on Local Authorities including:

- a) Appoint a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board, which will be consulted in the implementation of the new Act.
- b) Assess the need for accommodation-based domestic abuse support in their area for all victims or their children, including those who come from outside the area.
- 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.

Herefordshire Council carried out a domestic abuse needs assessment in 2024 and have used the information captured through this process, along with information gathered through the Safelives domestic abuse systems review and feedback from people with lived experience to develop a new Domestic Abuse strategy in line with the guidance issued alongside the 2021 Act.

The strategy reviews activities undertaken through the previous Domestic Abuse Strategy and outlines the activities that will be taken forward to prevent and tackle domestic abuse in Herefordshire during the lifetime of the strategy.

Who will be affected by the development and implementation of this activity?

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Service users       | <input type="checkbox"/> Visitors to the county |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Communities         | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Carers      |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Children            | <input type="checkbox"/> Patients               |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> All staff           | <input type="checkbox"/> All part-time staff    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Staff at a particular location | <input type="checkbox"/> Other:                 |

Is this:

- ☒ Review of an existing activity/policy
- ☐ New activity/policy

- ☐ Planning to withdraw or reduce a service, activity or presence?

### 3. Background information and findings

What information and evidence have you reviewed to help inform this assessment? (name your sources, eg. demographic information, usage data, Census data, feedback, complaints, audits, research)

A full needs assessment of domestic abuse has been undertaken using a range of data sources across local support providers and stakeholders as well as sub regional, regional and national data, this was completed in October 2024.

Additionally, we have used legislation, research and policy documents to inform and develop the strategy.

Summary of engagement or consultation undertaken (eg. who you've engaged with, and how, or why do you believe this is not required)

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.

Feedback has been used to inform the strategy.

Summary of relevant findings (it is possible that you will have gaps in your evidence. You must decide whether you need to fill in the gaps now, and if it is feasible to do so. It might be that collecting robust information forms part of your action plan below)

The need assessment completed provides a comprehensive analysis of domestic abuse in Herefordshire for the year 2022/23, covering various aspects including demographics, service provision, and recommendations for improvement which include:

- Challenges in data collection and service provision, particularly regarding demographic and socioeconomic factors, which need to be addressed to improve support for victims.
- Support for children and young people affected by domestic abuse includes various programs.
- The number of recorded domestic abuse offences has increased, with a significant proportion of cases not progressing due to lack of victim support for police action.
- There is a need for more housing support for domestic abuse victims, including those with mortgages and those without a local connection, to ensure they have safe accommodation.
- The MARAC process is effective but requires improvements in data collection and addressing the behaviour of perpetrators to enhance victim safety.

The strategy has identified four key priority areas where actions are needed to improve services and support available, these are set out below.

Improve awareness and prevention  
 Improving understanding of domestic abuse and support services  
 Improve joint working and coordination across services  
 Hold perpetrators to account for their behaviour



#### 4. The Public Sector Equality Duty

Will this activity have a positive, neutral or negative impact on our duty to:

Equality Duty	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advance equality of opportunity between different groups?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Foster good relations between different groups?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Explain your rationale here, and include any ways in which you could strengthen the capacity of this activity to promote equality (remember to add anything relevant into your action planning below)

The strategy has been developed in line with the requirements of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

A Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board is in place, this consists of a group of organisations that are working together to improve outcomes for victims of domestic abuse. This is achieved through a strategic approach to sharing knowledge and intelligence, identifying and, where possible, addressing gaps in support and prevention. The 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 victims and are committed to listening and engaging with those with lived experience and supported by expert evidence base, to continuously learn and improve.

The board also acknowledges 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.

The equality duty is strengthened through the following actions:

1. Commissioning 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.
2. Secured additional investment for the Sanctuary Scheme (installation of target hardening equipment) in Herefordshire, giving victims the option to stay at home where it is deemed safe to do so.
3. 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
4. Offering specialist domestic abuse training for professionals and volunteers across Herefordshire to increase understanding of domestic abuse and the support services that we have in place.
5. Securing funding for the continuation of the IRIS programme to support early intervention and prevention through GP surgeries.
6. Developed our relationship with the Police and Crime Commissioner and domestic abuse commissioners across West Mercia to share best practice and maximise service provision.
7. Work with Adult Social Care colleagues to gain greater insight into the prevalence of elder abuse in Herefordshire.
8. Gain feedback from children and young people and review research to better understand the impact of domestic abuse on their lives.
9. By offering a range of specialist services for people to access e.g. floating support, specialist services for children etc.
10. Fostering good relationships through the DA Local Partnership Board, DA professionals network, West Mercia DA commissioners working group and through the lived experience advisory group.

## 11. The impact of this activity

Consider the potential impact of this activity on each of the equality groups outlined below and explain your rationale. Please note it is possible for the potential impact to be both positive and negative within the same equality group. Remember to consider the impact on staff and service users (current and potential) and partner organisations. It may be useful to include data within these sections if you know the diversity make-up of the people likely to be affected.

Equality Group	Potential <u>positive</u> impact	Potential <u>neutral</u> impact	Potential <u>negative</u> impact	Rationale
<b>Age</b> (include safeguarding, consent and child welfare)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 asks local authorities to have particular regard to victims and their children with relevant protected characteristics as per the Equality Act 2010 and states that they must be able to access the support that they need.</p> <p>Under this duty, local authorities must ensure the appropriate and adequate support within safe accommodation that meets the needs of all victims including those with relevant protected characteristics, additional and / or multiple complex needs and whose support needs may not be able to be met within non-specialist domestic abuse safe accommodation.</p> <p>The duties under the act are reflected in the council's Domestic Abuse Strategy and commissioned services which should result in a potential positive impact on age ensuring that victims/survivors have access to the right support at the right time regardless of age.</p>
<b>Disability</b> (consider attitudinal, physical, financial and social barriers, neuro-diversity, learning disability, physical and sensory impairment)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Abuse can take various forms, including physical, emotional, financial, and sexual. For disabled victims, it can also include withholding care,</p>

Equality Group	Potential positive impact	Potential neutral impact	Potential negative impact	Rationale
				<p>medication, or mobility aids, and restricting access to necessary support services.</p> <p>Disabled victims may face additional barriers to reporting abuse, such as fear of losing their caregiver, lack of accessible reporting mechanisms, and concerns about not being believed or taken seriously.</p> <p>The council's strategy emphasises the need for support services to be accessible and tailored to the specific needs of victims. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>providing information in accessible formats, ensuring physical accessibility of services, and training staff to understand and respond to the unique challenges faced by individuals.</li> <li>collaboration between multiple agencies, including health and social care services, the police, and specialist domestic abuse services ensuring a comprehensive and coordinated local response to need.</li> </ul>
<b>Gender Reassignment</b> (include gender identity, and consider privacy of data and harassment)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>The needs data highlights the number of non-binary and transgender victims supported by the Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) service is very low. Specifically, between April 2018 and March 2023, no non-binary victims and fewer than five transgender victims have been supported by the IDVA service.</p> <p>Data on gender identity was not provided by the Police, Health, Housing, or Adult Social Care services as part of the needs assessment.</p> <p>The challenges in data collection need to be addressed to better understand the impact on this group however the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 Statutory Guidance includes important considerations for individuals who have undergone or are undergoing gender reassignment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individuals who have undergone or are undergoing gender reassignment may face unique forms of abuse related to their gender identity. This can include emotional abuse, such as threats to "out" them, or physical and sexual abuse that targets their gender identity.</li> </ul> <p>There can be significant barriers to accessing support for these individuals, including fear of discrimination, lack of understanding from service providers, and concerns about being misgendered or not taken seriously.</p>

Equality Group	Potential positive impact	Potential neutral impact	Potential negative impact	Rationale
				The council's strategy and commissioned services emphasise the need for domestic abuse services to be inclusive and sensitive to the needs of transgender individuals. This includes providing training for staff on gender identity issues and ensuring that services are welcoming and accessible to all.
<b>Marriage &amp; Civil Partnerships</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>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.</p> <p>Domestic abuse within marriage can often involve coercive control, where one partner exerts power and control over the other through various means, including emotional, psychological, and financial abuse.</p> <p>Married individuals may experience economic abuse, where the abuser controls access to financial resources, limiting the victim's independence and ability to leave the abusive relationship.</p> <p>The council's strategy and commissioned support services emphasise the importance of accessible support services for married victims of domestic abuse, this includes safe housing options which would have a positive impact on this group.</p>
<b>Pregnancy &amp; Maternity</b> (consider working arrangements, part-time working, infant caring responsibilities)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>The needs assessment shows over three-quarters of the people accessing refuge were either pregnant (12%) or had children in the household (65%).</p> <p>Women make up 86% of domestic abuse victims supported by the Housing Solutions Team in Herefordshire, many with children or pregnant (52%).</p> <p>Whilst the domestic abuse strategy for Herefordshire does not specifically address pregnancy, although it is acknowledged that pregnancy can be a trigger for domestic abuse, and existing abuse may get worse during pregnancy or after giving birth. Midwives ask pregnant women about domestic abuse as part of their checks. However, the strategy does talk about investment in the IRIS programme, which is a GP based programme of education and support which focuses on early intervention and prevention of domestic abuse. The strategy highlights the impact of domestic abuse on various vulnerable groups and</p>

Equality Group	Potential positive impact	Potential neutral impact	Potential negative impact	Rationale
				the importance of providing support to all victims, regardless of their circumstances.
<b>Race</b> (including Travelling Communities and people of other nationalities)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>The Herefordshire DA needs assessment data shows the majority of victims are from white ethnic backgrounds. However, the needs assessment also shows there are challenges in data collection which need to be addressed to better understand the impact on people from different nationalities.</p> <p>The Domestic Abuse Act acknowledges the additional cultural and linguistic barriers that victims from ethnic minority backgrounds may face, and the need for culturally sensitive support and intervention.</p> <p>The council's strategy and commissioned support services emphasise the importance of accessible support services ensuring a commitment to inclusivity and non-discrimination in providing support and services to victims of domestic abuse.</p>
<b>Religion &amp; Belief</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Data from the needs assessment on religion and belief was not provided by the Police, Health, Housing, or Adult Social Care services. This highlights the need for better data collection.</p> <p>The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 asks local authorities to have particular regard to victims and their children with relevant protected characteristics as per the Equality Act 2010 and states that they must be able to access the support that they need.</p> <p>This duty is reflected in the councils updated Domestic Abuse Strategy and should result in a potential positive impact.</p>
<b>Sex</b> (consider issues of safety and sexual violence, part-time work)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>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.</p> <p>The local needs assessment data confirms that the majority of domestic abuse victims are female.</p> <p>The duties under the act are reflected in the council's Domestic Abuse Strategy and commissioned services which should result in a potential positive impact by ensuring that victims/survivors have access to inclusive and sensitive support services regardless of sexual identity.</p>

Equality Group	Potential positive impact	Potential neutral impact	Potential negative impact	Rationale
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>The domestic abuse act recognizes the distinct experiences of LGBTQ+ victims, including the potential for abuse to be linked to their sexual orientation or gender identity. The act also covers the experiences of male victims of domestic abuse, highlighting the stigma and underreporting that can occur.</p> <p>Whilst the Domestic Abuse Strategy for Herefordshire emphasises the importance of ensuring that the local response to domestic abuse is accessible to all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation.</p>
<b>Others: carers, care leavers, homeless, social/ economic deprivation</b> (consider shift-patterns, caring responsibilities)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>The strategy outlines several priorities and actions aimed at improving awareness, understanding, and joint working across services. These include investing in specialist domestic abuse roles, promoting healthy relationships education in schools, and developing social media campaigns to support wider understanding of domestic abuse. Additionally, the strategy emphasises the importance of training professionals to understand coercive control and its impact, as well as the need for a non-victim-blaming approach.</p>
<b>Health Inequalities</b> (any preventable, unfair & unjust differences in health status between groups, populations or individuals that arise from unequal distribution of social, environmental & economic conditions)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>The strategy outlines several priorities and actions aimed at improving the health outcomes of domestic abuse victims. These include investing in specialist domestic abuse roles, promoting healthy relationships education in schools, and developing</p>

Equality Group	Potential <u>positive</u> impact	Potential <u>neutral</u> impact	Potential <u>negative</u> impact	Rationale
				<p>social media campaigns to support wider understanding of domestic abuse.</p> <p>Further investment has been secured for the continuation of the IRIS project in Herefordshire to support GP practices with early intervention and prevention of domestic abuse.</p>

Where a negative impact on any of the equality groups is realised after the implementation of the activity, the activity lead will seek to minimise the impact and carry out a full review of this EIA.

## 12. Action planning

What actions will you take as a result of this impact assessment? (you will need to include actions to mitigate any potential negative impacts)

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

## 13. Monitoring and review

How will you monitor these actions?

Needs assessments are an important precursor to developing local strategies. A full needs assessment should be conducted at a minimum every 3 years, with a refresh being undertaken on an annual basis to ensure any change in demand or support requirements are adequately captured. This will be used to inform the strategy and resulting actions.

### Accountability and Governance

The strategy and associated action plan is designed to be flexible and adapt to changing needs and national guidance. The Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board is responsible for its implementation, overseeing effectiveness, delivery plan, and funding commitments. Feedback from people with lived experience will continue to inform progress and commissioning of services.

### Measuring Progress

Progress will be measured through a multi-agency domestic abuse dashboard, feedback from the Lived Experience Advisory Network, workforce data, grant and contract monitoring data, and learning from Domestic Homicide Reviews.

The strategy will be implemented by the Local Partnership Board, a multi-agency partnership. The council will be required to report to the Government annually.

When will you review this EIA?

The EIA will be reviewed at least every 3 years at the same time as the strategy is updated



## 14. Equality Statement

- All public bodies have a statutory duty under the Equality Act 2010 to give due regard to how they can improve society and promote equality in every aspect of their day-to-day business. This means that they must consider, and keep reviewing, how they are promoting equality in decision-making, policies, services, procurement, staff recruitment and management.
- Herefordshire Council will challenge discrimination, promote equality, respect human rights, and design and implement services, policies and measures that meet the diverse needs of our population, ensuring that none are placed at a disadvantage over others.

Signature of person completing EIA

*Hannah McSherry and Wendy Dyer*

Date signed 13.03.25

## 15. Make this EIA available (and delete this section)

- Attach your EIA as an appendix to any decision reports so that decision-makers have all the equality data they need in order to make robust and fair decisions.
- Upload your EIA to the shared Teams site: [Equality Impact Assessment | General | Microsoft Teams](#)
- Staff, trade unions, service users or members of the public may want to see this EIA, so it must be published on our website along with the decision report.





# Title of report: Procurement Strategy for the Hereford Western Bypass -Phase 1

<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>
<b>Meeting date:</b>	<b>Thursday 17 July 2025</b>
<b>Cabinet member:</b>	<b>Councillor Price, transport and infrastructure</b>
<b>Report by:</b>	<b>Corporate Director of Economy and Environment</b>
<b>Report Author:</b>	<b>Delivery Director, Infrastructure, Economy and Environment Western Bypass Consultant, Economy and Environment</b>

## Classification

Part exempt

This report is open but appendices are exempt by virtue of the paragraph(s) of the Access to Information Procedure Rules set out in the constitution pursuant to Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended.

- 3) Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

## 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.

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Further information on the subject of this report is available from  
Steve Smith, Scott Tompkins, , email: [steve.smith@herefordshire.gov.uk](mailto:steve.smith@herefordshire.gov.uk),  
[scott.tompkins@herefordshire.gov.uk](mailto:scott.tompkins@herefordshire.gov.uk)

## Wards affected

(All Wards);

## Purpose

This report is seeking approval of the procurement strategy and authority to procure and award a contract, to a contractor through a two-stage procurement process utilising a Pre-Construction Services Agreement for design and enabling works with the option to accept a bid from the contractor for the construction works under NEC4 Engineering and Construction Contract subject to further governance and budget. The report also seeks to inform members of the land acquisition strategy for the land required to construct Hereford Western Bypass Phase 1.

## Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) **Cabinet agrees the procurement strategy as detailed in Appendix 1**
- b) **Cabinet agrees the proposed strategy for the acquisition of land associated with the proposal as detailed in Appendix 2**
- c) **Cabinet delegates authority to the Corporate Director Economy and Environment to undertake a two-stage procurement process and award of a Pre-Construction Services Agreement to a contractor through a compliant framework for the design and early contractor involvement on the project within the current approved budget.**
- d) **Cabinet delegates authority to Commercial and Investment Manager Property Services to agree the Heads of Terms and subsequent acquisition of land, within the approved budget.**
- e) **Cabinet delegates authority to the Corporate Director Economy and Environment to procure and enter into contracts with any additional specialist external consultants and advisors required to support the project with the approved budget.**

## Alternative options

1. A design and build contractor could be procured under a NEC4 Engineering and Construction contract which allows for early contractor engagement through competitive tender approach through an open tender approach, however this approach would take significantly longer and as such is unlikely to enable a construction start until summer 2027. Given current rates of inflation in the construction industry any delay is likely to result in higher construction costs. The council is also currently continuing discussions with key stakeholders, such as Network Rail and National Highways to finalise approvals; having a construction contractor in place at an earlier date enables approvals of temporary works to be discussed in a timely manner so that all approvals are in place ahead of a decision to proceed to construction.
2. The design could be undertaken under existing arrangements with Aecom or Balfour Beatty Living Places prior to tendering the construction phase only. This approach would take significantly longer to deliver as a result of needing to complete all third party approvals and designs finalised prior to tendering for construction. Any contractor amendments for buildability or value engineering, and third-party approvals of temporary works would have to be done after award of the construction contract resulting in contractual compensation events and increased costs. This approach would result in a delay in tendering for the construction phase which is likely to result in higher construction costs given rates of inflation. The lack of early contractor

engagement in the process would also reduce the cost certainty as a result of increased likelihood of changes required during the construction phase.

## Key considerations

3. A Design and Build contract procured through a two-stage procurement process would bring the contractor on board at a far earlier stage and enable those designs to be undertaken in parallel with construction preparations. It is not unusual for some non-critical design work to extend into the construction period with such an approach enabling the programme to be reduced. It is also typical for an element of value engineering design to be undertaken by a contractor during any construction only tender. Bringing the contractor in early (Early Contractor Involvement) is industry best practice and will ensure that buildability issues are considered when finalising the designs. Having the contractor involved in the engagement with National Highways and Network Rail will also reduce the risk of further redesign during construction resulting in increased costs.
4. A design and build approach also enable discussions on temporary works to be undertaken at the same time as permanent works and ensure that sufficient detail is in place in a timely enough manner to seek approvals from third parties, such as utility companies, and submit the required planning and network applications for temporary works.
5. The use of a framework to procure a construction partner enables a partner to be on board considerably quicker than through an open competitive tender route with approximately 9 weeks saving in time helping to avoid high construction inflation impacting on the tender prices.
6. Contractors go through a competitive process to be appointed to a framework giving assurance that the contractors have met all quality and financial standards as well as having demonstrated value for money. Framework providers often monitor works against KPI's and client feedback to ensure that contractors align with the expectations and values of the framework. This further incentivises contractor performance as they desire to remain on the framework and continue to acquire work through the framework.
7. Whilst tender prices would be considered for both the design and construction of the scheme during the initial tender process, the council would only award a Pre-Construction Services Agreement for the early contractor engagement in the first instance and would not commit to award the construction contract until final costs reflecting design changes have been confirmed and are within the available budget. A further report will be brought to Cabinet in 2026 seeking approval to award the construction contract.
8. It is considered therefore that, for the reasons given in this report, and as detailed within the procurement strategy provided in appendix 1, securing the early engagement of a contractor through a two-stage procurement process for a Design and Build contract via a framework provides the best solution for meeting the scheme's delivery objectives and providing best value to the council.
9. The council is also seeking to procure land from landowners along the length of the scheme. Whilst it is very much preferred that this can be achieved through negotiation, where this is not possible use of the council's powers of compulsory purchase (CPO) may be required.
10. Acquisition by negotiation has several benefits that are often mutually beneficial to both the council and landowners. Positive engagement often identifies issues that may impact the scheme that the council may not have been aware of and enables the landowner to work closely with the council to ensure that any impacts on the landowner of acquisition of the land are mitigated as sensitively as possible.

11. The use of a compulsory purchase order is often seen as an adversarial approach and as such often leads to legal challenges resulting in a public inquiry, as happened in the previous iteration of the scheme. A public inquiry is a costly and time-consuming process for both the council and the landowner and doesn't encourage the mutually beneficial discussions that may take place during negotiation. However, negotiation and CPO processes are routinely undertaken in tandem and speeds up the process if the council is unable to obtain the land through negotiation.
12. It is the council's preference therefore to seek to secure land by negotiation wherever possible on the terms outlined within the Procurement Strategy (Land) in Appendix 2. There remains a risk that this may not be achievable, however, and as such the council has initiated the initial stages of the compulsory purchase order process to be utilised in the event negotiations are unsuccessful.
13. A report to Cabinet will be brought later in the year to seek approval of a compulsory purchase order should negotiations not be successful with any landowner.

### **Community impact**

14. The delivery of an improved transport infrastructure is a key part of the Council Plan 2024 to 2028 and the Delivery Plan 2025/26 which states as a key deliverable that: Progress the necessary work to tender for the design and construction of Phase One of the Hereford Western Bypass and to progress delivery of Phase One and Phase Two business cases as well as progress the Design and Construction tender for the Hereford Western Bypass Phase One. The delivery of the Hereford Western Bypass is seen as essential in providing a more resilient road network in and around Hereford to enable residents and businesses to thrive and support economic growth in the area.
15. The delivery of the first phase of the bypass will ensure that progress is made towards the overall ambition of a full bypass of Hereford to the west of the city. The new road will remove traffic travelling between the A465 and A49/ Rotherwas from more central areas making alternative forms of transport more attractive.
16. Procuring a contractor to engage at an early stage, means that the contractor builds a better understanding of the locality and the impacts of the work and is therefore able to implement construction methods and traffic management measures in a more sensitive and informed manner. Therefore, reducing the impact of such works on those residents and road users most directly affected.

### **Environmental Impact**

17. The procurement of a design and build contractor early on in the process will enable the design and construction of the first phase of the Hereford Western Bypass to be aligned to meet the Council's environmental objectives including:
  - a) Improve drainage and increase flooding resilience
  - b) Reduce the council's carbon emissions
  - c) Improve the air quality
  - d) Improve resident access to green space

- e) Increase the number of short distance trips being done by sustainable modes of travel including walking, cycling and the use of public transport
- 18. Herefordshire Council provides and purchases a wide range of services for the people of 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.
- 19. The environmental impact of this proposal has been considered through the service specification and includes appropriate requirements on the contractor/delivery partner to minimise waste, reduce energy and carbon emissions and to consider opportunities to enhance biodiversity. This will be managed and reported through the contract management processes.
- 20. The tender process will include a requirement to provide social value for the benefit of Herefordshire which will encourage the successful provider to utilise local supply chains wherever possible to reduce the movement of goods and people as far as practicable.

## Equality duty

- 21. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. Our providers will be made aware of their contractual requirements in regards to equality legislation.
- 22. 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.
- 23. The mandatory equality impact screening checklist has been completed for this project and it has been found to have low impact for equality. The selection of a construction partner has no direct or indirect impact on the public above and beyond those that arise from the scheme itself. The approach to land acquisition has a direct impact on 9 landowners but not the wider public and it is not considered that the approach has a detrimental impact on any specific group. Consideration will be given on a case by case basis as any specific concerns may be raised. It is recognised that objections were submitted to the previous compulsory purchase order and as such any further objections will be similarly be considered on a case by case basis.
- 24. Due to the potential impact of this activity being low, a full Equality Impact Assessment is not required. However, the following equality considerations should be taken into account when making a decision about this activity:
  - a) Ensure that traffic management measures take due accord of the impact on those not travelling by private car to their site of work or education to ensure that safety and reasonable access is maintained throughout the works.
  - b) Ensure that equality processes employed by the contractor forms part of the procurement selection process within a value submission.

## Resource implications

25. The Council has approved expenditure of up to £10.3 million for the procurement, design and land acquisition to enable the progression of the scheme. A further £30 million budget provision has been approved for the construction of the scheme. It is considered that the approved budget will be sufficient to undertake the required level of design, land acquisition and procurement costs for the scheme.
26. It is considered that the Design phase and any enabling works inclusive of early contractor engagement, will be affordable within the £10.3 million budget already approved for that purpose.
27. The business case for the construction costs indicated that £30 million was an indicative cost required for the construction of the scheme based on general construction inflation. The two-stage tender process will enable early contractor engagement to develop a more precise cost estimate that will allow the council to adjust its financial contribution accordingly through the budget setting process. A business case will be made to seek approval from Cabinet in 2026 as part of the approval process to draw down the available funding and to seek approval to award the construction phase of the contract.
28. The council will require the support of its professional services partner, Aecom, in the preparation of tender documents and tender assessment and this is already within the scope of the contract under which Aecom are engaged. The cost of this specific support within that contract is estimated at £52,000.
29. Further specialist professional services and advice such as support for contract management support, legal advice on contract development, planning and compulsory purchase specialisms etc. may be needed to support the council in developing and managing the delivery of the scheme and contract and it is recommended that delegated authority be provided to enable this to occur in a timely manner as and when the need is identified and is able to be contained within current available budgets.
30. The procurement will also require internal resources from procurement, legal, finance and infrastructure teams to ensure that procurements align with the council's governance requirements and achieves the best value for the council. There are therefore no immediate resource implications for this procurement that have not already been provided for within previous decision papers.
31. Approval of a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) could trigger blight notices. Consideration has been given to the potential cost of this and there is sufficient budget within contingency within the approved £10.3 million to accommodate the impact of a blight notice.

## Legal implications

32. All contracts pursuant to this project will be procured in accordance with the Procurement Act 2023 and the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.
33. Sections 239, 240, 246, 250 and 260 of the Highways Act 1980 and the Acquisition of Land Act 1981 (to secure the acquisition of the land) grant a highway authority statutory powers to acquire land for the construction and improvement of a highway, to acquire land for the construction and improvement of a highway, to acquire land which is required for (or use in connection with) the construction of the highway, to acquire land to mitigate the adverse effects of the highway and to create new rights over land. A confirmed CPO will need to be registered as a local land charge once a decision is made to specifically identify the land interests and demonstrate the necessity for a CPO in a statement of reasons.



## Risk management

34. The key risks associated with the approval of this procurement are set out below

Ref	Risk	Potential Impact	Mitigation
1	Lack of interest in the contract	Lack of competition during the procurement process may result in higher costs and concerns related to value for money.	Officers have been undertaking soft market engagement which suggests that there is interest in the scheme and upon approval of the procurement strategy will engage with all contractors on relevant frameworks to encourage interest.
2	Further design changes during the contract period as a result of ongoing discussions with third parties, mitigation requirements identified by ongoing environmental surveys which may increase the scope of design required.	Increased costs and potential impacts on programme	Any compensation events arising though such changes will be assessed by Aecom, to ensure that costs align with submitted tender rates to ensure that the councils continues to derive good value from the process. Impacts on programme will be assessed and mitigations sought on a case by case basis.
3	Relationship with partner sours over time.	Could delay progress on the delivery of the scheme and hamper the ability of the service to deliver its objectives.	Utilisation of a framework route encourages a more collaborative approach between both client and contractor as the contractor is incentivised to work in a way that will lead to future awards of work through the contract.
4	Procurement delays	Could delay progress on the delivery of the scheme resulting in both programme delays and cost rises.	The service has built an element of contingency within the programme. The use of a framework reduces the requirements of the tender process and therefore is typically quicker and easier to engage as it is

			delivered along the set process of the framework.
5	Third party and planning consents are not able to be agreed, land is not acquired or the cost of the scheme following design changes exceeds the budget available.	The scheme is not able to be delivered to the programme or budget that the council has set.	The contract will include a break clause at the end of the design phase to remove any obligation to proceed to construction.

#### Assurance Statement:

The strategic risks associated with the Herefordshire Western Bypass – Phase 1 procurement strategy have been reviewed and are being managed in accordance with the Council's Risk Management Strategy. The key risk areas identified, including market interest, design development, third-party consents, land acquisition, and budgetary pressures, are appropriate and proportionate to the scope and stage of the programme. Oversight of risk mitigations will continue through the Council's established governance and assurance frameworks to ensure risks are effectively monitored, escalated, and addressed.

I have reviewed the risks identified within the Herefordshire Western Bypass – Phase 1 procurement strategy and am satisfied that they have been appropriately assessed and are being managed through proportionate and reasonable mitigations. The risk management approach taken is in line with the Council's expectations for a project of this scale and complexity.

#### Consultees

35. The following consultation has taken place

Consultation	Date	Feedback
Political groups consultation on a key decision	7 <sup>th</sup> July 2025	Detailed below.
Member Steering Group for Growth Corridor and Hereford Western Bypass.	12 <sup>th</sup> June 2025	Supportive of approach

#### Political Groups Consultation 7<sup>th</sup> July 2025

The consultation was attended by 19 councillors from across the Conservative Party, Green Party, Independents for Herefordshire and Liberal Democrats groups. The following discussion/feedback was noted:

- Questions were raised about the need for a Department for Transport (DfT) Green Book business case in order to proceed to construction contract award. The director responded that an internal



capital business case was completed which was approved at full council in order for the funding for Phase One to be included in the capital budget. A Green Book compliant business case is not required unless DfT are funding the project. However, a compliant business case was completed to Full Business Case stage for the Southern Wye Transport Package in 2018 and although this was not submitted to government it was completed to the standards necessary for DfT assessment and the modelling work showed a positive cost benefit ratio which would have resulted in the scheme being compliant for the Local Enterprise Partnership funding which had been secured for the project. The scheme has changed little since 2018 and there is nothing to indicate that the business case will not be equally compliant. The director also confirmed that a review of the full business case for Phase One (FBC) and a Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) for the whole bypass (phase one and phase two) has been commissioned. The FBC review of Phase One should be available in July 2026 and the SOBC will follow in the autumn of 2026. The reviews are time consuming as they require significant updates to traffic modelling and traffic survey work to be completed.

- Clarity was sought over the available budgets for Phase One. The director gave assurance that £10.3m of capital has been made available for the purchase of land and for progressing the review of the design and business cases. This work is underway. Additionally, the director confirmed that £30m had been added into the capital programme for construction.
- A question was raised concerning the approvals required by Network Rail and National Highways of the design. The director confirmed that National Highways needed to approve the design of the roundabout on the A49 where Phase One will join it. Network Rail needs to approve the works to install a bridge over railway line. Both have been engaged and given preliminary approval in principle to the designs, however, it is felt that having a contractor engaged early will enable these approvals to be progressed whilst design is being completed, and construction is being planned.
- Questions were raised about the use of a framework and the award of separate contracts for Early Contractor Engagement/Involvement (ECI) and for the construction. The director stressed the benefits from having early contractor engagement at this point as the scheme has been designed to a RIBA stage 4 level and the remaining design considerations around bridge certifications, embankment works and drainage would all benefit from having a contractor's view on buildability and value engineering. This was the primary reason for wanting to use a design and build contract with built in ECI. This would also get the scheme to market in a timely manner and avoid potential additional inflation in future years.
- The question of the business case was raised again around the need for a business case for the whole bypass and one just for Phase One. The director responded to say that the key to this is about the authority reaching a point next year when we have a compelling case to put forward to government for funding the whole bypass; with Phase One under construction using council's own funding, a compliant FBC for Phase One and a compliant SOBC for Phase Two, plus developers engaging with the council wanting to deliver sections of Phase Two. This will put the council in the best position to apply for future funding. Whilst the business case for Phase One has a strong narrative, it will be further strengthened by consideration of its impact as the first phase in the must wider bypass project. The wider case will also take account of additional housing numbers and employment land growth needed for the future.
- Questions were asked about the frameworks that would be used for the procurement. The director confirmed that a number of national frameworks were being considered but that currently there are two that allow for mini-competitions and have between 5 and 10 contractors on them giving assurance that a good competition would result. Additionally, officers are engaging with the framework managers and the contractors on each framework to provide information about the scheme ahead of the mini competition to ensure enough contractors are interested and will consider bidding.

- Cllr Price gave assurance that the notes from the PGC would be considered by Cabinet on the 17<sup>th</sup> July meeting and thanked members for their patience given the short notice for the PGC.

### Appendices

Appendix 1 – Phase 1 Construction Procurement Strategy

Appendix 2 – Phase 1 Land Procurement Strategy

### Background papers

None

### Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

Governance	John Coleman	Date 02/07/2025
Finance	Karen Morris	Date 27/06/2025
Legal	Emma-Jane Brewerton	Date 28/06/2025
Communications	Luenne Featherstone	Date 23/06/2025
Equality Duty	Harriet Yellin	Date 30/06/2025
Procurement	Carrie Christopher	Date 01/07/2025
Risk	Paige McInerney	Date 01/07/2025
Approved by	Ross Cook	Date 09/07/2025

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

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