

Meeting:	Cabinet
Meeting date:	Thursday 14 March 2019
Title of report:	Domestic Abuse Strategy 2019-2022
Report by:	Cabinet member health and wellbeing

Classification

Open

Decision type

Key

This is a key decision because it is likely to be significant having regard to:

- the strategic nature of the decision, and
- 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(All Wards);

Purpose and summary

To approve the multi-agency Domestic Abuse Strategy for Herefordshire 2019-2022 and governance arrangements for implementation of the strategy.

Domestic abuse is a complex and pervasive issue which cannot be addressed fully by any single organisation. The overall purpose of the strategy is to provide direction to partner organisations on how they can work collaboratively to prevent, identify and respond to domestic abuse.

The strategy builds upon learning from the former 2014-2017 strategy adopted in 2014. It includes a shared vision, priorities and outcomes developed collaboratively with partner organisations and service users, updated national and local context and clarified governance arrangements to ensure delivery of the strategy.

The vision of the strategy is that domestic abuse is unacceptable to people and communities in Herefordshire.

There are four priorities under the shared vision:

- Priority 1 – Prevention: The aim is that individuals and communities understand domestic abuse and the harm it causes and have the skills to build, and a culture that supports, healthy relationships.
- Priority 2 – Provision of service: The aim is that when domestic abuse is disclosed, identified or reported, those affected by domestic abuse can access timely and effective information, advice and support.
- Priority 3 – Partnership working: The aim is to work together across organisations in an efficient and effective way to prevent, and protect those experiencing, domestic abuse, ensuring that organisational barriers do not have impact on those affected by domestic abuse.
- Priority 4 – Pursuing perpetrators: The aim is that the tools available are used effectively and consistently and those experiencing domestic abuse see the police and criminal and civil legal systems as working to protect them and their children.

The Community Safety Partnership (CSP) will be responsible for strategic delivery and leadership of the strategy. The CSP will task the multi-agency Domestic Abuse Delivery Group (DADG) to develop and deliver annual action plans to implement the strategy. The action plans will need to take account of plans, opportunities and resources available within each partner organisation. Successful delivery of the action plans, and subsequently the strategy, will depend on the continued commitment and engagement from partner organisations.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- (a) the Multi-agency Domestic Abuse Strategy for Herefordshire 2019-2022 at appendix 1 be approved;
- (b) the response at paragraph 36 of the report to a recommendation made by the Adults and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee is agreed.

Alternative options

1. Not to adopt a Domestic Abuse Strategy for Herefordshire. This option is not recommended. Domestic abuse is a challenge which cuts across many organisations, sectors and professional roles. A shared strategic approach which provides clear priorities, roles, responsibilities and pathways is therefore crucial to ensure domestic abuse can be prevented and identified, and that those affected and their children receive safe and timely interventions at the earliest opportunity.

Key considerations

2. Domestic violence and abuse can occur within any familial, partner or ex-partner relationship from any culture. The government defines domestic abuse as occurring between individuals aged 16 years or over, while the adverse impact upon children who

have witnessed domestic abuse is becoming increasingly understood. These factors are captured within the scope of the revised strategy.

3. The human cost of domestic abuse is devastating to those affected and their children, with significant impact upon their safety and mental and physical wellbeing. Domestic abuse often remains undisclosed for many reasons, including fear or repercussions from the perpetrator, concerns about rejection by family and friends, reliance upon the perpetrator for financial stability or concerns over custody or access to the children. Under-reporting therefore means the true cost to resources across organisations is unknown but estimated to be significant both in the short and long term.
4. In Herefordshire 3,071 victims made disclosures to the police in the year ending March 2017, with approximately two thirds being female (these counts are not unique individuals, but rather include multiple counts of repeat individuals). As a significant amount of domestic abuse is known to go unreported to organisations, a more accurate prevalence can be estimated by applying national, self-reported prevalence rates to the Herefordshire population. Through this method, it is estimated that in 2016/17 there were 5,900 victims aged 16-59 in the county. The true figure is likely to be higher.
5. The number of children exposed to domestic abuse in Herefordshire has been estimated to be 300-400 children per month (some of these will be repeat exposures for the same children). Around 850-900 children are known to be in the households of those accessing domestic abuse support services each year, including around 250-300 children in households of high risk cases discussed at the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference each year
6. All people affected by domestic abuse are vulnerable in some way. However, there are people who can be connected to one or more groups who are harder to reach due to additional vulnerabilities or cultural challenges who are identified within the strategy. These groups are:
 - Men
 - Older people
 - People with physical or mental health illness or learning disabilities
 - People from the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual or transgender (LGBT) community
 - People from ethnic minority groups
 - People living in rural communities

The strategy specifies that all organisations involved in tackling domestic abuse need to consider people within these hard to reach groups when planning how to prevent, identify and respond to domestic abuse.

7. Our aim is to make Herefordshire a place where domestic abuse does not take place. Successful delivery of the strategy will require strong leadership, commitment and engagement from partner organisations. No organisation can fully tackle domestic abuse alone. A collaborative response to preventing, identifying and responding to domestic abuse in all of its forms is required through a shared vision and priorities.

8. The strategy has been developed primarily through engagement with stakeholders through workshops and more specific engagement activity. The strategy has also been informed by research, including the law, local and national policy and guidance, data and research analysis, review of comparative strategies and learning from the former strategy as set out in appendix 2.
9. The research has been presented to stakeholders through engagement discussions, stimulating views on good work and areas for improvement in Herefordshire. Stakeholders included people who have used the local domestic abuse support service and professionals from partner organisations including West Mercia Police, Herefordshire Clinical Commissioning Group, providers of health services, housing, social care and probation.
10. The feedback provided has been grouped into four broad themes to inform the priorities. Objectives and outcomes under the four priorities are further broken down in a table as appendix 1 to the strategy to ensure all feedback has been captured. This approach ensured views from stakeholders were captured effectively and could subsequently be translated into actions pertinent to some or all organisations, while ensuring all organisations kept a shared strategic vision and priorities.
11. The strategy sets the direction and vision for tackling domestic abuse in Herefordshire over the next four years. Strategic leadership and monitoring of delivery will be overseen at a partnership level by the Community Safety Partnership (CSP), which will have a specific operational group to develop and put into place annual action plans.
12. The action plans will need to take account of plans, opportunities and resources available within each partner organisation, as well as identifying data available as a benchmark to measure success of actions. The annual action plans are intended to be working documents which are subject to regular review and adaptation while ensuring accountability. Successful delivery of the action plans will depend upon a continued commitment and engagement from several partner organisations, including the allocation of professionals' time and a review of, and willingness to change, practices.
13. It is not possible to set an overall effectiveness measure for the strategy itself as this will depend on the annual work progress, plans and resources available within each partner organisation. Additionally, measures are specific to actions; there is no uniform approach which can be adopted. For example, domestic abuse is under-reported; a successful awareness campaign would result in increased reporting, therefore an increase in numbers would be a positive indicator. However, other prevention measures may require a reduction in numbers to denote success.
14. Appendix 2 sets out learning from the former strategy. The 2019-22 strategy has retained the previous four key priorities in recognition that they are golden threads to tackling domestic abuse and remain relevant given feedback during engagement and current research. However, aside from updated data and research, a key change in the strategy is the use of a specific plan to ensure delivery and accountability, which is aligned to the priorities and outcomes.

Community impact

15. In accordance with the adopted code of corporate governance, the long-term nature of many of Herefordshire Council's responsibilities means that we should define and plan outcomes and that these should be sustainable. Decisions should further the council's purpose, contribute to intended benefits and outcomes, and remain within the limits of authority and resources. The council is committed to promoting a positive working culture

that accepts and encourages constructive challenge, and recognises that a culture and structure for scrutiny are key elements for accountable decision making, policy development, and review.

16. The council's corporate plan includes a commitment to enabling people to live safe, healthy and independent lives. A collaborative approach with other public and emergency service organisations with a shared vision and priorities is therefore key to ensuring those affected by domestic abuse and their children are safe, identified at the earliest possibility, offered good quality advice and support and enabled to build their resilience to avoid the cycle of abuse being perpetuated.
17. The strategy will have a positive impact upon the role of the council as a 'corporate parent' to 'looked after children'. The strategy provides a focus on early identification of children exposed to domestic abuse and interventions which reduce the impact.
18. The strategy will support the achievement of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, the Adults Wellbeing Plan 2017-20 and the Children and Young People's Plan 2015-18 by:
 - enabling people affected by domestic abuse to lead fulfilling lives, to be emotionally and physically healthy and to feel safe and secure through prevention, education and services which enable them to cope and manage the risks;
 - offering children and families affected by domestic abuse access to early help and the troubled families programme;
 - ensuring intelligence is shared promptly between agencies where children and their families are in need of safeguarding.

Equality duty

19. 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.
20. 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. Domestic abuse is experienced by people across all parts of the population including those with protected characteristics.
21. Research for the strategy included the domestic abuse needs assessment undertaken in 2013 and subsequently updated in 2017. The assessment included specific demographic data around those affected by domestic abuse and perpetrators of abuse in

Herefordshire. The strategy considers how partner organisations can respond to the needs of those affected by domestic abuse with protected characteristics based upon the specific demography of Herefordshire, including people in hard to reach groups as detailed in paragraph 6.

Resource implications

22. Delivery of the strategy will require officer time and will be delivered within existing resources. The annual action plans developed by the DADG will need to take account of plans, opportunities and resources available within each partner organisation.

Legal implications

23. Under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 councils have a statutory duty to work with other agencies to reduce crime and disorder in their local area. Domestic abuse constitutes a significant proportion of all recorded crime in the UK.
24. Any service strategy should take account of the needs of different groups of the community in accordance with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.
25. There are no other significant legal implications identified from this report.

Risk management

26. Implementing the strategy relies upon continued commitment from stakeholders to engage and implement the strategy through the DADG and within their own organisations. This could be impacted by conflicting demands placed on resources.
Mitigation: Engagement with stakeholders in developing the strategy has secured a commitment to implementing the priorities and action plan. A pragmatic approach has been taken to minimise demand upon resources.

Consultees

27. Engagement with stakeholders has formed the basis of the strategy. Views captured during engagement have been taken into account and themes developed in terms of the priorities and outcomes.
28. People who had accessed the local domestic abuse service provided insight into their experiences of universal and specific domestic abuse services. Ten service users attended; the feedback was used to inform stakeholder workshops, commissioning and the strategy. Emerging themes included concerns about communication between organisations, lack of confidence in the criminal justice system and the importance of the domestic abuse support service.
29. Two stakeholder workshops, including the police, probation, fire and rescue, housing, social care and health services were completed in July and October 2018. This directly informed the shared vision, the four draft priorities and the plan detailed in appendix 1 of the strategy.
30. Professionals from West Mercia Women's Aid were asked for their insight into successes and where improvements could be made across organisations under the four priorities. Their feedback was used to inform the strategy detail. Feedback included a general sense of good local partnership working but challenges around raising awareness amongst professionals and also locating suitable housing.

31. A workshop for joint Scrutiny Committee Members was completed in July 2018. This provided background into the national and local context, invited comments on the commissioned service and the approach to developing the strategy. A further workshop for all Members was completed in October 2018. At this workshop, Members were given the opportunity to discuss and feed into the identified priorities. Specific comments were received around the importance of education for professionals and children, creating the environment for disclosure of abuse and challenges and opportunities related to technology.
32. Political groups were consulted in August 2018 on the both the proposed recommissioning of a domestic abuse support service and the outline of the strategy. No comments were received with regard to the strategy.
33. Eight West Mercia Women's Aid service users attending a programme of support and parents attending groups at children's centres in Hereford, Ledbury, Leominster and Ross provided feedback on the priorities within the draft strategy in December 2018. Their feedback corroborated the approach in the strategy and informed the detail under the objectives. Emerging themes included concerns about the role of children's services, difficulties in identifying abusive relationships when the abuse isn't physical and professionals not fully understanding the impact of controlling behaviour by perpetrators.
34. Professionals attending the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference were consulted in December 2018. Their comments included a need for a commitment to delivering the strategy, strategic leadership across all organisations and the requirement for those in positions of leadership to communicate and influence change at an operational level.
35. The Community Safety Partnership was consulted in January 2019. Comments were received about strengthening the language used in the shared vision and some suggested amendments to wording in other sections of the strategy were offered. The draft strategy has been amended accordingly.
36. Members reviewed the draft Domestic Abuse Strategy at the Adults and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee in January 2019. Members from the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee were also in attendance. The recommendations were:
 - a. Specific consideration will be given to communicating details of the domestic abuse support service in rural areas.
Response: It is proposed that the domestic abuse support service, recommissioned from 1 April 2019, includes the recommendation within its communications plan. It is also proposed that more broadly, the Domestic Abuse Delivery Group will consider how to reach those in rural areas through culture change and joined-up media campaigns.
 - b. An update be provided to committee members on progress with the implementation of the strategy during 2019/20.
Response: It is proposed that an update is provided to committee members in March 2020 to allow time for the Domestic Abuse Delivery Group to develop and commence implementation of annual plans.
37. Political groups were further consulted on the draft strategy in February 2019. It's Our County responded to state that they broadly support the strategy but have concerns about partner organisations' capacity to engage. Specifically:

- National Probation Service and West Mercia Community Rehabilitation Company - Concerns were raised around their effectiveness and ability to monitor offenders effectively since the changes to a two-tier model.
- West Mercia Youth Offending Service – Concerns were raised around the drive to keep young people out of the criminal justice system, leading to a situation where parents are becoming afraid of their children.

Response: The comments relate to operational working and effectiveness of these organisations and therefore fall outside the scope of the strategy. All of the named organisations have made a commitment to delivering the strategy.

Additionally It's Our County made comments about strengthening the connection between domestic abuse and mental health earlier on within the strategy.

Response: The wording in the foreword section of the strategy has been amended to include the impact of domestic abuse on mental wellbeing.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Draft domestic Abuse Strategy for Herefordshire 2019-2022

Appendix 2: Learning from the former Herefordshire Domestic Abuse Strategy

Appendix 3: Equality Impact Assessment

Background papers

None identified.